

COGNITIONS OF LITHUANIAN JUVENILE OFFENDERS

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Summary. The question of juvenile crime prevention is still complicated in Lithuania as well as in other EU countries. There are many studies on “what works” in preventing criminal behavior and its recurrence. In this study we tried to explore the inner cognitive patterns of juvenile offenders that might contribute to their problematic behavior, focusing on their basic beliefs and cognitive schemas as this aspect has not been explored comprehensively yet. The study showed that in compare to secondary school students, juvenile offenders hold less favorable beliefs towards self, the world, and their relationships with other people. A strong negative reciprocity between these beliefs and early maladaptive schemas has been found.

Keywords: juvenile offenders, cognitions, schemata.

INTRODUCTION

The question of juvenile crime prevention is still complicated in Lithuania as well as in other EU countries. There are many studies on “what works” in preventing criminal behavior and its recurrence. In this study we tried to explore the inner cognitive patterns of juvenile offenders that might contribute to their problematic behavior, focusing on their basic beliefs and cognitive schemas. This aspect has not been explored comprehensively yet, although some implications have been made [1; 2]. Cognitive schemas have already been investigated in connection to depression, emotional disorders, eating disorders, and these studies showed that maladaptive behavioral reactions mostly are activated by systems of dysfunctional beliefs [2; 18].

The developmental approach suggests that development of aggressive, delinquent behavior is, on most part, influenced by unsatisfactory early experiences of individual in relation to the closest environment, that is, family members, peers, and important others. The similar model can be observed in development of dysfunctional beliefs: they are reinforced through early experiences with family members, significant others, influenced by some emotionally significant event, and in this

way through lifespan become stable cognitive structures [2; 6; 18]. Through early experiences a person develops her perception of the self, other people, and relationship with others, etc. [6]. In other words, a person works out a particular framework according to which she evaluates particular life events and chooses a particular way to react in a particular situation. This framework in Beck’s (1979) model is called “the matrix of schemas” where schemas refer to the systems of expectancies [14], or the systems of beliefs. In Beck’s model, “a schema constitutes the basis for screening out, differentiating, and coding the stimuli that confront individual” [2, p. 13]. Beck notes that schemas may be inactive for a long period of time, and then “energized by specific environmental inputs” [2, p. 13]. In other terms, schemas regulate the individuals’ behavior with respect to a changing environment [6, p. 61].

J. E. Young hypothesizes that Early Maladaptive Schemas (EMS) refer to “extremely stable and enduring themes that develop during childhood, are elaborated throughout an individual’s lifetime, and are dysfunctional to a significant degree” [18, p. 9]. Young (1999) provides the following defining characteristics of EMS:

1. Most EMS are unconditional beliefs about oneself in relation to the environment, for example,

“If I can please other people all the time, then I am worthwhile”.

2. EMS are self-perpetuating, and therefore very resistant to change.
3. EMS are dysfunctional in some significant and recurring manner, and can lead to psychological distress.
4. EMS are usually activated by events in the environment relevant to the particular schema.
5. EMS are closely tied to high levels of affect when activated.
6. EMS are the result of previous dysfunctional experiences with parents, siblings, etc.

Young and colleagues [18] have developed *Young Schema Questionnaire* and have identified several Early Maladaptive Schemas. A brief description of schemas is provided below.

Emotional deprivation (**ED**) schema refers to the belief that one’s primary emotional needs (nurturance, empathy, affection, caring) will never be met by others.

Abandonment (**AB**) schema refers to the expectation that one will soon lose anyone with whom an emotional attachment is formed.

Mistrust/Abuse (**MA**) schema refers to the expectation that others will intentionally hurt, cheat, or put one down.

Social Isolation (**SI**) schema refers to the belief that one is isolated and different from other people.

Defectiveness/Shame (**DS**) schema refers to the belief that one is internally flawed, and that, if others get close, they will realize this and withdraw from the relationship.

Failure (**FA**) schema refers to the belief that one is incapable of performing as well as others in areas such as career or education.

Dependence/Incompetence (**DI**) schema refers to the belief that one is not capable of handling day-to-day responsibilities competently and independently.

Vulnerability to Harm and Illness (**VH**) schema refers to the belief that one is always on the verge of experiencing a catastrophe (financial, medical, criminal, etc.).

Enmeshment (**EM**) schema refers to the belief that at least one of the enmeshment individuals cannot survive or be happy without the constant support of the other.

Subjugation (**SB**) schema refers to the belief that one must submit to the control of others in order to avoid negative consequences.

Self-Sacrifice (**SS**) schema refers to the belief that one must sacrifice one’s own needs in order to help others.

Emotional Inhibition (**EI**) schema refers to the belief that one must inhibit emotions and impulses, especially anger, because any expression of negative feelings would harm others or lead to abandonment.

Unrelenting Standards (**US**) schema refers to the belief that whatever one does is not good enough, that one must always strive harder.

Entitlement (**ET**) schema refers to the belief that people should be able to do, say, or have whatever they want immediately regardless of whether it hurts others or seems reasonable to them.

Insufficient Self-Control (**IS**) schema refers to the belief that any frustration in reaching goals, as well as an inability to restrain expression of impulses or feelings, is intolerable.

In Young’s (1999) model, “schemas generate behaviors” (p. 75) and “emotional experiences” [18, p. 76]. Distorted basic beliefs lead to narrowed understanding of reality, and accordingly lessen the alternatives in choosing strategy for responding to particular social stimulus [3; 4; 5].

Thus, the main purpose of this study was to compare the perception of self, the world, and the relationship with others in the groups of juvenile offenders and secondary school students. We were also interested to evaluate the basic beliefs and early maladaptive schemas in juvenile offenders’ population. Therefore, we hypothesized, that there would be significant differences in cognitions of juvenile offenders and secondary school students.

METHODS

Participants

This research examined the cognitions in the samples of juvenile offenders from custody care institutions (n=75) and secondary school students (n=92), aged 12–17 years (87 girls and 80 boys: 38 girls and 37 boys from custody care institution; 49 girls and 43 boys from secondary school).

Measures

J. Young Schema Questionnaire (1999) [18] and S. Epstein’s *Basic Beliefs Inventory* (1993) [4] were used to identify the early maladaptive schemas and basic beliefs of students. Respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with the various statements. Rating is on a 5-point Likert scale: 1= “completely untrue of me”; 2= “mostly untrue of me”; 3= “I don’t know”; 4= “mostly true of me”; 5= “describes me perfectly”.

Statistical analyses of the psychological data were performed with the statistical package SPSS.11.

Results and discussion

Results showed that in most cases juvenile offenders tend to perceive self, the world and their relationship with other people less favorably than secondary school students. However, it should be noticed that there are quite significant gender differences in favorableness of beliefs and the expression of early maladaptive schemas.

Boys do not differ in favorableness of beliefs as strongly as girls do (Table 1). For example, there are no statistically significant differences in evaluating self-directedness or perceiving world as more or less controllable, while in girls' population, juvenile offenders have significantly less favorable beliefs in all scales ($p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Mean differences in basic beliefs of juvenile offenders (j.o.) and secondary school students (s.s.s.).

Scale	Mean	Girls		t	p	Boys		t	p
		j.o.	s.s.s.			j.o.	s.s.s.		
OFB	M	42,89	54,69	-5,725	0,001	47,87	52,63	-2,594	0,011
SE	M	41,61	54,65	-6,672	0,001	48,73	52,77	-2,160	0,034
RS	M	48,16	56,08	-3,792	0,001	44,38	48,74	-2,256	0,027
BW	M	42,66	53,73	-5,200	0,001	49,05	53,16	-2,270	0,026
MW	M	43,39	52,47	-4,336	0,001	49,59	53,65	-2,105	0,039
PD	M	45,53	51,90	-2,873	0,005	49,16	52,67	-1,726	0,088
CW	M	42,42	52,12	-4,988	0,001	50,24	54,02	-1,902	0,061
OP	M	45,42	54,41	-4,116	0,001	46,57	51,65	-2,675	0,009

Abbr.: OFB – overall favorableness of beliefs; SE – self-esteem; RS – relationships; BW – benign world; MW – meaningful world; PD – personal directedness; CW – controllable world; OP – optimism.

In juvenile offenders' group gender differences can also be observed: girls tend to think about the self, the world and their relationships with others in less favorable way than boys do (Table 2).

Table 2. Gender differences in basic beliefs of juvenile offenders

Scale	Mean	Girls	Boys	t	p
OFB	M	42,89	47,84	-2,456	0,016
SE	M	41,61	48,73	-3,626	0,001
RS	M	48,16	44,38	1,734	0,088
BW	M	42,66	49,05	-3,065	0,003
MW	M	43,39	49,59	-3,072	0,003
PD	M	45,53	49,16	-1,654	0,102
CW	M	42,42	50,24	-4,107	0,001
OP	M	45,42	46,57	-0,532	0,596

Many early maladaptive schemas (EMS) were much stronger expressed in juvenile offenders. However, it can be observed stronger differences in girls' population: statistically significant mean differences were not found only in schemas of *Enmeshment* and *Unrelenting Standards*, while in boys there were no significant differences in 8 of 15 schemas. Most schemas of latter group, where strongest differences can be observed, involve the sphere of impaired performance and autonomy.

Table 4 shows that some gender differences in EMS in juvenile offenders group could also be found. It could be seen that girls have stronger expression of schemas of *Abandonment*, *Mistrust/Abuse*, *Self-Sacrifice*, and *Insufficient Self-Control*.

Table 3. Mean differences in early maladaptive schemas of juvenile offenders (j.o.) and secondary school students (s.s.s.).

Schema	Mean	Girls		t	p	Boys		t	p
		j.o.	s.s.s.			j.o.	s.s.s.		
ED	M	54,55	46,59	3,388	0,001	51,03	48,67	1,238	0,219
AB	M	57,63	48,92	4,400	0,001	47,73	46,35	0,676	0,501
MA	M	57,32	47,78	4,588	0,001	48,62	46,49	1,057	0,294
SI	M	52,97	46,57	2,737	0,001	53,59	47,84	2,837	0,006
DS	M	56,03	44,76	5,657	0,001	54,49	47,33	3,367	0,001
FA	M	52,16	46,82	2,359	0,021	53,68	48,12	2,719	0,008
DI	M	53,21	45,53	3,896	0,001	54,46	46,98	3,546	0,001
VH	M	55,66	45,31	4,989	0,001	53,08	46,60	3,293	0,001
EM	M	50,79	49,02	0,796	0,428	51,65	48,19	1,597	0,114
SB	M	54,89	45,45	4,843	0,001	52,73	48,02	2,347	0,021
SS	M	56,42	50,69	2,826	0,006	45,14	47,79	-1,288	0,203
EI	M	52,39	43,76	4,135	0,001	52,78	51,58	0,598	0,551
US	M	50,08	48,78	0,584	0,561	50,89	49,79	0,503	0,617
ET	M	53,29	48,10	2,405	0,018	52,14	47,33	2,378	0,021
IS	M	56,16	46,65	4,652	0,001	51,11	47,53	1,678	0,097

Abbr.: ED – emotional deprivation; AB – abandonment; MA – mistrust, abuse; SI – social isolation; DS – defectiveness, shame; FA – failure; DI – dependence, incompetence; VH – vulnerability to harm; EM – enmeshment; SB – subjugation; SS – self-sacrifice; EI – emotional inhibition; US – unrelenting standards; ET – entitlement; IS – insufficient self-control.

Table 4. Gender differences in EMS of juvenile offenders

Schema	Mean	Girls	Boys	t	p
ED	M	54,55	51,03	1,460	0,148
AB	M	57,63	47,73	4,919	0,001
MA	M	57,32	48,62	4,558	0,001
SI	M	52,97	53,59	-2,43	0,809
DS	M	56,03	54,49	0,622	0,536
FA	M	52,16	53,68	-0,655	0,514
DI	M	53,21	54,46	-0,576	0,566
VH	M	55,66	53,08	1,185	0,240
EM	M	50,79	51,65	-0,347	0,730
SB	M	54,89	52,73	0,948	0,347
SS	M	56,42	45,14	4,584	0,001
EI	M	52,39	52,78	-0,166	0,869
US	M	50,08	50,89	-0,314	0,754
ET	M	53,29	52,29	0,389	0,698
IS	M	56,16	51,11	2,167	0,034

Analyzing the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and basic beliefs, it could be observed that gender differences come to light here, too. Correlations between mentioned constructs in most cases are negative, though there can be found some positive ones as well. Nevertheless, most of the latter are not significant with one exception: correlation between *Relationships* scale and *Self-sacrifice* schema is significantly positive in the offenders-girls group (see Table 3).

In girls' population, strongest negative correlations were found between negative basic beliefs and emotional deprivation, social isolation, defectiveness/shame, and subjugation (Table 5), while in boys the correlations were found between basic beliefs and failure, dependency/incompetence, subjugation and defectiveness/

shame schemata (Table 6). The mentioned early maladaptive schemas negatively correlate mostly with over-

all favorableness of beliefs, self-esteem, personal directness, meaningfulness of world, and optimism.

Table 5. Correlations between basic beliefs and early maladaptive schemas in juvenile offenders (girls)

	OFB	SE	RS	BW	MW	PD	CW	OP
ED	-0,616**	-0,642**	-0,328*	-0,539**	-0,573**	-0,477**	-0,503**	-0,601**
AB	-0,309	-0,449**	0,067	-0,406*	-0,310	-0,297	-0,290	-0,325*
MA	-0,382*	-0,348*	0,016	-0,513**	-0,409*	-0,410*	-0,231	-0,298
SI	-0,527**	-0,432**	-0,267	-0,502**	-0,519**	-0,385*	-0,481**	-0,659**
DS	-0,550**	-0,496**	-0,239	-0,541**	-0,544**	-0,378*	-0,492**	-0,553**
FA	-0,357*	-0,161	-0,271	-0,317	-0,358*	-0,256	-0,371*	-0,426**
DI	-0,307	-0,266	-0,243	-0,200	-0,299	-0,193	-0,226	-0,460**
VH	-0,238	-0,416**	0,138	-0,443**	-0,198	-0,161	-0,196	-0,402*
SB	-0,600**	-0,547**	-0,347*	-0,565**	-0,533**	-0,417**	-0,586**	-0,573**
SS	-0,065	-0,251	0,370*	-0,368*	-0,079	-0,037	-0,095	-0,162
EI	-0,469**	-0,404*	-0,283	-0,392**	-0,442**	-0,366*	-0,355*	-0,428**
ET	-0,279	-0,248	0,114	-0,397*	-0,376*	-0,321*	-0,366*	-0,301
IS	-0,306	-0,377*	0,120	-0,390*	-0,399*	-0,326*	-0,431**	-0,314

* $p < 0,05$

** $p < 0,01$

Table 6. Correlations between basic beliefs and early maladaptive schemas in juvenile offenders (boys)

	OFB	SE	RS	BW	MW	PD	CW	OP
ED	-0,413*	-0,322	-0,316	-0,269	-0,417**	-0,451**	-0,267	-0,403*
AB	-0,354*	-0,240	-0,299	-0,090	-0,412*	-0,416**	-0,317	-0,311
MA	-0,481**	-0,478**	-0,222	-0,315	-0,500**	-0,444**	-0,426**	-0,494**
SI	-0,568**	-0,541**	-0,497**	-0,345*	-0,499**	-0,510**	-0,326*	-0,468**
DS	-0,608**	-0,530**	-0,362*	-0,371*	-0,635**	-0,625**	-0,439**	-0,602**
FA	-0,542**	-0,599**	-0,264	-0,316	-0,514**	-0,476**	-0,506**	-0,348*
DI	-0,484**	-0,380*	-0,269	-0,323	-0,522**	-0,632**	-0,256	-0,447**
VH	-0,471**	-0,482**	-0,303	-0,256	-0,463**	-0,461**	-0,344*	-0,383*
EM	-0,277	-0,242	-0,002	0,019	-0,464**	-0,370*	-0,468**	-0,263
SB	-0,642**	-0,617**	-0,285	-0,576**	-0,603**	-0,620**	-0,415**	-0,427**
EI	-0,475**	-0,323	-0,462**	-0,371*	-0,421**	-0,399*	-0,264	-0,376*
IS	-0,500**	-0,490**	-0,301	-0,269	-0,497**	-0,497**	-0,387*	-0,327*

* $p < 0,05$

** $p < 0,01$

The research revealed the significant interactions between cognitive variables in the sample of juvenile offenders group, and is consistent with works of many authors [7, p. 55–69], [8, p. 55–80], [9, p. 193–199], [10, p. 341–360], [11, p. 404–410], [12, p. 144–157], [13], [15, p. 21–32], [16, p. 361–387], [17].

To sum up, the present study provides some insight into the cognitions of juvenile offenders and might be helpful for the practitioners in the relevant setting.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The present study was designed to examine the cognitions of juvenile offenders. The results of the study showed that in compare to secondary school students, juvenile offenders hold less favorable beliefs towards self, the world, and their relationships with other people. Also, there is quite strong negative reciprocity between these beliefs and early maladaptive schemas.

2. The present study has revealed gender differ-

ences in cognitive patterns of juvenile offenders. Female offenders are different from male offenders in expression of early maladaptive schemas; moreover, they have less favorable beliefs than male offenders.

3. Juvenile offenders' favorableness in evaluating self, others and one's relationship with the others is more related to subjective evaluation of personal skills, abilities and achievements in boys, while in girls group the favorableness of beliefs is more related to subjective evaluation of other people.

4. Cognitive skills programs are of key importance in the relevant setting to improve the cognitions of juvenile offenders in Lithuania.

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LIETUVOS NEPILNAMEČIŲ TEISĖS PAŽEIDĖJŲ KOGNICIJOS

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S a n t r a u k a

Pastarųjų metų statistikos duomenys rodo nepilnamečių nusikalstamumo didėjimo tendencijas. Prevencinis ir interven-

cinis darbas, susijęs su nepilnamečių nusikalstamumu, tampa vis aktualesnis. Autoriai, nagrinėjantys prevencinių programų efektyvumą (C. Hollin, D. Andrews, G. Patterson, A. Kazdin, T. Dishion ir kt.), teigia, kad vien aplinkos sąlygų keitimas, jų kontroliavimas, bausmių griežtinimas nėra tinkamiausios poveikio priemonės nusikalstamumui mažinti. Individualaus darbo su teisės pažeidėju pabrėžimas prevenciniame darbe remiasi prielaida, kad šie asmenys pasižymi tam tikrais kognityviniais (pažinimo) ypatumais. K. Dodge'o, L. Berkowitzo ir kitų autorių atlikti agresyvių vaikų ir paauglių socialinio pažinimo ir funkcionavimo tyrimai parodė, kad agresyvūs vaikai netinkamai apdoroja gaunamą socialinę informaciją, jiems trūksta socialinių problemų bei konfliktų sprendimo įgūdžių (K. Rubin, L. Bream, L. Rose-Krasnor). Informacijos apdorojimo tendencijos, kaip rodo tyrimų duomenys, labai priklauso nuo ankstesnės patirties, kurios pagrindu formuojasi tokie psichologiniai kintamieji kaip įsitikinimai, nuostatos, vertybinė sistema ir pan. Tokiu atveju svarbiu prevencinio darbo su teisės pažeidėjais aspektu tampa būtent darbas su šiais informacijos apdorojimo veiksniais; juos veikiant įvairiose stadijose, būtų galima tikėtis nuteistųjų elgesio pokyčių.

Bet kokio prevencinio darbo tikslų, darbo metodų pasirinkimas turi būti paremtas empiriniais tyrimais. Asocialių asmenų socialinio informacijos apdorojimo tyrimuose vis dar yra nemažai neaiškumų. Nors jau įrodyta, kad agresyvūs vaikai linkę aplinkiniams priskirti priešiškus ketinimus savęs atžvilgiu dėl netinkamo informacijos apdorojimo, nėra pakankamai duomenų apie tai, kokie kognityviniai modeliai ir kaip prisideda prie asocialaus elgesio pasireiškimo, koks šių kognityvinių modelių turinys, t. y. kas per juos projektuojama į aplinką, kokios socializacijos patirtys galėjo turėti įtakos vienoikių arba kitokių kognityvinių modelių susiformavimui. Nemažai šiais klausimais nuveikta tiriant depresyvius asmenis (A. Ellis, A. Beck, J. Young), tačiau yra gana mažai tyrimų, nagrinėjančių asocialių, teisę pažeidžiančių asmenų kognityvinius modelius, jų veikimo ypatumus. Tokie tyrimai galėtų išryškinti problemines nepilnamečių teisės pažeidėjų socialinio bei kognityvinio funkcionavimo sritis, kurių pagrindu būtų galima nubrėžti aiškesnes individualaus darbo su šiais asmenimis gaires.

Šio straipsnio tikslas – patyrinėti nepilnamečių teisės pažeidėjų kognityvinius modelius, t. y. pagrindinius jų įsitikinimus, atspindinčius pagrindines bazines kognityvines schemas, disfunkcines kognityvines schemas, kuriomis jie vadovaujasi. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami svarbiausi nepilnamečių teisės pažeidėjų kognityviniai (pažinimo) elementai, t. y. įsitikinimai savęs, pasaulio ir santykio su pasauliu atžvilgiu. Tyrimų šioje srityje atlikta labai mažai, todėl tyrimo objektas pasirinktas remiantis įvairių autorių darbais, rodančiais, kad nusikalstamas elgesys gali būti pastiprinamas tokių kognityvinių konstrukčių kaip nuostatos tam tikrų asmenų arba reiškinių atžvilgiu, vertybinės orientacijos ir pan. Pastarųjų pagrindą sudaro šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjami kognityviniai elementai.

Tiriamajai grupei pasirinkti 75 specialiųjų vaikų auklėjimo ir globos namų auklėtiniai, o kontrolinę grupę sudarė 92 moksleiviai iš vidurinės mokyklos. Jiems buvo duodami pildyti du klausimynai, kurių teiginiai atspindi pagrindinius įsitikinimus bei neadaptyvias schemas. Gauti rezultatai rodo, kad nepilnamečiai teisės pažeidėjai blogiau galvoja apie save, aplinkinius ir savo santykį su jais. Taip pat matyti, kad pasireiškia gana stipriai išreikštos neadaptyvios įsitikinimų schemas, kurios, matyt, sudaro prielaidas atsirasti neigiamiems nepilnamečio teisės pažeidėjo socializacijos aspektams.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: nepilnamečiai teisės pažeidėjai, kognicijos, schemas.