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## **Juveniles and their relations with police in open environment In the perspective of social prevention and rehabilitation.**

**Abstract:** The article presents theoretical concepts and research in the extent of minors - police encounters, paying attention to their confrontational nature. This issue was analyzed from three perspectives: environmental, individual and situational. Family and peer groups were described as the basic environmental factors. Age, gender and social background were analyzed as typical individual factors. Describing situational context, attention was paid to resistance and injustice as factors leading to intensification of the police intervention. It was emphasized that the confrontational nature of the encounters may lead to the escalation of conflicts, applied sanctions, increase social distance, resistance and labeling process.

**Keywords:** Juveniles, police encounters, open environment, social rehabilitation

### **Introduction**

Research on juveniles and their relations with the police shows that this is a problem difficult to grasp, reflected in the conflict-generating model of adolescents' functioning, manifested in behaviors deviating from social norms and usually resulting in the intervention of law enforcement officers (McAra & McVie, 2010; Carr, Napolitano, & Keating, 2007; Hinds, 2007; Piquero, Fagan, Mulvey, Steinberg, & Odgers, 2005). In discussions and comments, attention is drawn to its confrontational nature, ignoring factors shaping relations between the two sides. They are all the more important because, even if perceived as incidental events, they affect

a relatively stable model of an adolescent's perception of an institution guaranteeing order and safety, which in the long run may also hinder the process of social adaptation, adolescence, and in the case of socially maladjusted youth, the process of social rehabilitation.

It is difficult to indicate any research in the Polish literature which would analyze the relationship between the functioning of juveniles and the actions of police officers. Therefore, the following analyses are an attempt to characterize it, taking into account the findings of research carried out abroad.

The literature indicates two dominant models of relations between the institution of police and citizens (Reisig & Parks, 2006, pp.609-612). The first one boils down to the environmental dimension, emphasizing the quality of citizens' life, the specificity of the place of residence, infrastructure and ties between residents. They constitute a relatively coherent system - a micro-world, enabling individuals to build interpersonal relations based on family and neighborhood groups in accordance with the habitus of the environment. The second approach has an individual dimension and is related to individual's perception of the police institution. According to the authors, it can be analyzed in two perspectives: the general one, which manifests itself in the attitude of an individual towards the police institution, and the contextual one being a relatively stable opinion shaped as a result of experiencing the actions of police officers in a specific situation (e.g. during an intervention).

Two similar leading perspectives can also be observed in the studies on relations between juveniles and the police, as exemplified in the proposition of Ben Brown and Reed Benedict(2002). In their opinion, a key role in the first of these areas is played by the situational context in which the authors include the risk of victimization (understood as an individually perceived fear of being a victim of crime) and the specificity of the living environment (with particular emphasis on interpersonal relations). The second area includes factors referred to as individual factors: ethnic origin of juveniles, gender, experience in contacts with the police, as well as age and the resulting specificity of functioning in the social space, especially in informal peer groups.

The bipartite sets of factors proposed by the aforementioned authors will be the reference point for further analyses of the literature on the subject in the form of a fusion reduced to three

contexts: environmental, individual and situational. This will make it possible to take into account the phenomenon of the local environment, its educational role repeatedly emphasized by authors in the field of social pedagogy and social rehabilitation pedagogy (Ambrozik, 2016; Kowalski, 1984, 1988), the phenomenon of adolescence, the developmental norms experienced in this period, which may be considered as factors increasing the risk of behaviors contrary to existing norms. The last of the distinguished contexts refers to individual experiences, further defining opinions on not only the police as an institution, but also on the effects of potential intervention, related to the attribution of committing an act against the norms and as a result of social stigmatization and the consequences thereof.

### **Environmental context**

Referring to the environmental perspective, the key factor affecting the relations between citizens and the police is the sense of satisfaction with the work done by the police officers at the community level. In the light of the research, the key factor shaping the sense of satisfaction is the opinion of the community on the effectiveness of the police in combating crime. This dependence is directly proportional: the sense of effectiveness guarantees the sense of security, low rate of crime and victimization. On the other hand, high ratios of both problems undermine the authority and trust in the law enforcement officers, testify to their weakness in solving vital problems of a particular environment. What is important is that ethnic or cultural differences play a secondary role in this relation, because the most important factor shaping the analyzed relations is the opinion on the effectiveness of the police in combating crime (Reisig & Parks, 2006). An additional element shaping the opinion about the police is the noticeable presence of police officers in the environment. This is a factor minimizing the scale of deviant behavior, as the relatively frequent and adequate presence of the law enforcement officers results in minimizing the risk of unlawful behavior; a simple profit and loss account leads them to the conclusion that it is not worth it to behave in a way undermining public order (Sindall, McCarthy, & Brunton-Smith, 2017, s. 359).

This situation is different in environments where the presence of the police can be described as inadequate, insufficient and hardly counteracting breaking the law. Pursuant to this pattern, citizens who do not assess the security and infrastructure in their place of residence very favorably tend to be more negative towards the police than those coming from districts with

a high security rate (Reisig & Parks, 2003, pp. 38–40). A critical opinion about the police as shiftless (or abusing power) results in a low level of trust and even in shaping attitudes of resistance towards the police and its officers (ibid., pp. 44-45). Automatically, police intervention in such environments is a particular experience for both sides. This is due to the fact that the above-mentioned dissatisfaction and mistrust or even hostility towards the analyzed institution make the officers face social aloofness and prejudices, attitudes of hostility and provoking them to use means of physical coercion. In a confrontational situation, an antagonistic relationship between people in the so-called difficult neighborhoods and the police is generated, which causes a spiral of resistance and intervention, resulting in a recurrent pattern of conduct: arresting and often court proceedings. It is worth mentioning that the described spiral of events usually provides only an apparent solution to the problem, as the return to an open environment of people detained by the police and a potential contact with the police in the future will result in an escalation of resistance and conflict, and as a result - another police intervention (Sindall et al., 2017, p. 346).

Taking into account the analyzed environmental context, it should be stressed that the model of perception of the analyzed institution and its officers by their closest ones: members of peer groups and the closest family, plays a significant role there. In relation to the first of the areas, it should be stressed that an important element shaping the relations between the juveniles and the police is the complex context of socio-cultural factors, which is particularly reflected in the model of functioning of youth from urbanized backgrounds. These are environments which (in comparison with the other groups of adolescents) are characterized by an above-average number of interventions, a much lower level of trust towards institutions, accompanied by verbal provocations or even seeking a confrontation (A. R. Piquero, 2008).

A specific element that further defines the environmental context is the specificity of the relationship between juveniles and parents. Here, the authors attach considerable importance to two factors: criminogenic patterns in the family and the attitude of parents towards the police (Austin, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Luecken, Roubinov, & Tanaka, 2013). They play a key role in the light of the research, much more so than the individual deviant experiences of juveniles, group pressure or repression experienced from the law enforcement officers (Sindall et al., 2017, p. 359). It is worth stressing that the intergenerational model

of relations between parents and children towards institutions in the community undergoes slight changes during the adolescence period, becoming a pattern of perception of the police (ibid.). As a result, a negative attitude towards police officers may lead to far-reaching consequences associated with intervention or arrest and contribute to the escalation of the problem and consolidation of the negative model in the family environment.

The common element which juveniles encounter both in the family and peer groups (and which further defines the negative attitude towards the police officers) is disregard for the law (*legal cynicism*) - the attitude of the inhabitants of poor, minority communities, manifested in the belief of incompetence, injustice and heartlessness of the justice system (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011). As a result, people from minority groups are not willing to cooperate with the police and do not report any violations of the law. On the other hand, instead of the statutory law, such environments obey the law based on specifically understood respect, honor and right of vengeance, which boils down to self-proclaimed imposition of sanctions, by means of a wide range of informal and illegal measures existing in the group (ibid.).

In this context, it is worth to note the street code described by Elijah Anderson (Anderson, 1999). In the context of the analyzed problem it is the specific way of being that can be considered to be provocative towards the police officers; it is characteristic not only for those who break the law, but it is also a kind of a street style, habitus, manifested even by people who avoid violence (ibid., pp. 72-73). In this respect, it can be concluded that often the source of the problem is not the behavior of the police, but the negative (by definition) attitude of a given community towards the police officers and the institution they represent (Rosenbaum et al., 2005, pp. 344-345).

In addition, it should be noted that a negative information about the police (for example, too brutal intervention) has a much greater impact in the life of the community than a positive information. This pattern is in line with the mechanism of moral panic (Cohen, 2011), according to which the police are perceived negatively as a source of evil and injustice, while their actions are exaggerated and presented in a very negative light. According to the conclusions of Weitzer's research, (2002) such a role is also played by media coverage, as reports on the brutality of the police interventions intensify the negative attitude towards law enforcement officers for even a short period of time and are a significant complement to the strictly environmental

factors.

### **Individual context**

A separate group of problems in relations between juveniles and the police are factors inherent in the individual perspective. According to the adopted option, it consists of so-called hard data (age, sex, and social origin). Researchers agree that the teenage age is characterized by a peak in juvenile delinquency (Moffitt, 1993; Tittle & Ward, 1993). Research shows that the key moment when juveniles fall into conflict with the police is 13-15 years of age, with a trend towards lower age threshold (Sindall et al., 2017, pp. 344–345; Noszczyk-Bernasiewicz, 2016). At that time, attitudes change, the recorded manifestations of demoralization and punishable acts increase, and consequently the number of the police interventions increase (Stewart, Morris, & Weir, 2014, pp. 32–34).

Searching for the reasons for this regularity, it is worth indicating two important premises of theoretical nature. In the psychological literature on the subject, the attention is drawn to a specific feature of youth, which is their willingness to take risks, the juveniles' conviction of their "invulnerability" (D. Lapsley & Hill, 2010; D. K. Lapsley, 2003). This conviction results in taking ill-considered actions, without anticipating their consequences, in reckless approach not only to one's own activity, but also to side effects that may affect other people. Another characteristic feature of juveniles, according to William K. Muir, is "irrationality", which manifests itself in inadequate prediction of the effects of their behavior. Anticipated consequences are significantly different from those predicted by adults, fitting into a pattern of behaviors perceived as a violation of existing norms (Muir, 1977, p. 127 after: Belvedere, Worrall, & Tibbetts, 2005 p.32).

An additional factor complicating mutual relations is also resentment towards adults, broadly understood power, which can be considered a specificity of the period of adolescence. It is often associated with antagonistic, even provocative behaviors towards authorities and institutions, such as the police. (McAra & McVie, 2010). In this context, a key factor is the inappropriate behavior of young people in public spaces, resulting in intervention by the law enforcement officers, reprimand, arrest and other disciplinary actions (Stewart et al., 2014, pp. 23–24). What is important, antagonistic behavior towards the police officers themselves (for example

during arrest) increases the risk of involvement of a juvenile in a spiral of events connected with the implementation of procedures by the police officers or, as a consequence, by the justice system (Sargeant & Bond, 2015, pp. 918–919). It is worth to mention here that, with age, the attitude towards the police undergoes a positive reorientation, which (even to a minimal extent) is noticeable in every group, regardless of social status, place of residence or experiences discussed in this text (Stewart et al., 2014, pp. 23–24). This also confirms the conflict-generating nature of the period of adolescence.

In the context of the aforementioned hard data, it is also stated that girls are less antagonistic towards the police than boys (Chapple, Vaske, & Worthen, 2014; Szczepanik & Chomczyńska-Rubacha, 2006). The reason for this is that boys are more involved in the functioning of street gangs, identify with groups which by definition undermine or negate widely recognized authorities and prefer behaviors which are contrary to existing standards (Anderson, 1999; Miller, 1958). Girls rarely function as members in such structures. Their typical role is being a partner of a juvenile street gang member, which does not lead to a confrontational, hostile nature of the interaction. (McRobbie & Garber, 2003; Chapple et al., 2014).

Particular attention is paid to the relationship of juveniles with their peers who prefer anti-social patterns, staying out of control: both parental and school during truancy. The first contacts with the police at this age become the basis for building an attitude based on the aforementioned resentment and hostility towards the police, thus contributing to increasing resistance towards the police officers during a potential confrontation (Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001).

Referring to the social origin of juveniles, it is worth stressing the obvious and widely described in the literature fact of dependence between socialization in environments experiencing the problem of exclusion and marginalization and resentment towards the police institution and the police officers who represent it. In the analyzed aspect, special attention should be given to the aforesaid street code (which can be seen as an immanent attitude of resistance) and disregard for the law, which, as elements of the model of existing in the environment, shape the antagonistic attitude towards the law enforcement officers. An additional factor are the opinions on the behavior of the police officers in particular situations connected with the intervention or arrest of a member of the community. The use of indirect experience

by juveniles is particularly noteworthy. It happens in a situation when a particular juvenile has not had any direct contact with the police officers, but his/her opinion about them is shaped by the stories of other people (family members, peers) who (for example) have experienced intervention, and consequently this information becomes a basis for shaping his/her own stereotypical opinion. In this context, it can be stated that “whereas fear of crime is significant in environments with a low risk of victimization and vice versa (paradox of fear), the attitude towards the police is not closely linked to direct experience” (Rosenbaum et al., 2005, pp. 344–345). This means that a negative, stereotyped image of the police can be shaped during the adolescence period also by information that only partially reflects the real picture of a specific intervention.

### **Situational context**

Juvenile contact with the police officers is another important factor affecting the quality of relations between youth and the police in an open environment. Due to its complexity, it should be considered as an individual experience. According to research by Stephen G. Brandel and collaborators, the overall assessment of the police actions at the individual level is shaped by two types of experience: the police intervention and participation in operational work (e.g. by giving testimony) (after: Stewart et al., 2014, pp. 23–24). It is stated that those whose contact with the police was caused by the necessity of intervention, assistance, are definitely positive towards the forces. For obvious reasons, people who were an object of intervention due to disturbances of order have a negative attitude (ibid.).

Lawrence Sherman, among others, was involved in explaining the pattern of shaping people's attitudes towards the legal system (1993). He sought answers to the question about the impact and characteristics of resistance in the relation between ordinary citizens and the police officers. Cognitively interesting for him was the fact that some people experiencing arrest by the police are never again listed as offenders, while others are notoriously in conflict with the law. The author formulated a thesis about recidivism as a form of disobedience of the individual towards the social system and society as a whole. In his opinion, some people are more predestined to repeatedly violate the norms and rules of social coexistence because of their location in the social structure and their impulsive reaction to the violation of an individual's rights during an intervention. According to this thesis, in the case of many



people who are an object of the police intervention, their confrontational attitude is nothing more than a reaction to the subjective sense of injustice and the repressive nature of the system. In his opinion, it is also a counteraction to stigma and a specific side effect of the sense of shame resulting from being a subject of the police intervention. As a result, as Sherman states, some people who are an object of the police intervention are less susceptible to the system operation because they perceive it as unfair and unreliable (Sherman, 1993).

A sense of injustice is the basis for shaping the antagonistic attitude towards the law and its representatives, which becomes the cause of subsequent incidents. This topic was also touched upon in Tom R. Tyler's work "Why People Obey The Law" (after: Reisig & Parks, 2003, pp. 44–45). According to the author's thesis, both the lawful behavior of the police officers and the course of court proceedings have a much more socially desirable impact on the individual than in the situation of the objective and exclusively procedural treatment of perpetrators. A similar view is expressed by Nicole L. Piquero and Leana A. Bouffard (2003), who observed that among the factors determining the source of resistance of the people who are an object of intervention is the perception of sanctions as a manifestation of injustice, feeling of stigma and weakened ties with the society (which leads to marginalization and exclusion). The authors emphasize that the progressive internalization of stigma minimizes the change of behaviors assumed by social rehabilitation institutions. According to their thesis, a sanction is by definition a factor that triggers a reaction of resistance in the individual who experiences it and to a very small extent prevents further acts of deviation; moreover, it leads to legitimization of the peripheral status quo of the individual, thus complicating the process of readaptation and reintegration (ibid.).

## **Summary**

Summarizing the analysis of the literature of the subject, it is worth emphasizing a few important regularities. The research clearly shows that the combination of two factors: individual (adolescence) and environmental (community experiencing exclusion and marginalization) is a particular challenge in the work of police officers in an environment. In the light of the aforementioned research, it results in shaping the attitudes that can be described as resentment, antagonism and even hostility.

In conclusion, it may be worth to consider the issue of the manner in which the police officers react to such stimuli during the intervention. While taking measures to ensure the peace and security of citizens is indisputable, it is also worth to bear in mind that inadequate use of prerogatives may be the beginning of a trajectory of a juvenile's falling out of the margins of society, often resulting in a stigma that complicates the processes of social rehabilitation, readaptation and reintegration.

### **Abstrakt: Relacje nieletnich z policją w środowisku otwartym w perspektywie profilaktyki społecznej i resocjalizacji**

W artykule przeanalizowano koncepcje teoretyczne oraz badania dotyczące zagadnienia kontaktów nieletnich z funkcjonariuszami policji zwracając uwagę na ich konfliktowy charakter. Poruszaną problematykę przeanalizowano z trzech perspektyw: środowiskowej, jednostkowej oraz sytuacyjnej. Analizując rolę czynników środowiskowych, szczególną rolę przypisano rodzinie oraz grupom rówieśniczym. Charakteryzując perspektywę jednostkową zwrócono uwagę na rolę wieku, płci oraz pochodzenia jako czynników rzutujących na relacje z policją. W kontekście sytuacyjnym zwrócono uwagę na opór, poczucie krzywdy jako czynniki prowadzące do intensyfikacji przebiegu interwencji. Podkreślono, że konfliktowy charakter relacji może prowadzić do eskalacji napięć skutkujących stosowaniem sankcji, wzrostem dystansu i oporu oraz naznaczeniem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Nieletni, relacje z policją, środowisko otwarte, resocjalizacja

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