

Effectiveness of Special Juvenile Crime Prevention Programmes

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to identify the effectiveness of juvenile crime prevention programmes. After the introduction of the juvenile crime prevention programme into the educational process, aggressiveness ($p \leq 0.01$) and conflict ($p \leq 0.01$), propensity to break norms ($p \leq 0.001$), addictive behaviour ($p \leq 0.01$), self-destructive behaviour ($p \leq 0.01$), to aggression ($p \leq 0.05$), delinquent behaviour ($p \leq 0.001$) decreased among juveniles, while volitional control increased ($p \leq 0.05$). Much fewer juveniles are the initiators of bullying ($p \leq 0.001$) and their assistants ($p \leq 0.01$). The study showed that a certain part of the surveyed juveniles are prone to criminal behaviour; however, it was proved that special programmes are effective in preventing it. A decrease in delinquent behaviour, manifestations of bullying, aggressiveness, and proneness to conflict was found after the participation of the juveniles in the programme. The obtained results are useful for the implementation in educational institutions to prevent juvenile offences.

Keywords: illegal behaviour, juvenile justice, deviant behaviour, conflict, bullying, adolescent crisis.

Introduction

The problem of juvenile delinquency is currently considered one of the priority areas of domestic policy. In Ukraine, it becomes particularly acute during martial law, when all the emphasis of state policy shifts from social issues to military ones. In this context, the growth of illegal behaviour in adolescence, when children consider themselves to be adults while they are not, becomes relevant. Juvenile crime is a global problem. Despite statistics showing a decrease in juvenile crime rate in various countries, it is still one of the most widespread forms of risky behaviour in many societies (Darvishi et al., 2022).

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Juvenile delinquency is a threat to society and needs immediate prevention. In Ukraine, the juvenile prevention units of the National Police occupy a priority place among state bodies aimed at preventing juvenile crime. At the school level, the problem of children's deviant behaviour is dealt with by psychologists and pedagogues acting as Deputy Directors for studies and pedagogical work. The joint activity of these specialists is the key to successful preventive work.

Juvenile delinquency can result from deviant behaviour, including delinquent behaviour. It is a specific reflection of the crisis of adolescence (Dogar et al., 2010). Such behaviour is not only antisocial, it creates many problems for the juveniles themselves (Mittal et al., 2021). This is a decreased psychosocial adaptation, low school performance, disruption of peer relationships, and deterioration of relations with parents (Song et al., 2022; Zhylin et al., 2022). Such juveniles are characterised by proneness to conflict, aggressiveness, and a high level of psychopathy (Nasreldin et al., 2020).

Juveniles commit half of crimes as part of a group, which proves the group nature of criminal behaviour. Juveniles always tend to join a reference group where they can take their place and be a member of a certain association (Källmen et al., 2023). This gives them a sense of power and permissiveness, which makes juvenile criminal groups particularly dangerous (Martín et al., 2022). Crime can also be a consequence of psychosocial problems, the main ones being the loss of one of the parents, their divorce, etc. (Fitriana & Ramli, 2019).

Today, the most common types of criminal behaviour are bullying and cyberbullying (Panzai et al., 2020). Although criminal liability for bullying is not provided for by law and is reduced to administrative punishment in the form of a fine for parents, juveniles face punishment in case of serious or fatal consequences. The causes of bullying are primarily the wide spread aggressive and conflictual behaviour in the mass media, particularly in the Internet (Man et al., 2022). Every year, up to 70% of children face the problem of bullying, 20% become victims, and another 40% hide this problem (Roques et al., 2022). Impunity for bullying can contribute to further violent acts and lead to serious offences (Potard et al., 2021).

Therefore, juveniles with delinquent behaviour need effective intervention focused on positive changes. Research revealed that specialised juvenile justice programmes without psychological support are ineffective in reducing juvenile delinquency (Abbaspour et al., 2022). The implementation of complex programmes that take into account the legal and psychological components of the prevention of juvenile delinquency is the most effective.

Literature review

Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, preventive legal and educational work with children and adolescents remains a priority for both educational institutions and the state. In December 2017, Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine No. 877 established juvenile prevention units of the National Police (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2015). Their main goal was “preventive activity aimed at preventing children from committing criminal and administrative offences, identifying the causes and conditions that contribute to this, taking measures within their competence to eliminate them” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2017).

In Ukraine, the prevention of offences and criminal behaviour is legislated. However, the implementation of state programmes is mostly formal and is not implemented at the expected level. As a result, criminal behaviour among teenagers is increasing. Criminal behaviour is illegal actions that lead to the commission of a crime (Saladino et al., 2021). It includes not only direct illegal actions but also psychological predictors that precede them and prompted the act (Kalvin & Bierman, 2017). This proves the importance of the psychological development of adolescents and the formation of important personal qualities in them.

Bullying is one of the vivid examples of offences that are the most widespread today. Bullying is the aggressive behaviour of one child or a group of children towards another child, which is accompanied by constant physical and psychological pressure (Potard et al., 2021). Liability for bullying is established by Article 1734 of the Code of Ukraine on Administrative Offences. At the same time, individuals are held liable for committing and concealing cases of bullying (Le et al., 2019).

Research shows that the majority of adolescents commit non-violent crimes, while only a small proportion develop into violent crimes (Stenbacka et al., 2019). At the same time, taking into account the risk factors that lead adolescents to violent crimes can contribute to creating effective methods of crime prevention in the future (Saladino et al., 2021).

A review of existing juvenile crime prevention programmes showed that each country chooses its directions and methods, but comprehensiveness and purposefulness are common for all programmes. Psychocorrective trainings are developed and implemented in parallel with state programmes. It is noted that such work should be carried out for at least 10–18 weeks to reduce the consequences of negative manifestations of adolescent behaviour (Hikmat et al., 2024).

For example, we can consider the RIPP (Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways) project developed for US students in grades 6-8. The project provides 12 to 25 sessions, which are taught weekly. It mainly contains group forms of work aimed at developing moral values and strengthening positive individual traits (Colizzi et al., 2020). The effectiveness of this programme is determined by the dynamics of the number of discipline violations before, during, and after the programme (Laptii, 2014). Research shows that this programme is effective in reducing juvenile delinquency and the number of offences they commit (Brymer et al., 2022).

A preventive intervention based on the theoretical RNR (Risk Need Responsivity) model is also effective and focuses on working with adolescents in the early stages of delinquency (Dodd et al., 2022). The programme follows the principle of risk to prevent adolescents' illegal behaviour. The prevention of delinquent behaviour in this programme is aimed at reducing additional criminogenic factors: the influence of parents, peers, groups, and individual inclinations (de Vries et al., 2018).

The SMART Talk (Students Managing Anger and Resolution together) programme actively prevents juvenile delinquency. The programme is computerised and designed for students from 6th to 8th grades. The duration of the programme is approximately 13 weeks. Its structure includes special techniques for working with anger and aggression, reducing conflict, and learning constructive coping skills (Learning Multi-Systems, 2007).

The Reconnecting Youth programme is a school-based prevention programme designed for high-risk students. It is aimed at improving school performance, reducing drug use, and improving psycho-emotional state (Crimesolutions, 2013). The main difference between this programme and the other is the inclusion criteria. While participation in previous programmes was guaranteed for all students, this programme requires compliance with the following requirements: declining school performance, alcohol or drug abuse, and established delinquent behaviour (Myers et al., 2021).

There are no such special programmes in Ukraine. Prevention of crime among children is carried out by each educational institution separately based on Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Approval of the Comprehensive Programme for the Prevention of Offences" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2006). Following this regulatory document, measures are being developed to prevent illegal behaviour in the children's environment. However, this is not enough because full-scale access to the Internet allows children to learn negative trends in behaviour that provoke crime.

In addition, there is an opportunity for teenagers to independently complete a course to improve their psychological state using the HappyMind online simulator. It enables choosing the direction that interests a specific individual, which ensures anonymity and accessibility (HappyMind.Help, 2023).

The considered programmes prove their effectiveness by reducing the crime rate and illegal behaviour among children. The complexity of such programmes ensures their results. Only the multidisciplinary interaction of various specialists can provide the desired effect. This involves social services in working with parents and adolescents (Carr et al., 2022), particularly in overcoming the problem of bullying (Hikmat et al., 2024). This includes psychological training groups and individual consultations (Gupta et al., 2022) aimed at forming volitional control and moral awareness (Abbaspour et al., 2022). Legal education is also a necessary element which should be provided by juvenile justice authorities (Coulombe et al., 2020). In a complex, these services should contribute to reducing juvenile delinquency and improving their behavioural qualities.

Objectives

Therefore, the aim of the study is to identify the effectiveness of specially developed programmes in the prevention of negative behavioural tendencies of adolescents that provoke crime. The aim involved the fulfilment of the following research objectives:

- conduct a diagnostics of the bullying structures of juveniles, signs of their deviant behaviour, and indicators of their proneness to conflict;
- implement a specially developed crime prevention programme for reducing the signs of deviant behaviour in the educational process;
- identify the effectiveness of the implemented programme at the statistical level;
- justify the results and outline the research prospects.

Research hypothesis: a special crime prevention programme helps to reduce the level of juvenile deviant behaviour.

Methods

Research Design

The study was carried out from September 2023 to March 2024 and included 5 stages. The first stage provided for the research organisation was determining the sample and research methods. The second stage involved the diagnostics of the adolescents. During the third stage, the primary analysis of the obtained results and their interpretation was carried out. The fourth stage was the longest and involved adolescents' participation for 3 months in the Juvenile Crime

Prevention programme. The fifth stage provided statistical processing of the obtained data and determined the programme's effectiveness.

The essence of the study was the implementation of a comprehensive programme for the prevention of juvenile delinquency. The programme is designed for 24 sessions, 2 sessions per week. Each session is devoted to a particular topic. The programme includes four blocks: cognitive (acquaintance with the basic concepts and types of juvenile crime), psychological (delivering sessions to relieve psychological tension and development of self-regulation), legal (meetings with representatives of law enforcement agencies to study the problem of juvenile crime and its consequences), medical (doctor's lectures on the consequences of criminal, addictive, illegal behaviour for the health of adolescents). The sessions were delivered at the specified time without disrupting the educational process.

Sampling

The study involved 250 7th-9th grade adolescents aged 12 to 15 ($M=13.5\pm1.8$): 140 girls and 110 boys. Criteria were applied to the selection of respondents. First, the selection volume was chosen, ensuring its representativeness. Second, the study included the greatest crisis period of adolescence in order to achieve a complete diagnosis. Thirdly, the selection criteria consisted of the study of adolescents from different regions in isolation, which made it possible to avoid the influence of the regional factor. Among the examined were 90 teenagers from Comprehensive School No. 25 (Chernivtsi), 84 teenagers from Comprehensive School No. 12 (Kryvyi Rih), 76 teenagers from Special Comprehensive School No. 2 (Kropyvnytskyi).

Methods

The Personal Aggressiveness and Conflict Test (E.P. Ilyin, P.A. Kovalev). The test is a standardised and valid tool for diagnosing aggressiveness and conflict. The test distinguishes between three main scales: positive aggressiveness, negative aggressiveness and proneness to conflict.

The Young People's Roles and Positions Test (created by O. Norkina; modified by Yu. Podkopaieva, K. Hordiienko). The test is standardised and adapted to the Ukrainian language. The aim of this test is to determine the roles and positions occupied by adolescents in bullying.

Deviant Behaviour Test (A. N. Orel). The methodology is a standardised test. The test is aimed at studying the structure of deviant behaviour. It contains the following scales: propensity to break norms and rules, propensity to addictive behaviour, propensity to self-destructive behaviour, propensity to aggression and

violence, volitional control of emotional reactions, propensity to delinquent behaviour.

Statistical analysis involved the use of descriptive analysis, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and parametric Student's t-test for independent samples. Descriptive statistics were applied to present mean values and standard deviations for each test score. Univariate variance analysis was used to determine significant differences in indicators by gender. The Student's t-test was used to identify statistically significant changes in the indicators of adolescents after participating in the program.

Results

The results showed a high level of proneness to conflict among adolescents (Table 1).

Table 1. Indicators of the adolescents' personal aggressiveness and proneness to conflict (N=250)

Group	positive aggressiveness (Mean±SD)	negative aggressiveness (Mean±SD)	proneness to conflict (Mean±SD)
boys (N=110)	16.77±2.21	12.28±6.18	37.93±7.78
girls (N=140)	15.34±12.87	11.32±3.26	28.25±9.63
Total (N=250)	13.44±4.17	14.88±5.22	34.57±8.13
F	87,329	69,514	73,392

It was found that a high level of positive aggressiveness, a medium level of negative aggressiveness, and a medium level of proneness to conflict prevail among adolescent boys. A high level of positive aggressiveness and proneness to conflict and a medium level of negative aggressiveness were found in the group of adolescent girls. Generally, a high level of positive aggressiveness, a medium level of negative aggressiveness, and a high level of proneness to conflict prevail in the whole group. Such results indicate significant proneness to conflict in the adolescent environment, which can lead to criminal behaviour.

Table 2 presents the results of the bullying structure.

Table 2. Indicators of the adolescents' bullying structure of teenagers (N=250)

Group	initiator (Mean±SD)	victim (Mean±SD)	assistant (Mean±SD)	defender (Mean±SD)	observer (Mean±SD)
boys (N=110)	18.63±7.22	4.25±3.85	9.44±3.19	8.26±1.26	7.33±2.97
girls	16.65±3.17	9.15±4.89	13.10±2.94	9.63±3.25	7.31±2.11

(N=140)					
Total	17.35±4.29	7.66±2.26	11.58±2.74	9.33±3.16	7.24±2.15
(N=250)					
F	18,327	82,119	46,293	82,182	12,83

The obtained data indicate the predominance of the role of the initiator of bullying among boys and girls, as well as in the group as a whole. The role of victim is represented the least among boys, and the role of observer — among girls. The role of assistant was quite high among girls. Such results show that adolescents are mostly initiators of conflicts and bullying of others, while girls are also initiators and assistants. This indicates the wide spread of the problem and the need for its prevention.

Determining the propensity to deviant behaviour revealed that a percentage of teenagers had high indicators (Table 3).

Table 3. Indicators of the adolescents' propensity to deviant behaviour (N=250)

Group	boys (N=110)	girls (N=140)	total (N=250)	F
propensity to break norms and rules	54.25±11.43	48.22±9.28	51.87±12.49	45,219
propensity to addictive behaviour	48.73±11.27	42.57±10.18	45.64±10.94	53,931
propensity to self-destructive behaviour	31.18±7.64	37.22±8.95	35.78±8.32	66,298
propensity to aggression and violence	54.37±12.78	52.29±12.04	53.12±12.01	27,392
volitional control of emotional reactions	63.48±19.72	64.06±20.26	65.67±21.13	10,392
propensity to delinquent behaviour	45.28±13.37	47.83±14.73	46.78±14.24	23,484

A high propensity to break norms and rules, a propensity to aggression, low volitional control and borderline values of a propensity to delinquent behaviour were found among adolescents. A propensity to break norms and rules, a propensity to aggression, low volitional control and borderline values of the propensity to delinquent behaviour prevail among boys. A propensity to aggressive behaviour and low volitional control dominate among girls. They also have borderline values of propensity to delinquent behaviour. Such results prove the need for corrective measures that would make it possible to reduce the

manifestations of deviant behaviour in adolescents and the risk of committing crimes by them.

The Juvenile Crime Prevention programme was introduced into the educational process based on the obtained results. The programme provided for the introduction of foreign experience in the prevention of delinquency among adolescents in Ukraine. The SMART Conversation programme was taken as a basis.

After adolescents participated in the programme, a repeated study showed a statistically significant indicator decrease (Table 4).

Table 4. Dynamics of indicators of adolescents before participation in the programme and after it (N=250)

Indicators	Adolescents (N=250) (Mean±SD)		t
	before	after	
Indicators of adolescents' personal aggressiveness and proneness to conflict			
positive aggressiveness	13.44±4.17	15.52±6.16	-5.94**
negative aggressiveness	14.88±5.22	9.18±3.77	6.47**
proneness to conflict	34.57±8.13	21.43±9.18	7.28**
Indicators of the adolescents' bullying structure			
initiator	17.35±4.29	6.36±1.32	9.34***
victim	7.66±2.26	6.39±1.28	1.25
assistant	11.58±2.74	6.58±1.77	8.42**
defender	9.33±3.16	12.33±4.17	-7.17*
observer	7.24±2.15	7.35±2.26	1.80
Indicators of the adolescents' propensity to deviant behaviour			
propensity to break norms and rules	51.87±12.49	31.44±6.53	9.38***
propensity to addictive behaviour	45.64±10.94	23.81±7.42	8.17**
propensity to self-destructive behaviour	35.78±8.32	15.28±6.48	11.26**
propensity to aggression and violence	53.12±12.01	33.26±8.13	4.57*
volitional control of emotional reactions	65.67±21.13	54.36±11.43	5.18*
propensity to delinquent behaviour	46.78±14.24	26.24±8.19	12.61***
* <i>p</i> <0.05; ** <i>p</i> <0.01; *** <i>p</i> <0.001			

It was found that the indicators of negative aggressiveness and proneness to conflict have significantly decreased after the adolescents participated in the programme. The value of positive aggressiveness, which includes persistence and intransigence, somewhat increased. After the programme, a much smaller number of adolescents are the initiators of bullying and their assistants. Still, the number of those who are ready to defend the victims of bullying has increased significantly. The propensity to break norms and rules decreased, the level of addictive behaviour, self-destructive behaviour, propensity to aggression, delinquent behaviour decreased, and volitional control increased among teenagers.

Discussion

The research results show that currently, adolescents have a problem with negative behavioural tendencies that can cause a propensity to commit crime. We found that adolescents have signs of aggressive and conflict behaviour, pronounced roles of initiator and assistant in the bullying structure, as well as a propensity to deviant behaviour. All revealed indicators are almost equally distributed between boys and girls, which indicates the absence of a critical gender difference. The obtained results are the basis for the possible criminal behaviour of such teenagers, which requires prompt prevention. On this basis, we implemented a comprehensive programme to prevent juvenile delinquency among the studied adolescents. A repeated study revealed the programme's reliable effectiveness. After its implementation, aggressiveness and proneness to conflict, proneness to break norms and rules, addictive behaviour, self-destructive behaviour, aggression, delinquent behaviour, and volitional self-control increased among adolescents. At the same time, the number of bully initiators and their assistants decreased while the number of defenders increased. The results prove that specially developed programmes can reduce the level of criminal behaviour of adolescents even at the stage of its inception.

Our results are consistent with other studies stating that adolescents show signs of deviant behaviour that may be the basis for committing crimes among both girls and boys (Panzai et al., 2020). At the same time, the facts are presented that confirm the existence of differences in bullying among adolescents by gender, age and region (Man et al., 2022). It was proved that delinquent teenagers are aggressive and prone to conflict (Nasreldin et al., 2020), they have a pronounced propensity to break norms and rules, and low self-control (Mittal et al., 2021). The majority of juvenile delinquencies are explained by their antisocial traits: aggressiveness, proneness to conflict, and withdrawal (Abbaspour et al., 2022).

The environment can contribute to or reduce the occurrence of crime. It is noted that if more than half of the peers in the adolescent environment are

criminals, the chances that they will also commit a crime increase 6 times for girls and 8 times for boys (Källmen et al., 2023). However, if adolescents have family support and a positive school environment, this has long-term benefits in reducing antisocial and criminal behaviour (Stevens, 2018). This proves the influence of the educational environment on the emergence of illegal behaviour.

Most of the programmes developed to prevent and combat juvenile crime are effective. However, many scholars argue that it should be a comprehensive, blended care model focusing on multilevel, multifaceted, and targeted interventions for healthy adolescent behaviours through family, school, and community (Song et al., 2022). Combining social and educational work with psychological correction is the key to the success of such programmes (Hikmat et al., 2022). In doing so, juvenile delinquency should be addressed through self-control and empathy training using evidence-based approaches in important applied studies (Roques et al., 2022).

The researchers proved that 55% of teenagers are quite good at preventing criminal behaviour (Dodd et al., 2022). Moreover, prevention programmes are more effective specifically for adolescents with at-risk juveniles and less effective for non-at-risk children (Farrell et al., 2003). This proves that specially developed programmes can significantly reduce and prevent the occurrence of criminal behaviour among juveniles.

However, some scientists proved the opposite and found that juvenile prevention programs are not effective and do not reduce juvenile crime (De Vries et al., 2018). Such a conclusion can be substantiated from several points of view. First, crime prevention programs are unidirectional and do not include measures to improve relationships with parents and peers, which is also a significant factor in reducing crime. Secondly, such programs do not include specialised measures of behavioural modelling and assimilation of constructive methods of response in crisis situations. Third, involvement in the program must be high enough to achieve a level of effectiveness. Very few teenagers are interested in preventive measures. From this, we state that the crime prevention program must be comprehensive and in-depth to achieve maximum benefit.

Conclusions

The research that was conducted confirmed the effectiveness of special programmes in juvenile crime prevention. It was proved that implementing the programme contributed to reducing deviant and conflictual behaviour of adolescents and reducing bullying in the adolescent environment. These results are useful, first of all, for school psychologists and educational assistants because the programme makes it possible to reduce negative behavioural tendencies in

adolescents. Second, such results are effective from a legal perspective, as a decrease in deviant behaviour indicates a decrease in possible crime. Therefore, the large-scale implementation of such a programme guarantees the successful educational work of the school, as well as an effective juvenile prevention mechanism.

The limitations of the study are additional factors that can affect the manifestations of deviant behaviour in adolescents: family type, material condition, social position in society, reference group and individual typological characteristics of the personality. All this can increase or decrease negative behavioural manifestations.

Research prospects may be the study of the influence of family type on the criminal behaviour of adolescents, as well as the dependence of criminal behaviour on school performance.

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