

Introductory Thoughts – The Role of Communication in the World Related to the Children

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this short introductory chapter is to highlight, through a few examples, the key importance of communication in the social integration and socialisation process of young people, and their subsequent turning into perpetrators or victims – before moving on to topics that are discussed in greater depth in succeeding chapters of the book. The individual factors in this complex system of relationships influence each other both directly and indirectly.

At the same time, the level of children's communication skills – or their impairment or lack thereof – in itself influences the extent to which and the success with which they will be able to exercise their guaranteed children's rights.

KEYWORDS

communication, developmental language disorder, DLD, criminological aspects, child and youth crime

Although the attention of professionals to the specificities and changes in the communication skills of minors has increased, especially since the emergence of the iGeneration, several studies have been conducted in the last decade focusing on the text comprehension, language, etc. skills of minors in moral danger zones or otherwise coming to the attention of the authorities (e.g. minor in child protective care). The results thus obtained define¹ the communication characteristics of young people as an 'invisible disability', questioning whether criminal justice that ignores these facts can even comply with basic principles such as the principle of a fair trial? To what extent does this practice violate the rights of children as enshrined in the New York Convention?

It is undeniable that even in developed European or EU Member States such as England and the Netherlands, there is a very high rate of language deprivation among juvenile offenders (73.3% in England and 90% in the Netherlands), not only in terms

1 Csemáné Váradi, 2019, pp. 108–117.

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of reading, speaking and reading comprehension difficulties, but also in terms of limited vocabulary and limited self-expression and conversation skills.

The visibility and impact of communication impairments, which are already over-represented in the prevalence of communication impairments, are further increased by psychological characteristics of the indicated group of persons, such as low empathic ability, difficulties in recognising and expressing emotions². The criminologically relevant effects of these brain function attributes are exacerbated by the fact that the prefrontal cortex, which is the brain region with declining activity in adolescence, is the very region responsible for the development of internal inhibition of inappropriate behaviour. Nonetheless, there are equally neurological reasons for the lower level of empathic abilities that are common in this age group³.

However, even with this general prevalence, a group of juvenile offenders can be depicted by a truly “callous-unemotional” (CU) behaviour⁴. They are characterised by “a lack of remorse and empathy, uncaring behaviour and an inability to express emotion”. Although the objectives and means of crime prevention are specific, the degree of proportionality in the criminal justice response is different, and the lack of information and knowledge of justice professionals often leads to confusion between the two groups, which has a significant impact on the quality of the formal process (e.g. use of coercive measures).

In fact, while the occurrence of developmental language disorder (DLD) is 7% in total childhood population, it is several times higher (depending on the target group) among offenders under 18.

The figures are also ‘shocking’ in reverse: the re-offending rate in the DLD group within one year of the first court order is 62%(!), compared to the 25% for minors with no such problem. Moreover, other risk factors could also play a role in becoming a criminal, such as the level of cognitive ability, age at first offence, previous criminal activity (number of offences), degree of deprivation (2.61 adjusted risk ratio). This is partly due to the specific nature of the language disorder, which arises in different domains of language acquisition and use, is persistent and is associated with speech understanding and/or production disorders. On the other hand, it is generally associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or dyslexia. Recognising the former (e.g. at school) is a major difficulty in any case, while the latter “symptoms” for the given kindergarten teacher or school teacher are confused with inappropriate (irregular, disruptive) behaviour, with presumed school adjustment disorder⁵. (In the case of DLD, even from a medical point of view, this is difficult to predict/confirm,

2 The specificities of their socialization, especially the characteristics of the world created by information and communication technologies, have an important impact on the subjective well-being of iGeneration minors. See more about this e.g.: Váradi-Csema, 2021, pp. 95–112; Váradi-Csema, 2020, pp. 405–420; Váradi-Csema, 2025, pp. 53–73.

3 See in more detail: Csemáné Váradi, 2013, pp. 5–42.

4 Howard et al., 2012, p. 1237.

5 Winstanley, Webb and Conti-Ramsden, 2021, pp. 396–403.

because currently no “biomarker” is available that could be used to clearly detect its existence.)

Communication disability based on the presence of a language development (language development) disorder, confused with CU group membership - may lead to more severe actions, such as arrests, and predictably imprisonment (given the sentencing circumstances), together with a presumably more severe sentence. This is a risk factor that increases the probability of re-offending - i.e. the circle is closed, the fate of the young person seems to be determined.

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