Anna Burdek[1], Wioletta Ławska[2]

1. Silesian Spa and Rehabilitation Center called the name of Adam Szebest
in Rabka-Zdrój
2. Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University,
Faculty of Health and Medical Science, Poland

REASONS FOR ALIENATION LEADING TO ANTI-SOCIAL AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR AMONG JUVENILES, ACCORDING TO THE JUVENILES THEMSELVES

Corresponding author:
Anna Burdek, Śląskie Centrum Rehabilitacyjno-Uzdrowiskowe
im. dr. A. Szebesty w Rabce-Zdroju sp. z o.o., ul. Dietla 5, 34-700 Rabka-Zdrój
e-mail: aniaaa18@onet.pl

Abstract

Introduction: The problem of alienation and delinquency among juveniles still exists. This is not only a social problem, but also a health problem. Through participation in antisocial behaviour, juveniles may experience various difficulties later in adult life. The aim of this paper is to investigate reasons for alienation and delinquency among juveniles and their influence on said health and functioning in society.

Materials and methods: The research dealt with here was carried out in 2015 among children and teenagers from The Silesian Centre for Rehabilitation and Health in Rabka-Zdrój by means of a questionnaire designed by the author.

Conclusions: The participants defined alienated anti-social behaviour, or alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour. Children aged 16–18 showed symptoms of anti-social alienation mostly by using bad language, drinking alcohol, smoking and vandalism. The respondents were affected by the antisocial behaviour of parents, family framework and the Internet.

Key words: alienation, reasons, children, youth

Introduction

The problem of alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour among juveniles has not disappeared or diminished substantially in spite of heightened efforts to make it do so. This remains a topical matter that impinges not only on an individual's social dimension, but also on their physical and mental health. A juvenile with impaired mental and physical health may face numerous problems in their adult life. This is why this problem ought to be investigated in order to introduce some sort of preventive care for deviant behaviour.

What is delinquency and what is alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour? The Juvenile Delinquency Proceedings Act defines alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour as a conspicuously intensive and relatively permanent form of maladjustment [1]. It is described as a process of drifting away from the normally binding moral and ethical values of a society. The Polish dictionary defines alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour in much the same way: as a rejection of the binding moral and ethical values of society which may lead to criminal activity and sexual promiscuity, as well as to actions or behaviours normally rejected by other people [2]. Delinquency, on the other hand, is an illegal, punishable act by a person [1]. Other offences that are not punishable, but which are treated as symptoms of alienation and anti-social behaviour might include using cigarettes, alcohol, drugs (including designer drugs), violating public order, damaging property, coarse and explicit language, playing truant and vandalism. If done repeatedly, these offences cannot simply be described as ethical and moral misdemeanours [3].

In today's world, particularly in so-called advanced western countries, we can observe alienation and anti-social behaviour virtually everywhere. We are continually confronted with information about gangs, gang activities, and what is worse, with information that members of such gangs are often young juveniles, teenagers, and children under the age of 18 [4].

Despite the efforts of social services and police services, as well as increased teacher and parental intervention, this phenomenon is still very present. There are a number of reasons for this related to many situations present in everyday life, from politics to cultural conventions, the economy, family life, as well as technological developments, among others. Indeed, we are generally unable often to point to one principle factor that causes this behaviour in juveniles.

Thus, in order to find the reasons for alienation and delinquency among juveniles, one should mostly focus on the main social groups that young people encounter and are associated with; namely, their families, teachers, peers, and school friends.

A teenager's peers play a very significant role in the process of building identity. On one hand, this significance arises from the fact that adolescents begin

to identify themselves with an environment not connected to their family, and on the other hand, this is due to the new and completely different possibilities that the peer group creates. Within a peer group, teenagers can test their behaviour and reactions in different situations, explore tasks linked to gender roles and verify their value system, their plans for the future, and their own vision of the world. A teenager finds an understanding in their peer group that often feels inaccessible in their relationship with their parents. Young people struggling with similar problems demonstrate that adolescence is a specific and uneasy period that may cause a disorientation and hopelessness which is perfectly normal [5]. It is when this disorientation and hopelessness becomes excessive that problems occur.

Improper contacts within a peer group can lead to negative emotions, such as feelings of rejection, alienation, loneliness and peer violence: these factors often increase the risk of future psychological problems [6].

Fortunately or unfortunately, the world of media and new technologies has become a 'natural environment of development' for children and teenagers, and as a result, many, if not most, spend their childhood in the so-called digital playground. However, virtual space—in computers in all forms, from laptops to Apple Watches—offer plenty of helpful applications and possibilities, but may also pose a threat. While exploring the virtual world, children and teenagers might encounter many different forms of cyber-bullying like harassment, outing, cyber stalking, denigration, etc. Numerous web pages, forums, blogs and social networks are also flooded with pornography, taboo words, violence, racism, and xenophobia, as well as a lack of balanced and rational argument [7].

Aim of the paper

The main aims of this paper are: to discover children's and teenagers' opinions about the reasons for alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour in their social environment; to try to establish the age at which symptoms of anti-social alienation or criminal activity may first be noticed; to distinguish the most frequently committed offences and their influence health and function in society.

Problems researched

The research investigated the following problems:

1. Symptoms of anti-social alienation among respondents.
2. The most frequent reasons for alienation among children and teenagers.
3. Influence of parents' anti-social behaviour on their children's subsequent actions.
4. Imbalance in the family structure as a cause of offences committed by juveniles.

Materials and Methods

This study was carried out during two remedial summer camp sessions for children and teenagers, in April and June 2015 at The Silesian Centre for Rehabilitation and Health in Rabka-Zdrój. The respondents came from many different regions and voivodeships in Poland, which increases the validity of the study. The management of the Centre, parents, and children agreed to participate in the study, which was conducted in their free time. The questions in the questionnaire were readily comprehensible to the respondents, and answering them took no more than 10 minutes.

Results

70 people took part in the research: 40 boys (57.2%) and 30 girls (42.8%). The largest age group (28 people – 40%) were young adolescents aged 13–15. Most of the participants lived in cities or towns (37 people – 52.8%), the rest in villages (33 people – 47.2%). Most female participants were in the 13–15 age range (14 people, or 46.7%), as compared to 4 girls in the 10–12 age group (13.3%), and 12 girls in the 16–18 age group (40%). There were 14 males in both the 16–18 and the 13–15 age group (35% in both groups), with 12 boys in the 10–12 age group (30%). This data is presented in Tab. 1 and 2.

Table 1. Age, sex and place of residence

	%	n
Gender		
Female	30	42.8
Male	40	57.2
Age		
10–12 years	16	22.9
13–15 years	28	40.0
16–18 years	26	37.1
Place of residence		
Town	37	52.8
Village	33	47.2
Total	70	100

Table 2. Respondents' sex by age group

	Female		Male	
Age	n	%	n	%
10–12 years	4	13.3	12	30
13–15 years	14	46.7	14	35
16–18 years	12	40	14	35
Total	30	100	40	100

Both children (pre-teens, aged 10–12) and teenagers were asked how they understood the concept of alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour. In both groups, a number of girls (9 people – 30%) and boys (16 people – 40%) defined the term as drifting away from the bonds of social norms and values and neglecting rules considered right. However, other children considered alienation itself as an element in the process of the development of every human being. This was the opinion of 10 boys (25%) and 8 girls (26.6%); a further 8 girls believed that alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour was breaking the law in order to affirm their own identity, and 7 boys (17.5%) and 5 girls (16.8%) could not define this concept. The respondents listed several aspects of alienation of an anti-social nature that they themselves had manifested, such as coarse and explicit language (26 people – 37.1%), truancy (17 people – 24.3%), vandalism (8 people – 11.4%), running away from home (7 people – 10%), sexual and violent behaviour (1 person each group – 1.4%), smoking (23 people – 32.8%), alcohol consumption (20 people – 28.6%), drug use (10 people – 14.3%), joining religious sects (2 people – 2.8%), and theft (16 people – 22.8%). Thus, the most frequently committed offences were coarse and explicit language, smoking, alcohol consumption, truancy, theft and drug use. It should be noted that alienating actions correlate with behaviour that reflects the biological and physical conditions of a child, as well as the age of the teenagers when they started using psychoactive substances.

(Note that the above data does not add up to 100% since the respondents had the option to choose more than one answer.)

Fig. 1 presents the most often committed offences among the tested youth.

Further results of the research concern the influence on the alienation and anti-social hostility of children and teenagers of aspects such as family breakdown, the weakening of family ties, bad parenting, and parental addictions. As many as 30 boys (75%) and 20 girls (66.6%) believed that the aforementioned factors are crucial causes of deviant behaviour and delinquency among juveniles (See Fig. 2).

The respondents evaluated their own behaviour as far as committing deviant acts was concerned. Girls (17 people – 56.6%) and boys (18 people – 45%) aged 16–18 admitted to deviant or delinquent behaviour most often. The next group was girls (13 people – 43.4%) and boys (12 people – 30%) aged 13–15, and of the last age group, only boys (10 people – 25%) admitted such behaviour. (See Fig. 3).

The respondents assessed the influence of their own parents' delinquency on their (the respondents') own subsequent actions and their subsequent predisposition to further actions of a similar nature; not just then while they were adolescents, but also in their future adult lives. The majority of respondents thought that children indeed might imitate the behaviour of their parents (14 girls – 46.6% and 14 boys – 35%); however, 16 boys (40%) and 12 girls (40%) claimed that parental behaviour had no impact on children's actions—which is to say on their actions. 10 boys (25%) and 4 girls (13.4%) had no opinion. (See Fig. 4).

The respondents believed it was parents' unemployment and poverty that inclined children to wrongful behaviour. 52 respondents (74.2%) agreed with this view. (See Fig. 5)

According to 46 respondents (65.7%), the juvenile's immediate peer groups also have a major influence on their moral and ethical behaviour. (See Fig. 6).

As mentioned above, when searching for causes of alienation and delinquency among juveniles, one should take into consideration present-day technologies. Respondents were asked to indicate which media they considered most destructive on their behaviour, and to evaluate the new technologies' impact on alienation generally. As many as 34 people (48.6%) said that they thought the Internet was the most destructive media. (See Fig. 7).

The respondents were also asked who they thought offered most support and help in preventing them from entering the criminal population. The most common answer was 'parents' (42 people – 60%); the second most common was 'educators/class teachers' (12 people – 17.1%); the third most common was 'siblings' – 4 people (5.7%) (See Fig. 8).
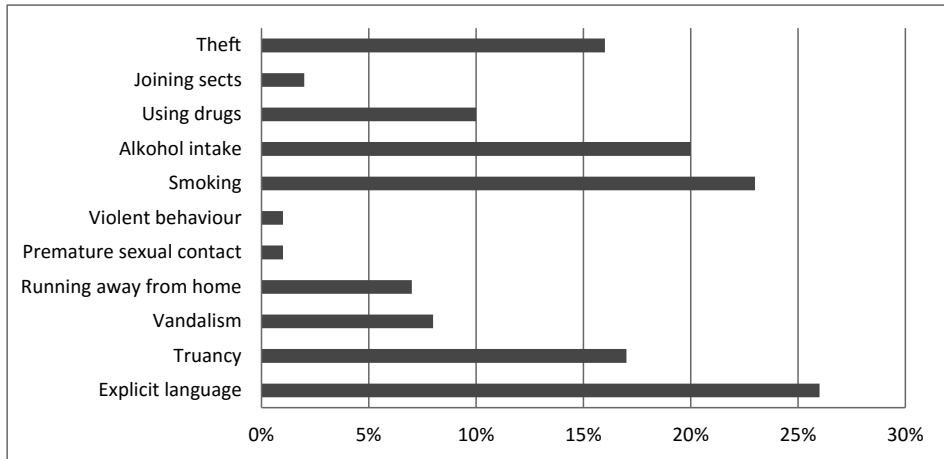
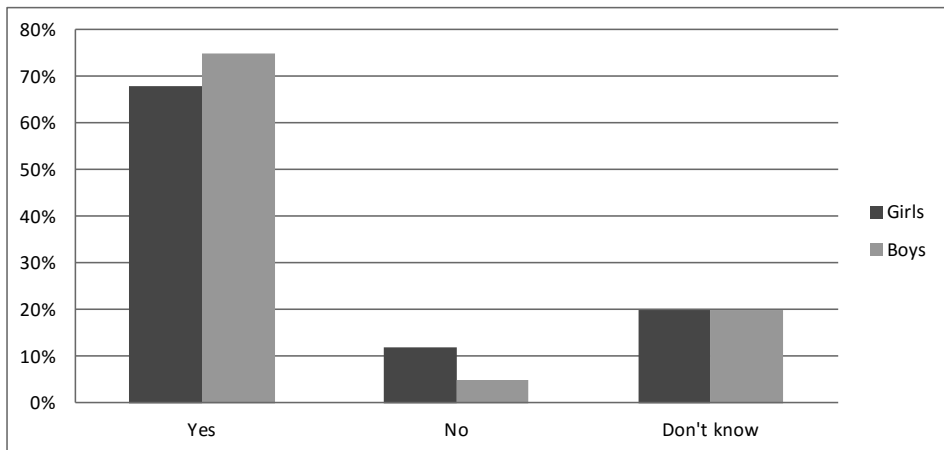Figure 1. The most common offences among respondents.

Figure 2. Influence of family breakdown on demoralising behaviour
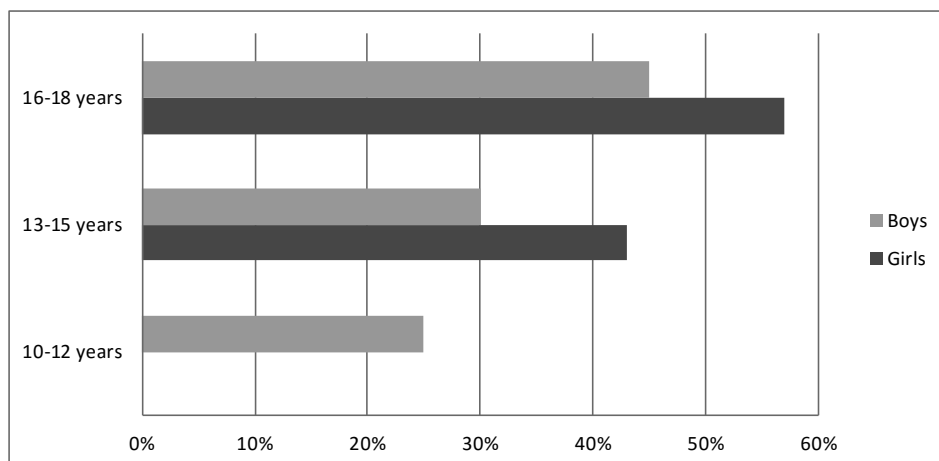in respondents' opinions.

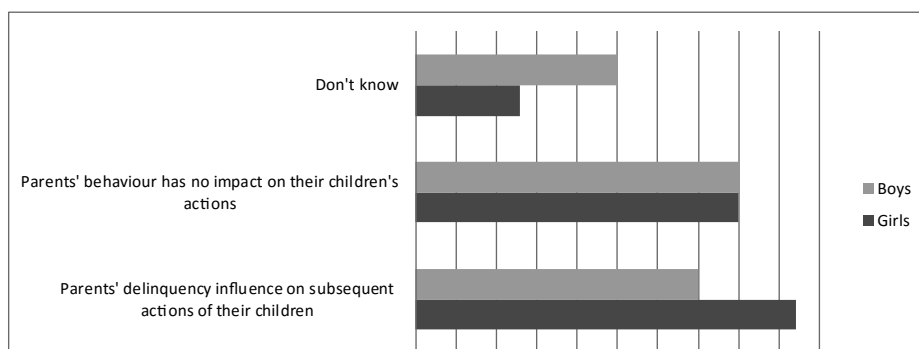Figure 3. Respondents' offences depending on age category.

Figure 4. Influence of parents' paradigm on juveniles' actions in the opinion of the respondents.
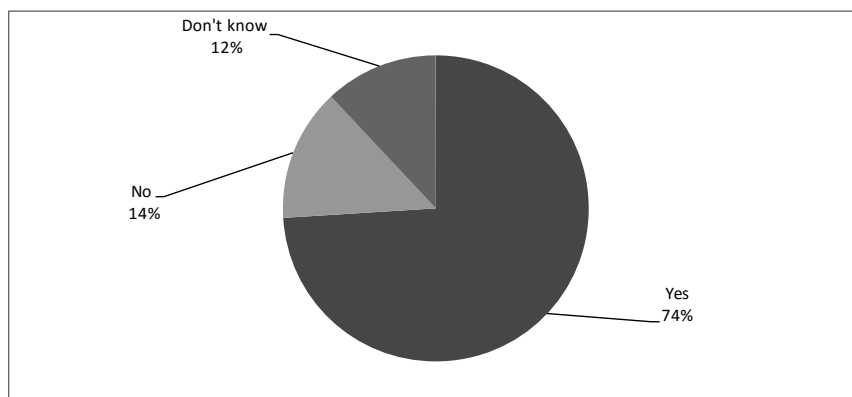

Figure 5. Juveniles' opinion on the influence of their parents' unemployment and poverty on their criminal behaviour.
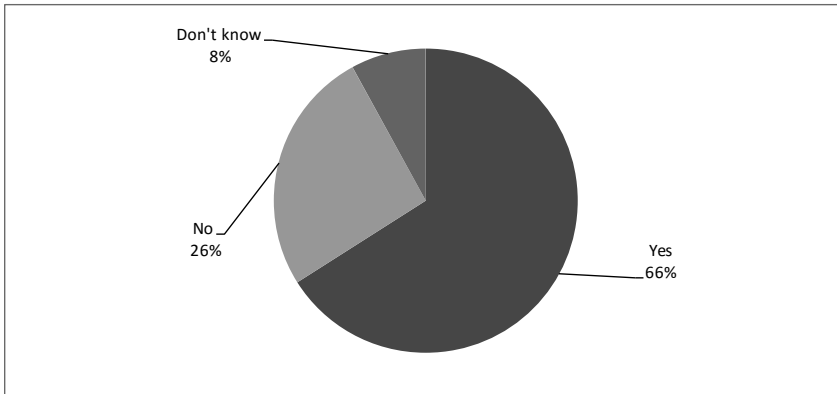
Figure 6. Peers' influence on committing offences by the juvenile in their own opinion
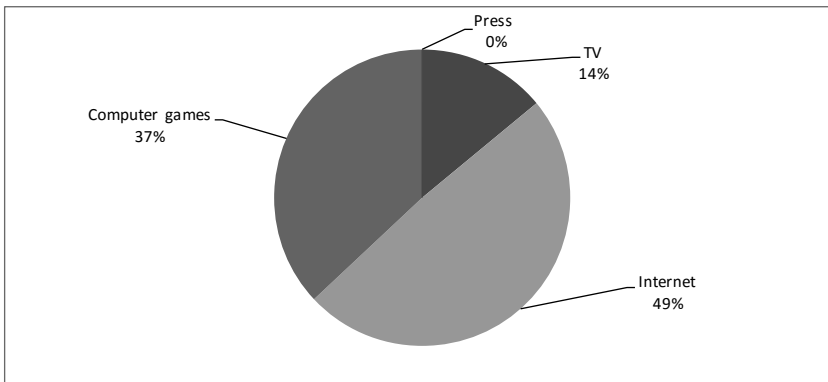

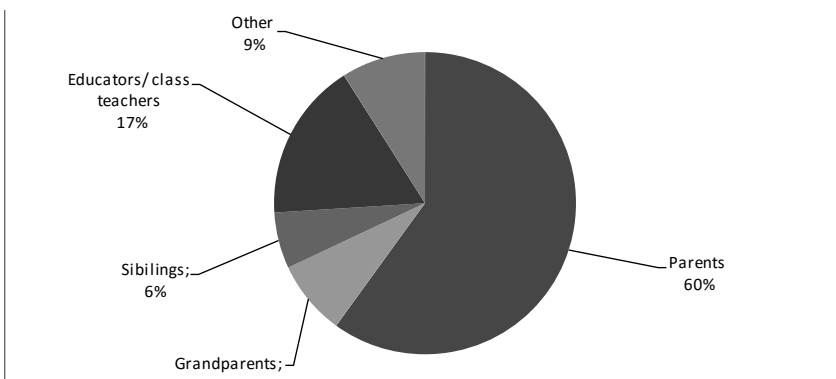Figure 7. The most demoralising media in respondents' opinions

Figure 8. People who give the biggest support in preventing the juvenile from entering the criminal population

Discussion

Supportive parents are very important in preventing improper behaviour among children and teenagers. Thus, it is the family that should play the greater role in counteracting antisocial behaviour among juveniles. As numerous studies have shown, through proper parenting, proper bonding, being open to children's needs and problems, parents are more likely able to positively influence their offspring.

This is of great importance nowadays when the risk of delinquency among juveniles is so high. As there has been an apparently substantial fall of the age at which young people break the law, it is necessary to coordinate actions in order to prevent and minimize deviance in society. A child surrounded by close family relations is more likely to be mentally strong and thus capable of dealing with adversity. Setting reasonable demands, helping in school, being present for everyday activities and duties, supporting children when they face obstacles, and giving a sense of security when they experience problems: all are among the basic aims of successful upbringing [8].

Frequent symptoms of a dysfunctional family, however, include demanding too many chores from a child, making excessive demands of a child (often because of unrealised aspirations and ambitions of parents who now want their children to fulfil them) and assorted autocratic methods of upbringing, which often involve exaggerated forms of discipline. This generally does more harm than good. Children who cannot meet excessive demands start to reject the ethical norms that bind society by violating these very rules of convention, committing forbidden acts, neglecting school, using alcohol or other psychoactive substances, running away from home, joining gangs, and engaging in forms of prostitution [4].

A family that is dysfunctional in several areas or levels cannot be expected to properly shape a child's or teenager's moral and ethical code. Such dysfunctionalism in the family should then be seen as a principle cause of the alienation and anti-social or delinquent development of the children and teenagers that come out of it. The family that satisfies all the needs of a child—biological, physical, and psychological—is usually able to react against damage to the child's personality in time. Of course, also very important here are the emotional bonds between members of the family [4,9].

Research indicates that a proper family structure and correct parenting have a huge protective power. Knowing the mechanisms behind a healthy and functional family helps us to understand how the dysfunctional family is shaped, and at the same time allows us to develop an effective and helpful strategy to counter its often debilitating effects [7].

Another oft-cited role is the influence that immediate peers have on people's social and mental development when they cease being children and begin to become adults. Numerous studies and research show that good social rela-

tions can work as a buffer against stress, whereas social skills that are weakly developed often lead to poor social relations that in turn may lead to isolation and rejection. Therefore, both psychologists and teachers working with children ought to understand that building proper social relations contributes greatly to the ability to discern healthy modes of behaviour and so to take care of oneself. Young people are in a special developmental phase in which they are beginning the process of detaching themselves from the family, and so the groups of friends they choose are very important. The young seem to reach for whatever appeals to them because they want to satisfy being misunderstood or poorly understood, fulfil their needs, or impress their peers, and they will often do this even if it involves illegal behaviour [4,10]. Juveniles do not always think about the consequences of their actions. Wanting to impress their peers is enough to make them violate moral and ethical boundaries.

When an individual feels threatened and uncertain of his ambitions, or his selfhood, the influence of the group can become even greater. This situation can lead to what is often termed 'obligatory conformism to a gang'. In order to prove one's worth, skills and importance, and so ensure one's acceptance and 'membership' in the gang, each individual activates a number of actions, and engages in a sort of character game which might involve daring, taunting, flirting, showing off, debating, and bluffing, among other things. If such interactions are fulfilled successfully, the individual might avoid humiliation and thereby assure membership in the gang or peer group. These interactions are of great importance, especially for those who seek prestige.

Delinquent juveniles much less often join, or attempt to join, any sort of respectable or 'formal' associations; a few reasons for this may be their parents' lack of education and lack of membership themselves in such organisations, as well as the character of their type of work and bonds outside of the family. Even though affiliation to various formal or respectable associations does not always reflect a peaceful attitude to the law, it does reflect a conscious or subconscious acceptance of societal norms, which itself reflects some sort of internalised acceptance or recognition of ethical and legal norms [11].

Nowadays, nobody needs to be reminded that new media has become a crucial part of young peoples' lives; their overuse of the Internet and smartphones is well known. So taken are they with technology that they often do not notice or do not want to notice the kinds of threats hidden behind this type of technology when used carelessly or ineptly. However, since such use is supported by their peers' use and opinions, collective misuse and abuse of the technology often seem to arise [12]. This is why the influence on alienation and anti-social behaviour of computers, computer games, internet film access and YouTube access, as well as all sorts of social media, will most probably not diminish. The aggression and hostility present in computer games also have an impact on how children respond to those closest to them, that is, those in their immediate family

environment. The Internet also provides a chance to enter the world of grown-ups and become familiar with sexuality [9]. Being addicted to the Internet or computer games is as psychologically dangerous as an addiction to psychoactive substances (alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes), so it also has an impact on alienation and anti-social behaviour. In addition, even if the effect is not visible at once, this does not mean that it will not become visible later in an individual's life [10]. The paradigms and ideals of the cyber world are highly conducive to the illusion of reality, which may lead to a sense of frustration. Data from the Central Statistical Office suggests that there is definitely an upward trend in offences committed by juveniles. In the first few years of the millennium, the number of offences committed was, on average, about 42,770 per annum; however, in 2012 this had risen to 64,432 offences [13].

The less sustenance they receive from their immediate family, the more they will seek it from among their peers, and this requires good social skills [14]. It is also worth mentioning that the majority of people who show criminal tendencies at some point in their life acquired these tendencies because of negative influences in their childhood.

Conclusions

1. One of the major causes of alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour in children and juveniles can be found in the family, especially in so-called broken homes and families considered pathological. The absence of proper behaviour paradigms, weak emotional bonds, lack of love, poverty, or parental substance abuse are among the main reasons for juvenile neglect of moral and ethical norms.
2. The significant influence of mass media should be noted in the process of alienation and delinquency in juveniles. The respondents point to the Internet as a crucial medium here.
3. The most common symptoms of alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviour among teenagers aged 16–18 are coarse and explicit language, alcohol consumption, smoking, truancy, theft and vandalism.
4. In order to prevent alienation and delinquency successfully, one should try to recognise early the threats present in the family and immediate environment of children and teenagers, and take action to counter improper anti-social behaviour. It also seems necessary to educate not only people who normally are expected to give support to youth—namely, parents and teachers—but also children and adolescents themselves, so that they know where to seek help if needed.

Bibliography

1. Ustawa z dnia 26 października 1982 r. o postępowaniu w sprawach nieletnich, Dz.U. 1982 Nr 35 poz. 228, http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=W DU19820350228 [on-line: 15.06.2015].
2. Doroszewski W. *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, http://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/demoralizacja.html [on-line: 15.06.2015].
3. Dmochowska H. *Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2013*, http://stat. gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/RS_rocznik_statystyczny_rp_2013.pdf [15.06.2015].
4. Sołtysiak T, Sudar-Malukiewicz J. *Zjawiskowe formy patologii społecznych oraz profilaktyka i resocjalizacja młodzieży.* Wydawnictwo Akademii Bydgoskiej im. Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2003.
5. Polcyn-Matuszewska S. *Bezpieczeństwo dzieci w sieci.* Remedium. 2015; 4 (265): 10–11.
6. Grzegorzewska I. *Rodzina dysfunkcyjna jako czynnik ryzyka w rozwoju dziecka*. Remedium. 2015; 5 (266): 4–5.
7. Grzegorzewska I. *Szkoła jako ważny kontekst rozwoju dzieci i młodzieży cz.1.* Remedium. 2015; 6 (267): 20–21.
8. Kozaczuk F. *Młodzież wobec współczesnych zagrożeń.* Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów 2003.
9. Gidel-Stefaniec E. *Patologia życia rodzinnego i jej wpływ na przestępczość nieletnich*. http://www.pedkat.pl/images/czasopisma/pk12/pk1208.pdf [8.04.2015].
10. Urban B. *Zachowania dewiacyjne młodzieży*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2000.
11. Mysior R. *Sexting – niebezpieczna strona nowych mediów*. Remedium. 2015; 6 (267): 6–8.
12. Szymańska D. *Wsparcie społeczne*. Remedium. 2015; 6 (267): 18–19.
13. Geldard D. *Promocja zachowań ukierunkowanych na dbanie o siebie* [w:] Geldard K. (red.). *Skuteczne interwencje w pracy z młodymi ludźmi z grup ryzyk.* Wydawnictwo Parpamedia, Warszawa 2010; 23–58.
14. Urban B. *Dorastanie społeczne i zachowania dewiacyjne młodzieży.* Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 1999.

Przyczyny demoralizacji i przestępczości nieletnich w opinii dzieci i młodzieży

Streszczenie

<u>Wprowadzenie</u>: Problem demoralizacji i przestępczości wśród nieletnich nadal występuje. Ma on wymiar nie tylko społeczny, ale i zdrowotny. Nieletni naruszając swe zdrowie zarówno biologiczne jak i psychiczne, w dorosłym życiu mogą mieć wiele dysfunkcji. Celem pracy było poznanie opinii dzieci i młodzieży na temat przyczyn przestępczości i demoralizacji w ich środowisku, wpływu wykroczeń na zdrowie i funkcjonowanie w społeczeństwie.

Materiał i metody: Badania przeprowadzono w 2015 roku wśród dzieci i młodzieży w Śląskim Centrum Rehabilitacyjno-Uzdrowiskowym w Rabce-Zdrój, z użyciem autorskiego kwestionariusza pytań.

Wyniki i wnioski: Badani definiowali demoralizację jako odchodzenie od obowiązujących norm w społeczeństwie. Najczęściej dzieci wykazywały przejawy demoralizacji, w grupie 16–18 lat, i było to wulgarne słownictwo, spożywanie alkoholu, palenie papierosów, wandalizm. Wpływ na postępowanie badanych miały aspołeczne zachowania rodziców, zachwiana struktura rodzinna oraz Internet.

Słowa kluczowe: demoralizacja, przyczyny, dzieci, młodzież