

Angelika Sikorska

University of Łódź

Techniques of Neutralization of Offenses Used by Dealers of Psychoactive Substances – a Case Study¹

Abstract: The author examines the issue of activities of drug dealers and the technique of neutralization of this criminal activity used by them. An introduction to the considerations taken is to analyze the phenomenon of crime in the context of individual and social problems. Additionally, it characterizes the theoretical category key for the study, i.e. “techniques of neutralization of offenses” by Gresham Sykes and David Matza). The next part of this article presents the methodology assumptions of the analysis and its primary objective. On the basis of free interviews, it identifies and characterizes individual techniques of neutralization used by drug dealers. The completed studies allow the emergence of a new strategy, which is questioning the damage by identifying the lesser evil. Conclusions from the presented analysis may be useful in professional practice (preventive or social rehabilitation measures).
Key words: delinquency, drug dealer’s activity, Techniques of Neutralization, Gresham Sykes, David Matza.

.....

¹ The article is based on an unpublished master’s thesis entitled “Techniques of Neutralization of criminal activity used by dealers of illicit psychoactive substances”, written under the guidance of Dr. Renata Szczepanik and defended at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Łódź in 2015.

Introduction: crime as a problem of individual and social nature

Crime is an individual and social problem. Both the sources and the effects and consequences of these activities affect the individual (perpetrator of the act) and the victim as well as the whole environment (social groups, families, witnesses of the events). To better understand the wide range of impacts, the source of the crime needs to be recognized and defined. This problem is important in the perspective of many disciplines, including humanities, social sciences, law, and medicine. The scope of the etiology of crime includes external factors (social, cultural) and individual human predispositions (determinants of the biopsychological nature) (cf. Gaberle 2003; Lubelski 1985).

Staying in the concept circle of biopsychological character, it is essential to mention Cesare Lombroso, who used the category of the “born criminal”, thereby starting a scientific search for the causes of deviant behavior in hereditary and physiological characteristics. This nineteenth-century concept found its justification in the positivist methods of analysis and evaluation of phenomena, ordering the world by a stipulated parallel between beauty and good, as well as evil and ugliness. Continuators of the Italian researcher’s concept made the actions of deviants dependent on the predispositions and determinants inherent in the biopsychological condition of the offender. In terms of this approach there are numerous theories about the different assumptions, verified and denied over the centuries. Researchers refer to assumptions with a *purely* biological basis (such as, among others, in the theory of sex chromosome disorders or disorders of the Central Nervous System), mental (psychopathy, emotional disorders); other times they combine these two positions, analyzing deviations in the context of occurring psychotic states or deviations from the intellectual norm. Biopsychological sources of crime were primarily combined with the chemical and physical function of the body, starting from anthropological dependencies through genetic, endocrine disorders, abnormalities in the CNS, to a reduced level of intelligence and psychological tendencies (Mościskier 2001, p. 130–177; Leśniak 1998, p. 40–43).

Biological theories refer to factors not susceptible to educational influences. In the definition presented below, determinants of a social nature seem important, that is those that are rooted in the external environment and go beyond the biological and mental condition of the perpetrator. Due to the multiplicity of theories about the cultural and social background, this article cites only selected aspects that are relevant to own research. The focus is on the role of the nearest educational environment (family) and criminogenic phenomena occurring in society and the local community².

.....

² Due to the complexity of the analyzed problem, in the beginning, only selected concepts (theories of deviation) were used. They not only bring closer the most important differences between the

Properly performed parental functions affect the prosperity of the process of education and socialization of a child. At the same time, as noted by Eliza Mazur (2010), the individual in the family is subjected to a process of socialization according to the subjectively accepted values and standards, which is why “what is regarded as proper conduct in a socially deviant family is not accepted by the family with positive social values” (Mazur 2010, p. 286). Then we are dealing with the problem of internalization by the individual of respected (desired) norms by the general public.

Indicating a wider area than the immediate environment of the perpetrator, Dorota Pstrąg characterizes the phenomenon of universal tolerance towards crime, especially violence. The author refers in particular to interpreting and understanding given behavior in the context of legal and social norms. As she notes, often opposition towards the violation of the law becomes merely declarative, which is the result of experiences and interpretations made subjective by people. In addition, “aggression and violence presented by significant others is not uncommonly seen by young people as attractive, effective behavior, evoking admiration and respect. Such attitudes are further strengthened by the influence of mass culture and the macro- and microsocial processes taking place in our country” (Pstrąg 2010, p. 109). Not only the local community contributes to the preservation and generation of criminal behavior but also extremely popular virtual world space. By referring to the substance of media communications (television, the Internet, “virtual communities”), Brunon Hołyst notes many areas of negative cultural content. In his opinion, the media/virtual space can distort the real picture of the world, dissuade from independent work and thinking, weaken the language skills and imagination of a child, and affect the relations prevailing in the family home (Hołyst 2009, p. 1058–1065)³.

The above examples allow to observe significant relationships between the identified phenomena (processes). A young person formed in the era of explicit consent to certain types of behavior, duplicates and approves it. In addition, the lack of clear messages from the public (including the tolerance of selected crimes) is conducive to the occurrence of illegal behavior⁴. As a result, society members

.....

assumptions of the biopsychological and social nature, but they also signal (or illustrate) the individual and collective nature of crime. In addition, the mentioned dysfunctions of the nearest educational environments relate to the empirical part of the paper (i.e. the biography of respondents).

³ It should be emphasized that the inappropriate and impoverished messages should be subjected to negative assessment and not visualization technology itself, which can e.g. enrich educational activities. Threat is mainly carried by numerous violent scenes available to the youngest audience (including e.g.: drastic scenes, descriptions of bloodshed, fights, inspirations to commit crimes). The virtual/media space (virtual communities) are also an important source of information (among others, they popularize and facilitate the acquisition of psychoactive substances) (cf. Woronowicz 2009).

⁴ Public consent is particularly important in the context of own research. As evident from the analyses, traffickers of illegal psychoactive substances live in multi-family houses (tenement houses, blocks); moreover, they declare that most of the surroundings are aware of their activities (just like

become witnesses, victims and a kind of source of crime. The investigator should therefore bear in mind that there is a massive variety of sources of crime. Theories of deviance and criminogenically potential factors themselves concern, on the one hand, biopsychological aspects (individual, internal), and on the other - environmental influences. This in turn causes that each person, as a unique individual, becomes a “mystery” of different functioning and varied reactions.

Theories of subculture – techniques of neutralization of crimes in light of the literature

This sociological concept of deviance is based on theories of criminal subcultures (Siemaszko 1993). Its authors, Gresham Sykes and David Matza, assumed that among criminals – just like in the rest of society - there is a similarly shaped system of values. The violation of internalized standards awakens a strong and nagging feeling of guilt in the perpetrator. In connection with this, the criminal, in order to achieve the right level of well-being, must develop a way to deal with this tension. The titular techniques of neutralization are used for this, which constitute a mechanism that reduces the resulting dissonance. At the same time they contribute to an individual becoming involved in the criminal activity, modifying their self-image, as well as creating their own interpretation of the environment's reactions (Siemaszko 1993, p. 184–187)⁵.

Referring to the literature on the subject, it is worth noting that the proposed concept is used in various types of research, and the techniques are helpful in defending the balance of not only criminals but also the victims. By using them, different categories of offenses are analyzed. An illustration to that diversity can be the article by Timothy O'Boyle, who used the techniques of neutralization in interviews with athletes (swimmers). Based on the collected material, he observed attempts to mask cheating, committed by the respondents in order to win (O'Boyle 2014).

It is worth noting that Matza and Sykes have become promoters of expanding the concept by other researchers (papers and characterizations of new types of strategies). Among other things, Jennifer R. Roberts and Joshua L. Smallridge applied the concept to analyze so-called digital piracy, adapting the theory to the study on the behavior of “virtual thieves” (Roberts, Smallridge 2013).

.....

they know about other dealers). This peculiar “open secret” may affect the scale and nature of the crime.

⁵ As pointed out by Siemaszko (1993), techniques of neutralization cannot constitute an autonomous theory of deviance. It lacks the classically understood assertions built on the basis of variables and dependencies arising from individual variables. However, the idea itself of techniques of neutralization, explaining the conduct of criminals, seems to be significant from the point of view of criminology.

In Poland, Renata Szczepanik (2011), when studying the experience of secondary victimization of women victims of violence, drew attention to the use of these strategies by the “oppressors”. She notes that the techniques are often used not only by the accused but also by their defenders in criminal cases of abuse. By resorting to these strategies, society and the offender try to justify and understand the complex pathomechanism ruled by domestic violence.

Matza and Sykes have identified five basic strategies of neutralizing offenses (Siemaszko 1993, p. 187–200; Matza, Sykes 1957, p. 664–670):

1. **Questioning responsibility**- the perpetrator excludes the relationship between themselves and the act, recognizing the offense as a random act, unwanted, resulting from external forces, independent of them. They deny the intentionality of the action and undermine their own influence on the course of events.
2. **Questioning damage**- a technique by which the perpetrator doubts the relationship between the act and the damages caused (consequences). The size of the harm caused as well as the offense itself are reinterpreted.
3. **Questioning the victim**- serves to minimize the role of the victim. Deviant behavior is seen as an act of revenge or vengeance. This leads to a kind of role reversal, where the perpetrator becomes the “executioner-judge”. Endowed with a sense of justice he neutralizes the act through a redefinition of the existing situation.
4. **Condemning the condemner** - the perpetrator creates an image of society as a bad body, committing equally illegal activities (e.g. the belief that everyone has stolen something at least once in their lives, it happens to everyone to hit somebody, etc.). Perpetrators convince themselves and others, that what they do does not fall far from the behavior of the general public. They often criticize formal institutions of social control.
5. **Referring to higher reason** - this “reason” is a subjective feeling of the perpetrator. They convince themselves and the public about making a necessary choice (i.e. better to steal food than to let your child starve). Their situation is treated as a conflict between two existing problems, where there is a sacrifice of one good for another. The crime becomes a remedy (“a lesser evil”), which protects the perpetrator and its primary objectives.

As already mentioned, the concept of Matza and Sykes inspired researchers to further analyze the indicated techniques. Przemysław Piotrowski (Piotrowski 2011, p. 119–125) collected other existing strategies, which are used by the deviant. Among them he mentions:

- **defense of the necessity to commit the act** - strongly associated with referring to higher reason; the crime is committed due to important, imperative causes for the individual (e.g. defense of one’s own life, self-defense);
- **defense of balance** - a kind of calculation associated with time distance (e.g. a member of an organized crime group, who stopped operating within

its structure after several years, claims that the positive side of their actions was giving work to other people);

- **denial of justice or the need of law** - an attempt to prove the futility of laws that were broken by the individual;
- **the assertion that “everyone is doing it”** - perpetrators see themselves as a scapegoat, i.e. the only person who experienced stigma due to carrying out criminal;
- **claiming rights** - perpetrators believe that they were owed the object of the offense (e.g. robbing an employer who abused employees); a visible analogy to “questioning the victim”.

New strategies referring to the original concept of Matza and Sykes is a clarification and extension of existing techniques. They complement the etiology of crime as well as the image (characteristics) of the perpetrator himself.

Methodology of own research

The subject of the research undertaken is the criminal activity of drug dealers. The primary objective was an attempt to characterize the different strategies of neutralization used by the surveyed persons (i.e. selected dealers). Objectives of a syncretic nature enabled the exploration, explanation and description of the discussed issues. First of all, they enable to verify scientific theories through the analysis of specific cases. Ultimately, they were used to create reliable characteristics of the analyzed phenomenon.

The following research questions were formulated:

What techniques of neutralization of criminal activity are used by dealers of illegal psychoactive substances?

What is the content of these techniques used by them?

What is the process of becoming a dealer of illegal psychoactive substances among those surveyed?

What system of life values are dealers guided by and what is their socio-professional status?

The research was qualitative in nature, and the theoretical basis was the concept of Matza *and* Sykes. On this basis, a set of features and issues were developed that were necessary for the execution of the research. Access to information and the possibility of communing with respondents in their natural and comfortable environment was critically assessed. In the selection of the sample, the snowball method was used. In Earl Babbie’s definition (Babbie 2013, p. 213), it consists in the process of accumulation, in which every individual found provides contact information to another person of interest to the researcher. This usually happens in groups that are inaccessible or uncooperative. The environment of drug dealers is extremely airtight, therefore, seeking to acquire respondents was

accompanied by concern for building a comfortable relationship between the researcher and the subjects. The specificity of the subject undertaken largely limited the organizational capacity of field research. The respondent expected, above all, discretion and respect of anonymity. Talks were generally carried out in the place of residence of the selected dealers, which allowed to extend the talks by the observation of living and social conditions of the subjects.

The research was conducted through *free interviews*. Babbie (2013) identifies this technique with the conversation, which is steered by the researcher and particular emphasis is placed on the topic that interests him. In ongoing studies, the questions were asked on the basis of original disposition card. It included five thematic categories:

- 1) demographic data (gender, age, education, marital status);
- 2) childhood, education, family;
- 3) crime and criminal record;
- 4) activities related to dealing in illegal psychoactive substances;
- 5) system of values and perceptions of each other.

The distinguished categories accounted for only a framework of questions guiding the interview. Such a developed form of the interview made it possible to move freely within the indicated disposal. It was conducive to the smooth account-making of events from the lives of the respondents, their insights and views. As a result, the interference of the researcher in the narrative of the respondents was minimized. At the same time, as noted by Krzysztof Konecki (2000), the disposition card should not limit the narrative. In order to prevent harmful reductions and improve communication, the researcher can freely arrange the interview (e.g. reformulate questions, cast aside one issue for another piece of substantial information).

The empirical material derives from the transcription of eight free interviews with dealers of illegal psychoactive substances, i.e. people who were employed in trading (i.e. dealing) marijuana or alcohol of illegal origin. The study was conducted in 2015. Due to the obligation of absolute anonymity, each respondent was marked by a symbol indicating their sex and age - e.g. man aged fifty years old was marked as M50, and a forty-year-old woman as K40.

The process of becoming a dealer of illegal psychoactive substances Analysis of the biography of dealers

The analysis of biographies made it possible to make comparisons within the cases studied. Among them, both similarities and differences were marked, which determined the individual stories. The first reference is to the age of the subjects, and thus to their socio-cultural experience. It is worth noting the social, economic and

political conditions as well as associated circumstances for undertaking dealing in psychoactive substances. Two completely different situations can be distinguished here: on the one hand, they were purely hedonistic motives (“the desire to possess”, get rich, like in the case of M17 or M23 born in the 1990s), on the other hand, older respondents experienced extreme poverty, unsatisfied basic needs, job loss associated with the closure of large industrial plants, and the difficulties with retraining (the case of K56, K60).

To a small extent, these differences were related to gender, with the exception of the attitudes of the respondents to education/school. Men, unlike women, expressed overt unwillingness to learn; they usually interrupted their education (M50 and M33 at high school stage, M45 in elementary school, M23 and M17 at junior high school stage). The education of the women ended with unplanned pregnancy (K40) or the need for independence from the parents (K56, K60). The differences observed between the surveyed opposite sex are also reflected at the level of peer groups, where men, as opposed to women, were willing to establish risky acquaintances with older colleagues (building their authority and position in the group).

In the area of biographical similarities, it is worth first mentioning the experience of deviation occurring in the immediate family of the respondents – mainly the alcoholism of the father, violence, loosening of ties, and family break-up (parents’ divorce). All respondents observed and reported some of the above problems, therefore it can be assumed that there is a correlation between the behavior of individuals and irregularities occurring in their main educational environment. It should be noted that in some cases the parent for the respondent was a kind of authority, which can be indicated by the duplication of familiar and “safe” patterns. Such a case is M23, who declared that: *as a kid I always wanted to be a bandit. [...] My father was a bandit... he did not accept me, I don't know... I wanted his approval or something. It hard to say.*

Another important feature common to almost all of the respondents, was criminal lifestyle, in which dealing was only one of many illegal activities (exceptions K60 and K56). Importantly, it was generally not the first offense committed. In this case, there is a huge range of deviant activities, ranging from theft, robberies, burglaries, extorting money or operating in groups of organized crime (case of M50).

The system of values and socio-professional status of respondents

The worldview of the respondents, as well as the system of values and socio-professional status in each case was determined, among others, through family experiences. Most of the respondents (except K40) are addicts of or abuse psychoactive

substances. Usually the substance dealt by individual subjects was also the source of their addiction (except M50, who deals marijuana but is himself an alcoholic). Some of the respondents revealed a tendency to cross or mixed addiction.

For the analysis of the system of values, the needs of the respondents is essential (their desires, set goals). First of all, reference is made to subjective narratives obtained during the interview. This made it possible to describe the priorities set by the respondents, and thus draw attention to what was the main objective of earning (in legal work and from illegal sources).

The female respondents found themselves in a difficult financial situation (as their accounts and objective evidence say), i.e. they lost their job, were responsible for supporting their children, they were single mothers, they lived in a complicated partner relationship, etc. In men, discrepancies could be observed between what they declare and what was revealed in the course of the interview. First of all, their needs were focused on experiencing pleasure: entertainment, alcohol, brand-name clothing. In addition, among the youngest respondents, M23 and M17, those needs arose against complexes (the desire to equal their colleagues; the desires often related to elements of appearance, dress, possessing popular and “prestigious” gadgets)⁶.

Another important aspect is the role of peer groups, their impact on the criminal lifestyle (including care for belonging to a given environment and respect for and recognition of certain hierarchies). Subcultural values predominate in men, creating their world view and moral principles (they define and shape authorities). Within these relationships the subjects sought instructions and information about the mechanism of dealing in illegal psychoactive substances, making it easier to begin this activity. The experience of the respondents and the analysis of the genesis of becoming a dealer bring to mind the concept of diverse links of Edwin Sutherland (Siemaszko 1993, p. 88–106). The subjects did not “come up with” the idea of dealing on their own. They learn how to deal effectively through more experienced friends (i.e. older colleagues), who become their “guides” in the dealing business.

A significant dependence is low self-esteem, lack of dreams, ambitions, the inability to talk about oneself in a positive way, the inability to present one’s own strengths. The subjects are reluctant to talk about strengths and capabilities, they ignored questions about plans and dreams.

Another observation concerns the interests of the respondents. They are generally poor, unsophisticated, often associated with the precarious financial situa-

.....

⁶ Of course, qualitative research does not allow to place generalizing conclusions. Any similarities and differences in the process of becoming a dealer of illegal psychoactive substances, however, allow for a more accurate diagnosis of the main research problem. The analysis of this process makes it possible not only to follow the criminal career of the subjects, but also – perhaps above all – to confront the objective motives for taking such measures with the subjective accounts of the respondents (their interpretation of reality).

tion (equating pleasure and entertainment with the material and social status). None of them mentioned entertainment from the circle of so-called “elite/high culture”, like the love of literature, interest in cinema or theater arts, or deepening their knowledge in a specific discipline (e.g. history). Only few showed interest in the world, e.g. they dreamed of traveling (K40, M50).

The strong belief in fate observed in all respondents is notable. Respondents very often saw winning the “lottery” as a source of their future happiness, which may indicate a lack of responsibility or the belief that success in life does not depend on one’s own actions and resources.

The data collected suggests that the system of values of the respondents does not differ significantly from non-criminals (according to the concept proposed by Matza and Sykes). They are subculturally oriented, however, their status and views stem rather from the level of education, their jobs, and family experience. We therefore assume that their “moral backbone” functions just like in non-criminal individuals.

The use of techniques of neutralization by dealers of illegal substances – content, description and context

Assuming that the techniques of neutralization of crimes are ways to justify certain behaviors inconsistent with generally acceptable social norms, an attempt was made to identify the strategies in the selected cases. In the course of research, the subjective “interpretation of reality” became crucial, therefore, the analysis took the form of a confrontation of certain statements of the respondents (i.e. focusing on statements containing inaccuracies, inconsistent, mutually exclusive replies). The study was conducted by comparing the statements that were considered objective with the statements felt to be contradictory, subjectivized or inconsistent with the observed facts. Creating one’s own image and assessment of criminal offenses by the respondents allowed to present the following observations.

Referring to the technique known as **questioning responsibility**, only M50 in the assessment of his actions found that: *I’m not encouraging anyone to anything, I can sympathize if someone has an addict at home. I cannot prevent it.* This way, the man mainly emphasized the impossibility of influencing the decisions of people buying and taking the drug. The turnover of illegal psychoactive substances in his opinion becomes independent of his own decisions. He situates himself only as a “tool” or “agent”. There was no use of this technique with other dealers, which suggests that it was not sufficiently useful in the study group (it did not reduce internal tension associated with criminal operations).

Frequently used techniques among the respondents are so-called **questioning damage**. M50 creates its own hierarchy of offenses, sorting them into “less” and “more” harmful. In relation to this scheme of interpretation, he regarded dealing

in marijuana as an act less harmful than assault or beating. K60 primarily sought to provide a balance of profit and losses, according to which the social damage was minimized. In her opinion, dealing in only small amounts of alcohol resulted in a modest cash flow. In fact, she sold over a dozen liters of alcohol per week. The technique of questioning damage was used by K56 twice. The respondent, in her account, presented many arguments aimed at proving the minimum dimension of the social harm caused. Her statement concerned the sale of alcohol to minors. K56: *It happened that I sold to a minor. I wouldn't want to whitewash it, but generally I know that if this person doesn't buy it from me, they'll buy it somewhere else, because what I knew from that friend, generally they're probably kids, I'm not saying teenagers, because I may have sold to a seventeen-year-old [...].*

Analysis of empirical material allowed for the emergence of a specific type of technique, which was named **questioning damage by identifying the lesser evil**. In the literature, such a strategy does not exist, therefore, the proposed variant is a kind of specification of the original concept of Matza and Sykes. This kind of strategy (by using properly developed disposition) was referred to by all the respondents (sometimes even several times). Due to the comparative nature of the question, which helped to observe this technique (i.e. on the type of settlement between the harmfulness of substances) first describes the response of people engaged in dealing in marijuana.

M50 (working as a drug dealer), when asked about the harmfulness of the drugs, he minimized their importance. In his opinion, marijuana compared to alcohol or other drugs (including amphetamines and the currently popular so-called designer drugs) is recognized as the "lesser evil". M45, in accounting his attitude to the project of the legalization of marijuana and the current legal provisions, above all stated that dealing in marijuana should not be fortified by strong sanctions. M45: *If marijuana could be separated from drugs, that it is not a drug, then penalties would be bigger. The penalty for drug dealing but not for marijuana. Marijuana was defined by the respondent as a "light drug" (with the declaration that he has small knowledge about this and he never reached for information from reliable sources). The attitude of M33 was less clear and more ambivalent, which may be due to the fact that the man sells marijuana but at the same time abuses the drug and alcohol. On the one hand, he found that: *drugs are worse – they affect the brain more. After drinking alcohol you go to sleep, nothing, politely, the degenerate is gone. I can see how friends behave, I have not seen anyone do something on drugs, but it is known, drugs chisel into the head more. And after alcohol all my buddies quietly go to sleep, just like 90% of the population does.* Another time M33 questioned the harmfulness of marijuana, comparing its effect to smoking. The main argument he used was that *cigarettes cause death in people more frequently than drugs*. In this case we are dealing with an unusual way of minimizing damage from the perspective of a person addicted to several substances at the same time selling one of them (marijuana). It can be assumed that the respond-*

ent wanted to justify his crime, but he also had to reduce the tension associated with his own addiction. Finally, thanks to the comparison with another substance - tobacco - marijuana is classified with the least harmful substances. When asked about the effects of the product, which he deals, M23 clearly minimized the damage by comparing it to alcohol and so-called “hard drugs”. The subject used many arguments to confirm his position, including his own experiences and observations of friends (although, like his predecessors, he didn’t have any detailed knowledge from reliable sources). He assigned positive effects to marijuana (e.g. a kind of painkiller, relaxing). M17 has created his own hierarchy of harmful substances, recognizing marijuana as a substance the least affecting humans, which in his opinion does not belong to the group of drugs. M17: *Injecting, smelling, some glues, amphetamine, cocaine, designer drugs. These are drugs. Marijuana is not.* K40 experienced alcoholism in both her father and her partner. She, herself, is not addicted to anything. Her attitude towards marijuana is very clear. K40: *Alcohol addiction is a terrible addiction, which can completely destroy the family, the psyche of the people, the whole relationship. The worst addiction is alcohol and hard drugs. People simply become bums. Marijuana is harmful, but a person doesn’t roll down to the very bottom.* It could be argued that she based her position solely on difficult family experiences. However, the subject also referred to the legal issues, which may already be the basis for the occurrence of the technique of challenging responsibility by pointing to the lesser evil. K40: *In our culture, people who sell alcohol are unpunished, when alcohol is found in their home, from what I know, and I heard such situations from several people, these people are punished only by a fine, which I reckon is stupid in relation to a person who is caught selling marijuana, so these penalties are inadequate. Because to get a 500 PLN fine for something and to get a suspended sentence I think is inadequate, because both are addictive.*

Such observations could only demonstrate the world view of the respondents, their attitude to drugs, alcohol and tobacco. However, the quite different account of women dealing in alcohol shows this problem in a different light. K56 and K60 recognize that alcohol, compared to drugs, is a much less harmful substance. Their knowledge of these substances is negligible, taken only from conversations with other dealers and their own observations. K60: *I don’t know what is in the drugs, and I don’t know anything about what’s in the vodka. But I drank it many times and I live [laughs]. The chemical composition didn’t interest me. Nothing bad happened when I sold, nobody died, nobody saw a doctor.* At the same time, both women are addicted to alcohol (which had a significant impact on their family life, social and material status). Despite the hardships suffered, they argue that drugs are a greater threat to humans than alcohol of illegal origin⁷.

.....

⁷ The techniques characterized above are often a compilation of several defense mechanisms. The cited proposals were selected for the purposes of this paper. They serve to present a new variant observed in the course of the study. The exact relationship between techniques (combining several

Another observed technique is **questioning the victim**, or minimizing their importance. This strategy was used by M17 in the statement that: *Others do not interest me, I don't know a person whom I'd condemn. Unless they're "scum", then I don't support that, because they're shit. When they sell to someone who's barely standing on his feet and they can kill them – that's shit.* In his statement he referred to the comparison of people using drugs and alcohol. As is clear from the content of the interview, the respondent claims that drug users are less likely to harm of this substance than people buying alcohol. In this way, the “drug addict-victim” becomes a questioned victim in the eyes of M17. An interesting modification of this technique is its implementation in the form of **questioning the victim through accusation like “she’s herself to blame”**. M50 found that: *If someone smokes every day they're hooked. I don't force anyone. It's like the grocery store, you want to you go and buy, you don't – you don't go in and you don't buy. I don't go around, I don't talk anyone into it. I'm not there to moralize them, they are of legal age, everyone has to grow up.* In this way, he accuses the victim of immaturity and assigns them full responsibility for their actions. M33 put it similarly. In referring to the responsibility of his customers, he stated clearly that *everyone does what they think is right*, and thoughtless acts are the sole fault of the buyer.

A common technique for neutralization among the surveyed people was **condemning the condemner**. M50 has the richest experience in deviance, and the respondent's stay in prison was very important (observation of dealing in prison conditions). The respondent willingly resorted to using the technique of condemning the condemner, having strong arguments in the form of his own experiences. In response to a question about the assessment of the employees at the prison (dealing of officers of the Prison Service), he stated that: *You can't judge him. He brought out of greed. He can't get another job like in other professions, right. He had a trusted prisoner, he delivered to the cells and that guy sold it, simple.* K60, using the technique of condemning the condemner, mainly referred to the general social practices (accusing people of frequently engaging in the trafficking of alcohol). Her attitude to this situation was further emphasized by non-verbal messages, like laughter. This suggests that the woman treats dealing as something normal, almost obvious. When asked about the uniformed services, the respondent declared that she doesn't know of any specific case of police dishonesty, but she doesn't believe in justice.

The respondents were equally willing to refer to the technique described by Piotrowski called **denial of justice or the need of law**. It can be assumed that this technique strongly alludes to “condemning the condemner”, especially in the statements of the respondents. In this perspective, the dealers first denied

.....

strategies within the respondents' statements) were discussed in detail in the master's thesis entitled “Techniques of neutralization of criminal activity used by dealers of illegal psychoactive substances”.

the legitimacy of high penalties for drug possession and strongly supported the legalization of marijuana.

The last technique drawn from the concept of Matza and Sykes is **referring to higher reason**. The fact that this strategy was used by all the female respondents is interesting. K40 used this technique most extensively. She was equally willing to allude to the role of the mother as a parent responsible for the life of her daughter. In this way, she not only justified dealing but also other criminal activity, which she committed. However, it should be noted (inference based on the analysis of the interview) that these activities lasted in parallel with her day job, and the funds acquired from illegal sources were spent on pleasure (e.g. buying a new TV or car). K56 and K60 described their situation similarly. The main motive of their activities was sudden job loss. In their opinion, dealing became a necessary remedy to “patch” the household budget.

In the context of the undertaken research, several other strategies used by the selected dealers have been distinguished. They seem to be as important to develop a complete characterization of the subjects and to detail how they work and interpret reality as the other strategies. The phenomenon of **autostimatization** is worth noting. M50 willingly presented himself as a former prisoner, in this way justifying every criminal offense committed. M23 and M17 appealed to a sense of inferiority due to “detachment” from their peer group. Such a creation of their own image could serve to elicit sympathy or strengthen many of the presented arguments.

When analyzing the behavior of the respondents, it is worth referring to the **economic theory of crime** by Gary Becker and Isaac Ehrlich (Buřat et al. 2007, p. 66-67). The subjects - having an alternative - acted according to the principle of maximizing pleasure⁸. M33 did not sell marijuana to minors (due to the high penalties for this type of activity): *No, I didn't sell to minors, because you know how it is. I knew that there are higher penalties and judgments for this. It wasn't worth being exposed to it.* K40, in calculating the profit and loss balance, appealed primarily to her own well-being and mental health. As she understands it, the stress that accompanied this activity determined the “unprofitability” of this crime. K40: *I think that now, after everything I've been through, I wouldn't go into dealing, because of everything that's left in my head, the fear, turning around after every person, seeing a potential police officer in everyone, someone who's following me. It can't be described.*

.....

⁸ According to this theory, criminal behavior was described using terms from economics (e.g. demand, supply, profit and loss). The authors of the concept assumed that all people are rational individuals and strive to achieve the highest level of pleasure, and criminal behavior is subject to a kind of balance of risk. The principle of maximizing pleasure assumes that a person with a choice of two courses of action chooses the one that will bring more fun. Then the offender, with the possibility of illegal activity giving greater benefits than legal activities will break the law. The offense in this perspective becomes a behavior chosen from all possible actions (Buřat 2007, p. 66-67).

The last distinguished strategy was the use of **linguistic measures** - the so-called euphemization of language. The respondents often “cushioned” their statements in this way. They exchanged the word stealing with: *casual work, a job, extra work*. They did not express their activities directly, despite full awareness of committing a crime. The use of substitutes may also probably indicate an attempt to reduce moral dissonance (creating events through language).

Final reflection

What is the system of values of the respondents? Their views and aspirations are largely due to the circumstances of family, school experiences, educational environments, the level of education attained. External stimuli affected the deformation of these systems, however, there were no unusual differences between selected dealers and “non-criminals”. Among the respondents the priority values were the desire for happiness, security, prosperity, getting to know a caring partner.

This observation made it possible to apply the theory of Matza and Sykes in the analysis of the empirical material. Importantly, all of these techniques of the mentioned authors were verified in the process of research, finding their exemplifications in individual respondents. In addition to the five basic techniques (i.e. questioning responsibility, questioning damage, questioning the victims, condemning the condemner, resorting to higher reason), there was one additional strategy described by Piotrowski (2011) – the denial of justice or the need of law. It is worth noting that the specificity of the analyzed problem helped to enrich the existing strategy with the new variant, i.e. **questioning damage by indicating the lesser evil**. This demonstrates the usefulness of the concept of Matza and Sykes in different types of studies. This interesting modification found its application due to the topic of the paper (the problem area of dealing in illegal psychoactive substances) and the prepared disposition card allowing to freely arrange the interview. It is worth emphasizing the essence of designing field research in so-called “harsh environments (communities)”. Reaching the interviewees was not the only time-consuming and problematic factor, but also building a secure relationship between the researcher and the narrators. Gaining trust and creating an adequate environment that allowed us to acquire extensive relationships.

Other observed strategies also deserve mention, i.e. autostigmatization, calculation of profitability in line with the theory of Becker and Ehrlich, Sutherland’s theory of diverse links, and resorting to linguistic measures (mainly linguistic euphemization). The wealth of the verified strategies for reducing dissonance is revealed by the complex characteristics of people engaged in dealing in illegal psychoactive substances. The relationship of the used strategies with personal experiences of the respondents should also be noted – women as mothers and/or wives based on family values, willingly used the technique of referring to higher

reason, whereas the respondent who served a prison sentence, used the technique of condemning the condemner three times.

The use of the techniques by selected dealers appears to be a positive signal, giving hope for a successful social rehabilitation process. First of all, it testifies to the fact that the subjects felt some discomfort associated with the criminal lifestyle. It appears that the techniques can be an excellent basis for the introduction of corrective actions (reference to internalized values). The interpretation of reality adopted by dealers is merely an attempt to understand the world, which can be influenced and affected educationally.

In the face of this study, the issue of social acceptance to criminal activity, mentioned earlier, is concerning. Dealers stay in the city, they live in multi-family houses (tenement houses, blocks), sometimes parade around with their activities among friends and neighbors. As we reported, most of the environment knows about their activities, and they know about other offenders (including dealers). In these circumstances, it is worth considering a certain co-responsibility and social ignorance. No reaction may stem both from fear and starting the so-called effect of the viewer. This can be an important signal to undertake preventive measures, social rehabilitation and education.

Literature

- [1] Babbie E., 2013, *Podstawy badań społecznych*, PWN, Warsaw.
- [2] Bułat K. i in., 2007, *Kryminologia*, Oficyna Wolters Kluwer, Warsaw.
- [3] Gaberle A., 2003, *Nierozłączna triada. Przystępność, przestępca, społeczeństwo*, Arche, Gdańsk.
- [4] Hołyst B., 2009, *Kryminologia*, LexisNexis, Warsaw.
- [5] Konecki K., 2000, *Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych. Teoria ugruntowana*, PWN, Warsaw.
- [6] Leśniak M., 1998, *Jednostka – dewiacja – społeczeństwo*, [in:] *Labirynt współczesnego społeczeństwa*, (eds.) K. Czekaj et al., Wydawnictwo BBS, Katowice.
- [7] Lubelski M., 1985, *Droga do przestępstwa*, Wydawnictwo Prawnicze, Warsaw.
- [8] Matza D., Sykes G., 1957, *Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency*, „American Sociological Review”, no. 22.
- [9] Mazur E., 2010, *Rola rodziny w etiologii zachowań przestępczych na przykładzie osadzonych Aresztu Śledczego w Kielcach*, [in:] *Zachowania przestępcze, przyczyny i zapobieganie*, (eds.) F. Kozaczuk, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów.
- [10] Mościskier A., 2001, *Natura ludzka i problemy przestępczości*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, Warsaw.
- [11] O’Boyle T., 2014, *Techniques of Neutralization and Cheating in a National Pool League*, „International Journal of Business and Social Science”, no. 5.
- [12] Piotrowski P., 2011, *Rozbój. Uwarunkowania psychospołeczne, motywacja i racjonalność sprawców przestępstw*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, Warsaw.

- [13] Pstrąg D., 2010, *Tolerancja wobec przemocy jako czynnik etiologiczny przestępczości*, [in:] *Zachowania przestępcze przyczyny i zapobieganie*, (eds.) F. Kozaczuk, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów.
- [14] Roberts J., Smallridge J., 2013, *Crime Specific Neutralizations: An Empirical Examination of Four Types of Digital Piracy*, „International Journal of Cyber Criminology”, no. 7.
- [15] Siemaszko A., 1993, *Granice tolerancji. O teoriach zachowań dewiacyjnych*, PWN, Warsaw.
- [16] Woronowicz B., 2009, *Uzależnienia. Geneza, terapia, powrót do zdrowia*, PARPAMEDIA, Poznań.

Internet sources

- [17] Szczepanik R., *Doświadczenie wtórnej wiktyimizacji przez kobiety – ofiary przemocy w rodzinie*, http://dspace.uni.lodz.pl:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11089/5065/2011%20Andragogiczny_Szczepanik.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [access: 01.03.2016].