

# New Developments on the Delinquent Child's Resilience

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**Abstract.** The current paper aims to approach the theme of the resilience of delinquent youth. The present approach is part of the experience of working with delinquent adolescents, conducted in the project "Promoting the Resilience of Youth Delinquent-PRYD," which aims to provide a model of intervention to increase the resilience of juvenile offenders, as a significant part of the process of supporting and facilitating their social integration.

PRYD is a project developed within a European partnership, financed by the European Commission through the Daphne Program.

The beneficiaries of this project are adolescents aged between 14-20 years, residents of one Reeducation Center from Romania. All the adolescents included in the project are in the custodial environment, executing an educational measure, as a result of criminal acts.

**Keywords:** Delinquent Youth, Social Reintegration, Educational Measures, Resilience.

## 1. Introduction

In Romania, there are 3 specialized centers for hosting teenagers who are executing educational measures and 2 prisons for minors and youth. PRYD aims to generate a model of good practices for working with delinquent adolescents from these two categories of institutions.

The direct beneficiaries of the project are approximately 50 adolescents (number may vary throughout the project, because of the mobility of the adolescents that are in the center), with criminal penalties, placed in one Reeducation Center in Romania. The indirect beneficiaries of the project are the specialists from the Center, which are working directly with the delinquent adolescents as well as the specialists from outside the Centre, which work with the delinquent adolescents. The design of the project involves the development of a *program of intervention* and of a *research*, conducted to validate the effectiveness of the intervention program and to provide a new model of intervention for enhancing the resilience of adolescent offenders.

*The Intervention program* involves a series of activities based on:

*Small group activities* - the activities organized into groups of 6-7 adolescents, assisted by two specialists in working with adolescents. The objectives of these activities are: improving the communication between adolescents and with adults, facilitating positive relationships in group, stimulating curiosity and creativity, working together, by respecting clear rules and generating socially desirable results, stimulating expression of feelings, getting a social positive recognition of oneself, facilitating socially desirable behaviors. The main workshops are: painting, pottery, theater, poetry, photography, music.

*Sports* - the teens participate in organized sports activities and competitions organized within and outside the center, at which will attend the adolescents from the Center and adolescents from outside the Center. The objectives of these activities: cooperation between adolescents and with adults, facilitating positive relationships in group, learning positive ways to compete with others, in a manner without aggressiveness and violence, foster relations with congeners and develop skills to respond appropriately to a complex social stimulation.

*Camps in the mountains were organized*, in groups of 10-12 teenagers during school holidays. The multiple objectives of these activities are largely similar to those of other activities, taking however into account the importance of organizing activities outside the center, in a more relaxed atmosphere, in a warm social and emotional climate.

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All these activities will be accompanied by *a research program* that aims to build a profile of the adolescent offenders and to provide a model of intervention which to identify the most important ways to increase resilience as a key factor of a good social integration, after the execution of the educational measure and return of these teens in the community.

## 2. Theoretical considerations

Dealing with difficult developmental tasks makes adolescence a very vulnerable period, which justify in a large extent, the fact - noted by many studies – that the age between 12 and 21 years is a difficult one, one of the major risks to which the teen is exposed being to confront the issue of violence, either as perpetrator or as victim (Bowen, E., El Komy, M & Steer, C., 2008).

Given that the mental vulnerability of the age is accompanied by risk factors, the external difficulties of successfully browsing increase in this period.

In the lives of many adolescents for which the project is made there are found numerous factors, considered in the literature, as risk factors for the development of deviant behavior during adolescence and adulthood: a. *environmental factors* - laws and norms favorable for antisocial behavior; poverty and economic deprivation; low economic opportunities; unfavorable neighborhood; low attachment relationships in the community; b. *interpersonal and social factors*: poor communication and conflict within the family; poor parent-child emotional relationships; bad practices of control and organization within the family; parental consumption of drugs and alcohol; school failure; low school commitment; rejection from the group of congeners; association with persons with antisocial tendencies; c. *individual factors*: family history of alcoholism; low control of tendencies toward impulsivity; attention deficit; hyperactivity.

Resilience is defined by Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990, p. 425) as "the process to, the capacity to, or to achieve successful adaptation, despite challenging or threatening circumstances." Resilience is understood, now, as a process rather than as a trait, is the result of the interaction between the individual and his environment, putting into action a series of processes that facilitate the well-being or protect the individual from the overwhelming action of the risk factors (Zautra , AJ Hall, JS & Murray, KE, 2010).

It appears, however, in some recent research, an important aspect, which partly justifies the approach presented in the current paper, part of the intervention program developed by the project PRYD. Such research reinforces Bowlby's emphasis on the fact that real-world experiences have a major role, and also his statement, that internal working models are open to change (Waters, Hamilton & Weinfield, 2000). Although there is a tendency toward stability of these models, research clearly demonstrates that a change may happen. For a child to overcome early traumas and disadvantages, he should have the opportunity to "re-work" his internal working models that were developed from these experiences. Daily experiences within the family and school have a big influence. The attention of those working with children and adolescents should proceed to maximize opportunities to enhance resilience through the reorganization of these internal working models (Atwool, N., 2006). Ever since, for professionals working with institutionalized delinquent adolescents is difficult to approach family factors and to correct early experiences, this vision offering hope and a beginning to build new strategies to address these adolescents.

Friends are important and it is important that they are not regarded as the major negative influences. Children help each other very much and all adults should be aware of the fact that friends and congeners are current resources / potentially for solving difficulties (Hill, 1999).

Jackson and Martin (1998) shows that one of the protective factors strongly associated with later educational success is that to have a friend who is doing well in school.

Close relationships with friends and congeners can increase the self-esteem and reduce the negative effects of abuse and adversity in the life of the adolescents (Bolger, Patterson & Kupersmidt, 1998).

Although most literature encourages the maintenance and development of friends / close relationships with congeners that are not institutionalized and without behavior problems, there are studies showing that young people develop friendships with supporting value and sometimes on long term with other children from the same institution (Horrocks and Milner in Mullender (ed.) 1999 and prune 2002) and these friendships should not be discouraged.

Adolescents belonging to an appropriate social group (school club, social organization) supported or organized by the institution to which they belong, present a lower risk of antisocial behavior (Catalano, Loeber & McKinney, 1999).

The alternative educational programs, which include individualized instruction, rewarding / valorization of positive behavior, goal-oriented activity and a small number of participants, activity in small group, are also effective in reducing crime (Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

The initiatives involving the use of community resources also support resilience: leisure opportunities, volunteer programs and well-organized extracurricular activities that (Walker et. Al., 1996). Mahoney (2000) show the fact that young people who participate in these activities, which practice hobbies and fulfill useful tasks are less likely to drop out of school and to exhibit criminal behaviors.

Individuals and groups developed in the community offer participants a positive identity, sense of belonging and of connection to community who accepts them, opportunities for success, opportunities for involvement and participation in social, cultural and sporting activities. The feelings of belonging and link, connection to group so generated are central in the development of resilience (Howard & Johnson).

### **3. Discussion and conclusion**

Starting from these theoretical and practical considerations, there was taking into consideration, in the PRYD project, organizing, among other intervention activities designed to increase resilience, other activities such as camps, carried out during school holidays. These camps were designed in the project as a mean to increase resilience by using the social factors of resilience.

To address all these issues highlighted by the various researches on this topic, summarized above, the camps were thought to be organized so as to facilitate the interaction of the teenagers from the Center with teenagers of the same age, to achieve the positive impact of pro-social congeners, who are from non-delinquent environments. It was also considered the wider use of community resources from which these delinquent adolescents are.

Among this program of intervention, it was wanted, in this way, to give the teenagers the opportunity to interact with adults who can act as positive social role models and provide permanent support for them throughout the camp.

The camps were held under the slogan "Choose Life", and the programs were organized so as to alternate different activities, maintaining throughout the program, a warm emotional climate, with real possibilities of interaction between teenagers and adults involved. The program alternated recreational sports activities, creative-educational activities and team building activities. What was intended by this structure, was the facilitating of establishing positive interpersonal relationships, the practice of social skills, fostering leadership behaviors, the practice of different positive social roles, valuing the personal contributions to the group work, taking responsibilities, participation in the development of products with social value, all conducted in a pleasant and stimulating emotional climate.

All activities had an interactive character, offering teenagers the opportunity to experience and express freely their creative potential. The workshops were alternated with the physical activities that facilitate de-escalation, the download of body pressure with personal development activities, which allowed the practice of disclosure skills, of sharing with others, to listen and be heard, of empathy with others. As part of the process of facilitating social exchanges, but also with a high educational potential and value of prevention, information activities were held daily regarding the consumption of drugs.

A series of activities were aimed at building team spirit and sense of trust in the other, the ability to physically interact and to practice body boundaries and possibly physical closeness, in a manner devoid of conflict and aggression (*human pyramid* or *football competition*). Also were concerned the ability to share with others personal life experiences, to practice confidence in the emphatic ability of others, to give and receive without fear of being judged, to understand their own context of life and the personal responsibility (*My Story*).

It was followed also the ability of the adolescents to set realistic expectations for the future and the ability to establish long-term goals, viable and optimistic (*Where I see myself in 5 years*). In general, the expectations of the adolescents from the Reeducation Center were oriented towards acquisition of personal and family stability and safety, and less to high social success, while expectations of the volunteer adolescents were directed mainly to the acquisition of high social status and social recognition.

There were also recreational activities that took into account the specific age of the participants and their need to informally interact, in a framework to enable and use humor as a resource in social exchange and personal development (Miss and Mister Contest, the campfire).

In parallel with all these activities, there was conducted and a research activity aimed at filling data within the large project. Thus, an activity of psychological assessment was carried out of the adolescents participating in the camps, both from the Reeducation Center and also the volunteer adolescents. The research conducted in the camps programs aims to obtain data to allow shaping of a psychological profile of the delinquent adolescent, by the capture of key factors, especially individual ones, of risk, but also of protective factors, research that will allow completion of the currently existing knowledge on the profile of the delinquent adolescent in Romania, but also building more effective intervention programs that take into account the psychological and social conditions of these adolescents. This part of the program will be conducted throughout the all four camps, following that the outcome of the evaluation of all adolescents who will participate in camp to allow a more complete picture of the personality dynamics of these adolescents. The psychological variables tracked in the research refers to the evaluation of emotional maturity, self-esteem, parental models and patterns of parental authority, the coping mechanisms of adolescents, the trends to not adapt and psychopathology, and also a tracking of personality dynamics by use of projective tests (Person Test, the Tree Test, Family test, Szondi Test). Providing this psychological profile of the delinquent adolescent involves the completion of all four camps and the processing and interpretation of the results for the children evaluated at the end of the course of this research.

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