

LEISURE TIME AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY*

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Filip Mirić

Faculty of Law, University of Niš, Republic of Serbia

Abstract. *In this paper, the author analyzes the impact of leisure time on the occurrence of juvenile delinquency. Drawing attention to the fact that unstructured and inappropriate use of juveniles' spare time may result in unlawful conduct, the author emphasizes the importance of efficient planning and well-structured use of one's leisure time as a means of preventing juvenile delinquency and combating juvenile crime. It is, therefore, essential to occupy young people in their spare time with useful contents, educational, recreational, creative and other forms of "active relaxation" which will have a positive impact on the prevention of their delinquent behavior. These factors should be taken into account when designing the criminal policy and prevention measures for combating juvenile crime.*

Key words: *juveniles, juvenile delinquency, leisure time.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Every individual is entitled to freely dispose of one's leisure time and independently decide how to use his/her spare time for relaxation, recreation and restoring the working and living energy. Yet, unstructured and inadequate use of leisure time may be a significant criminogenic factor. The author analyzes the impact of spare time on the occurrence of juvenile delinquency, perceived in a general sense. This subject matter is directly related to the ultimate objective of this paper: to emphasize the importance of careful planning and well-structured leisure time in the prevention of juvenile delinquency. Thus, the unlawful conduct in young people is not a result of the presence of free time *per se* but it may be caused by the unstructured and highly inappropriate use of one's spare time. This fact should be taken into account when designing prevention measures for combat juvenile delinquency and juvenile crime.

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Corresponding author: Filip Mirić, LL.D., Associate for Postgraduate Studies
University of Niš, Faculty of Law, Trg kralja Aleksandra 11, 18000 Niš, Republic of Serbia
E-mail: filip@prafak.ni.ac.rs

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2. INADEQUATE USE OF LEISURE TIME – A STEP TOWARD DELINQUENCY

The purpose of leisure time is to restore energy and to provide conditions for raising the quality of life. In modern society, leisure time has become an extremely topical social and scientific problem. One of the most significant reasons is certainly the rapid automation of the production process, which has fundamentally changed the role of man in this process and brought about shorter working hours. The breakthrough of technology in the field of leisure time as well as commercialization of activities and "goods" aimed at general consumption in one's spare time have additionally contributed to this problem.

In society, the leisure time activities of young people, and particularly the manner of using it, has always been the focal point of attention of the wider community. This on-going interest is primarily due to the fact that juveniles' leisure time has a significant developmental, educational, sociological as well as criminological significance, particularly considering the biological, psychological and social characteristics of juveniles as a social group. Therefore, any organized society exerts considerable efforts to develop positive interests, skills, abilities and preferences among young people, thus exercising the basic rights to self-expression and self-determination. In case the spare time has been inadequately used, young people easily get bored and idle. The feelings of boredom and idleness are fertile ground for the operation of various negative factors that can lead to antisocial behavior.

Some scientific studies show that young people often commit crimes at times of leisure. Such findings have given rise to the scientific standpoint that "juvenile delinquency is a product of misusing one's spare time" (Jašović, 1978: 232). This view is both incorrect and excessive because it disregards the impact and the operation of other criminogenic factors which are highly important in the course of any research on juvenile delinquency. The fact that a vast majority of juvenile criminal offences are committed by minors at times of leisure certainly does not imply that the roots of their antisocial behavior or unlawful conduct should be sought in their spare time activities. In fact, rather than being the cause of antisocial behavior, spare time is most frequently the condition that triggers some criminogenic factors, ultimately leading to the commission of crime. Given the fact that juveniles' spare time is far less supervised and controlled in relation to the time spent at school, it is much more convenient for displaying antisocial behavior and/or committing criminal offences.

In criminological literature, there are two largely similar views on the role of free time in the occurrence of juvenile delinquency. According to the first point of view, juvenile delinquency is a means of overcoming boredom. This view is often supported by legal practitioners who point out that juvenile delinquents explain their antisocial/criminal conduct by the fact that they had nothing to do and/or nowhere else to go. They emphasize that free time should be restricted as much as possible because it is "the source of all vices" (Jašović, 1978: 233). It is really hard to dispute the hypothesis that boredom and similar preoccupations may serve as an incentive for many juveniles to commit various offences. However, these feelings are not immanent characteristics of free time, nor can free time be identified and equalized with them. This hypothesis may prove to be valid only for the free time is unstructured and disorganized, where youngsters allow themselves to plunge into physical and mental idleness. Therefore, rather than being an immediate/direct cause of juveniles' delinquent behavior, boredom is a special form of "using" one's free time. The solution to this problem actually lies in responding to the question why young people are prone to boredom in their spare time, which they may

freely dispose of as they wish. It is indisputable that certain personality characteristics of minors play a significant role in youngsters' propensity to or decision to engage in such antisocial activity but we certainly cannot disregard the impact of broader social and environmental circumstances.

According to the second point of view, the delinquent behavior of young people is a reflection of their need for play. Playing games is not only a compensation for the unrealized desires and motives but also the way to overcome the accumulated conflict situations; thus, the game dynamics provides a feeling of pleasure and comfort. Despite the above statement, it would be quite unacceptable to construe that juvenile delinquency is only as a result of thwarted motives and the need to play.

In criminology, there is a standpoint that unstructured and disorganized free time contributes to the emergence of juvenile delinquency. Juvenile delinquency researchers endeavored to empirically identify the negative impact of unorganized leisure time and show its importance in shaping young people's behavior. Researchers particularly focused on the phenomenon of the informal organization of young offenders. It is a well-known fact that need for networking appears quite early in young people but it is particularly prominent from the age preceding puberty. Therefore, it can be said that the major feature of young people's leisure time is their organization into groups. Initially, the primary motive for such organization is to play games together, which is the common interest of all group members. However, in time, a group may split into a number other groups which develop specialized interests or affinities (Jašović, 1978: 234).

The organization of leisure time is of particular importance in the process of execution of institutional correctional measures imposed on minors with delinquent behavior. If the use of free time these persons is not planned, organized and systematically directed, minors may engage in gambling, wagering/betting, tattooing (Konstantinović-Vilić, Kostić, 2011).

Under specific circumstances, some of these specific groups may grow into juvenile criminal gangs, which are engaged in antisocial activities that often result in the commission of the most serious crimes (felonies). For this reason, it is important to note the negative impact of the neighborhood and delinquent groups on the occurrence of juvenile delinquency, which certainly deserves special attention in the process of combating youth crime.

An important issue in combating against juvenile delinquency is peer influence and informal groups. The negative impact of the neighborhood on the emergence of juvenile delinquency is usually embodied in the activities of delinquent group of peers that engage in delinquent behavior. Therefore, the more intense and direct the contact with these delinquent groups, the greater the impact on the delinquent behavior of other citizens. It primarily refers to various professional offenders, particularly among young people (such as: pickpockets, muggers, etc.), as well as hooligans, bullies, thugs, drunkards, gamblers and other similar categories of people.

3. JUVENILE GANGS AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Organized groups of professional criminals and thugs have a significant criminogenic impact on minors. These organized groups display various types of antisocial behavior, usually in public places, and the prominent features of their behavior are aggression and violence. In different ways, they endeavor to recruit new members to their criminal communities. By idealizing the world of crime and by their criminal behavior, these

groups exert a highly destructive impact on the immediate environment; they tend to exert a specific psychological impact on their members and develop a mind-set which serves as justification for diverse unlawful activities: breaking the law; ignoring social duties, interest and goals; disregard for human dignity; propensity to make a quick buck; and other antisocial tendencies and phenomena (Milutinović, Aleksić, 1989: 63-64).

Practice shows that older minors (aged 16-18) usually commit crimes during the holidays; these are usually criminal offences against property and against life and limb. The major problem is that adults usually fail to sufficiently understand the mechanisms governing the operation of juvenile groups and take a timely action to prevent their delinquent activities. The process of combating juvenile delinquency cannot be restricted to imposing punishment to juvenile delinquents and removing them from the society. Given their age and degree of maturity, it is essential to find the most efficient measures to combat juvenile crime and, concurrently, prevent the negative impact of criminal proceedings on the physical and mental development of minors.

It is a well-known fact that peer groups of close friends significantly shape and contribute to the development of a young man's personality. In case where these groups are antisocial and when they display criminal behavior, motives and activities, they may exert a considerable influence on group members and encourage them to commit various forms of deviant behavior. Youngsters who are recruited by powerful delinquent groups and gangs recruit are first required to prove themselves in action and to earn the trust of other gang members by engaging in some antisocial or criminal activity. Thus, gangs train the recruits, develop antisocial motives/behavior and prepare their members for deviant behavior (Milutinović, Aleksić, 1989: 63-64).

Identification with the negative role-models is the primary factor in the negative impact of the neighborhood on the occurrence of juvenile delinquency. Identification with the leader of the criminal group is of particular importance because the leaders of such groups necessarily require absolute obedience, the result of which is the phenomenon of *defensive identification*. Defensive identification essentially means obeying a single person or the most aggressive group member who intimidates the young recruits. In fear of possible penalties, such individuals do not respond to harassment by resorting to aggression towards the people who threaten him; instead, their frustration is aimed at the common "enemy", i.e. the society as a whole (Hajduković, 1975: 54). Another reason that makes the neighborhood a powerful criminogenic factor is the fact that neighbors are bound to develop close interpersonal relations and necessarily rely on other members in the community. Such relations are not a prominent feature in some other social communities. This bond is even more prominent during adolescence when youngsters demonstrate a very strong need to belong to different social groups. Thus, adolescents who are exposed to the activities of delinquent groups have a significantly greater chance to get involved in some form of delinquent behavior.

There are numerous factors that influence the formation of juvenile delinquent groups. Some of these factors are: poverty, poor family relations, institutional violence (especially in the countries of Central America), urbanization, stigmatization of juveniles in conflict with the law, unauthorized use of weapons, drug abuse, negative influence of the media, etc. From the institutional standpoint, some of the most prominent factor are: lack of political will of the state government to confront the serious crime, corruption at all levels, deportation from developed countries, etc. (Mejia, 2008).

The ability to foresee and forestall the behavior of juveniles in a group is of particular importance for combating juvenile delinquency. The significance of association in peer

groups for proper development of adolescents was beautifully illustrated by psychologist Nikola Rot. In his book "Fundamentals of Social Psychology", he stated: "through membership in a group of peers, especially in adolescence, young people are searching for their identity, trying to achieve personal autonomy and find a successful way into the adult world ... As they tend to emancipate themselves from the parental restriction, nothing is more embarrassing to adolescents than to be reproached or mocked by their peers about lack of independence or about being under full parental control, particularly by the mother. Peer groups may have some common features: they may share values and attitudes and they may demonstrate similar forms of behavior; but, the most valuable asset in peer groups is companionship and inclusion in peer groups which show certain ways identical behavior but rather the characteristics of companionship and inclusion in peer groups, the attempt to explain and formulate their own dilemmas, to exchange experiences about life and society, to question and challenge the authoritative declarations of parents, teachers and other adults, considering that such statements are often simplified idealization and frequently inconsistent with their own conduct in particular-specific circumstances. "(Rot, 2006: 131-132). All things considered, the impact of peer groups should be taken into consideration in the course of creating and developing the criminal policy for combating juvenile delinquency.

When considering the impact of leisure time and its inadequate/inactive use on the occurrence of juvenile delinquency, it should be noted that young people who are prone to deviant behavior often tend to pursue and satisfy their immediate needs and desires; their actions are usually driven by hedonism and easy-going pursuit of happiness. Yet, these tendencies are usually a cover-up for alienation and a prominent sense of loneliness. Thus, the commission of various crimes in bars, discos, cafes and other gathering places is actually a compensation for unrealized needs and desires pertaining to personal and social affirmation. Unlike their non-delinquent peers, juvenile delinquents try to satisfy their desires for social affirmation and personal achievement by engaging in criminal and other socially dangerous activities, such as alcohol and drug abuse. Running away from the real world, they may end up in the world of crime. For all these reasons, the conduct of juvenile delinquents is a highly significant criminological issue which should be subject to further research.

4. IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION

Effective planning and use of leisure time is of particular importance in the prevention of juvenile crime. Criminological studies show that juveniles most frequently commit crimes at times of leisure, when they are bored and idle. For this reason, it is important not to leave young people too much free time, to engage them in different meaningful activities (reading, walking, creative socializing with peers, etc.), and occupy them in their spare time with useful contents (educational, recreational, creative, etc). These diverse forms of "active relaxation" may have a positive impact on the prevention of delinquent behavior and may indirectly contribute to reducing the juvenile delinquency rate, which is unfortunately still very high.

Finally, it should be noted once again that physical and spiritual inactivity in free time is a significant factor which contributes to the occurrence of juvenile delinquency. A lack of social values and personal interests, a lack of patience and persistence, and a lack of will to pursue specific meaningful goals may give rise to the feelings of boredom, idleness and loneliness in young people. Running away from the reality, young people

may end up in the world of crime. All these factor should be taken into consideration not only in the process of devising the criminal policy measures for combating juvenile delinquency but also in the process of ensuring better living and working conditions for young people in general.

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SLOBODNO VREME I MALOLETNIČKA DELINKVENCija

Autor u radu analizira uticaj slobodnog vremena na pojavu maloletničke delinkvencije. Ovako postavljen predmet rada je u direktnoj vezi sa njegovim ciljem- da se istakne važnost osmišljenog korišćenja slobodnog vremena u prevenciji maloletničke delinkvencije. Obraćajući pažnju na činjenicu da neorganizovano i neadekvatno korišćenje slobodnog vremena od strane maloletnika može da rezultira njihovim protivpravnim ponašanjem, autor ističe potrebu efikasnog planiranja slobodnog vremena maloletnika, kao mere za prevenciju maloletničke delinkvencije i suzbijanje maloletničkog kriminaliteta. Neophodno je slobodno vreme maloletnika ispuniti korisnim obrazovnim, rekreativnim i kreativnim sadržajima kao i drugim oblicima „aktivnog odmora“, što pozitivno utiče na prevenciju delinkventnog ponašanja. Ove činjenice bi trebalo uzeti u obzir prilikom kreiranja mera kriminalne politike u cilju prevencije i suzbijanja maloletničke delinkvencije i kriminaliteta maloletnika.

Ključne reči: *maloletništvo, maloletnička delinkvencija, slobodno vreme*