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The School Deviance, a Risk Factor in Juvenile Delinquency? A Sociological Approach

Dennis-Theodor PÎRJU¹

Abstract

In this article we will carry out a brief analysis of the scientific connections between “school deviance” and “juvenile delinquency” phenomena. To illustrate this correlation between the two phenomena, we will begin by presenting and analyzing the writings of the great pioneers and representatives who have left their mark in deviance sociology and subsequently in delinquency sociology branch. We will continue by reviewing the notions of conformity and nonconformity in the generation of the actions deemed as deviant in the social environment, so as to identify the specific correlations between social deviance and juvenile delinquency. In the research hypothesis highlighted in this article, we consider that school deviance is a major risk factor in the etiology of juvenile delinquency, these phenomena being considered by many specialists in various fields as diseases which shall determine a range of repercussions on the psychosocial and educative trajectory among young people in the contemporary society.

Keywords: social deviance, school deviance, risk factors, juvenile delinquency.

Résumé

Dans cet article, nous allons réaliser une analyse succincte sur la connexion scientifique entre les phénomènes «déviance scolaire» et «délinquance juvénile». Pour illustrer cette corrélation entre les deux phénomènes, nous commencerons par présenter et analyser les écritures des grands pionniers et représentants qui ont laissé leur empreinte dans la branche de la sociologie de la déviance et ultérieurement, dans la sociologie de la délinquance. Nous allons continuer en passant en revue les notions de conformisme et de non-conformisme dans la production des actions considérées comme déviantes dans l'espace social, afin d'identifier ultérieurement les corrélations spécifiques entre la déviance scolaire et la délinquance juvénile. Dans l'hypothèse de recherche présentée dans cet article, nous considérons que la déviance scolaire constitue un facteur de risque majeur dans l'étiologie de la délinquance juvénile, ces phénomènes étant considérées par de nombreux spécialistes des domaines divers, comme maladies que vont

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déterminer une série de répercussions sur la trajectoire psycho-socio-éducative des jeunes de la société contemporaine.

Mots-clés: déviance sociale, déviance scolaire, facteurs de risque, délinquance juvénile.

Rezumat

În articolul de față vom realiza o scurtă analiză asupra conexiunii științifice dintre fenomenele „devianța școlară” și „delincvența juvenilă”. Pentru a exemplifica această corelație dintre cele două fenomene, vom începe prin a prezenta și analiza scrierile marilor pioneri și reprezentanți care și-au lăsat amprenta în ramura sociologiei devianței și ulterior, în sociologia delincvenței. În continuare, vom trece în revistă noțiunile de conformism și nonconformism în producerea actelor considerate deviante în spațiul social, pentru ca ulterior, să identificăm corelațiile specifice dintre devianța școlară și delincvența juvenilă. În ipoteza de cercetare avansată în prezentul articol considerăm că devianța școlară reprezintă un factor de risc major în etiologia delincvenței juvenile, aceste fenomene fiind considerate de numeroși specialiști din variate domenii, maladii care vor determina o serie de repercusiuni asupra traiectoriei psiho-socio-educative în rândul tinerilor din societatea contemporană.

Cuvinte-cheie: devianță socială, devianță școlară, factori de risc, delincvență juvenilă.

Introduction

Deviance has been and is one of the most important phenomena characterizing the interpersonal relationships in the distant past of the society up to the contemporary period. Deviance issue has been analyzed and researched by a lot of elite authors and researchers belonging to sciences such as sociology, psychology, biology, law or medicine. The subject of the abovementioned sciences was the circumstances (social, psychological, legal, hereditary etc) in which the deviant action is carried out, expressed by *homo sapiens* in the societal environment.

During the analysis of the interdisciplinary perspective regarding the “deviance” notion, it would be necessary to focus inclusively on the study object specific to sociology. As such, sociology is the science concerned among others with the study and analysis of the relationships and processes underlying the human behaviours and conducts in society. As a result of the numerous theories and definitions issued by the great sociologists who have shaped the psychosocial orientation within the modern criminology regarding the issue of deviance, the science on the social aspects has left an impact on the understanding, definition and explanation of the actions considered as violations of the norms and values in a human collectivity.

In the view of the researcher Virgil Dragomirescu, “some sociological research seeks to analyze the socio-cultural causes of the maladjustment phenomenon, translated into deviant behavior ... The sociologist focuses on the interpretation of the deviant behavior, on the analysis of certain social groups,

where a category specific to deviance can be identified” (Dragomirescu 1976, 5-6). In this respect, we can consider that the sociologist is the observer of the social life, by silently analyzing the manifestations, behaviors and conducts of the actors on the social scene. If we consider social deviance as a violation of the generally accepted social rules, the specialty authors etymologically define “delinquency” as deriving from the word *delinquere*, which means “to be at fault, to mistake” (Păunescu *apud* Ibiş 2010, 5). Focusing on the study and research of conduct deviances of the young people in the social environment, the sociologists Banciu and Rădulescu (2002), define juvenile delinquency phenomenon as being “all the behaviors of the minors and young people who are in conflict with the social coexistence norms accepted and recognized in a society” (Banciu and Rădulescu 2002, 7).

Keeping the same explanatory line, Mitrofan and collaborators highlight the fact that juvenile delinquency means “all deviations and violations of the social rules, legally sanctioned, committed by minors” (Mitrofan, Zdrenghia and Butoi 1992, 267). Therefore, by analyzing the two previously mentioned definitions, we can state that juvenile delinquency phenomenon consists in the infringements and deviations from the social values and the legal rules, including the criminal law, of the minors who are more than 14 years old and of the young people who are under the legal age of 18. These negative behaviors and conducts shall be sanctioned at community level according to the socio-legal rules which focus on the sanctions and educative measures (Sandu 2017).

1. Lawlessness and deviance – historical benchmarks

The first interpretation of the concept of lawlessness, which has had a significant impact in the scientific world, was issued by the Italian criminologist Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794). Founder of the Classical School of Criminology, Beccaria appealed to a moralistic interpretation of the lawlessness conducts in the social environment. According to him, “the actions of the individuals are not predetermined, but they impose the moral responsibility, namely choosing between good and evil” (Beccaria *apud* Palaghia 2016, 7). The definition given by the Italian criminologist has certain connotations towards the theological model of interpretation of the human deviance. Theology is the old science which has specifically valorized the notions of “good” and “evil”. According to the monotheistic Christian theology, the good is represented by God, and the evil by Lucifer the fallen angel. In other words, the deviance in the context of the XVIII-th century was described by Beccaria as being a moral choice of the mortals between light and dark.

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), considered as the founder of sociology as a science at university level, has illustrated lawlessness as being a consequence of the development of the societies from the traditionalist model towards the modernist one. In the opinion of the mentor of the French School of Sociology, the development of the societies and labor division have caused the separation of values and the loss of the community spirit among

population. The impairments at societal level, presented by Durkheim, have caused on their turn a range of disruptive manifestations and conducts in the society; “lawlessness appears as a normal condition related to the development stage of the modern society and abnormal related to the need of making from the social division of labor a factor of cohesion and social solidarity” (Durkheim *apud* Turliuc 2007, 129).

Around the same period, the French philosopher Jean Marie-Guyau (1885) considered that lawlessness was caused by the “absence of certain fixed rules” from the part of the State authorities in the respective period. By analyzing the present, Thorsten Sellin concludes that power and control in most of the contemporary societies are exercised by the State and by its subordinated institutions. This was the idea from which the Swedish sociologist started in defining deviance. In his opinion, deviance phenomenon must be considered as being “all the behaviors against the rules of conduct or the institutional order” (Sellin *apud* Dragomirescu 1976, 31). We can notice that in the past century too, a person was considered as being deviant when his behavior was out of the range of expectations of the other social actors or of the institutional order imposed by the State authorities in the respective period.

The famous American sociologist Robert K. Merton (1910-2003), considered as the founder of modern sociology, “has continued Durkheim’s ideas, according to whom deviance results from the social organization, seeking to discover the other processes involved in the production of deviance” (Turliuc 2007, 132). Merton tried to identify lawlessness to a situation where the individual does not find the possibilities to achieve a certain objective, imposed by social and cultural rules, as meaning that the ratio between purpose and means can determine deviant behaviors, in a society which encourages “success as a symbol of the social progress” (Palaghia 2016, 8-9). As a consequence, deviance could be identified by looking at different types of deviations from the social rules and values. Therefore, Merton defines deviance as being a “normal reaction of some normal people placed in abnormal conditions” (Merton *apud* Palaghia 2012, 6). In a broad sense, deviance means deviation, deflection from a certain set of social rules, being defined as a type of conduct (attitudes and behaviors) which are in opposition to the conventional or conformist rules and values and therefore from the “coexistence rules and the life imperatives of a collective form of life” (Merton *apud* Palaghia 2012, 6).

Another pertinent interpretation of the deviance comes from the Canadian criminologist Maurice Cusson. According to his statements, deviance is defined as being “all the conducts and moods that the members of a group judge as inconsistent with their expectations, rules or values and which, as a consequence, risk attracting from their part reprobation and sanctions” (Maurice Cusson *apud* Boudon 1997, 440). The clash between rules and values has been the basis of the interpretation and understanding of the context in which undesirable conducts occurred in the modern societies. Hence, he concluded that a certain behavior for certain individuals can be considered as negative, respectively deviant, and for

the others positive. Moreover, a behavior which is considered as negative and blamed by some of the society members can be tolerated by the group to which the deviant person belongs, simply by the fact that the author of the undesirable action shares the same values and rules which underlie the functioning of the respective group.

On the Romanian academic stage, the deviance phenomenon has also been analyzed by the pedagogue Ioan Străchinaru. In his conception, “behavioral deviations are characterized by reversibility and include an extremely wide range of manifestations, from anorexia, onychophagia, phobias up to acts of vandalism” (Străchinaru 1969, 174).

2. Conformity and nonconformity in the deviant action

Maria Nicoleta Turliuc starts from the idea that a certain “conformist behavior of the members of a society is dictated by the origin culture, which shapes a «society» (basic personality), as a common psycho-socio-cultural element” (Turliuc 2007). The author continues her idea regarding individuals’ conformism in the social environment, by mentioning that as a consequence of the “socialization process, the individual manifests the tendency to adhere to the rules and values of the group, transforming them into a standard of his own behavior” (Turliuc 2007); on the other hand, “the society evaluates the individuals according to this standard, expecting them to behave in predictable manners, in compliance with the cultural-normative model, with legitimate action types” (Turliuc 2007, 21).

Carmen Palaghia thinks that the social rules exercise on any individual a “pressure” or a “constraint” that determines him to comply with the customs, ways of life and legal rules, specific to the group to which he belongs. The researcher defines the social rule as being “an ideal conduct guide, the benchmark according to which people adjust their conduct or actions” (Palaghia 2016, 10).

A captivating perspective regarding the conformist and nonconformist behavior of the individuals is offered to us by the French sociologist Raymond Boudon and his collaborators. They consider that “rule observance has been considered first of all as a submission to the laws, with reference to the social authority required in the legal standard” (Boudon *et al.* 1996, 190). However, even though the functioning of the normative system is ensured by the ratio between “positive sanctions and the fear of negative sanctions”, during the socialization process the individual is influenced by the “ways of life from a certain period”, which explains the opposition and dynamics between the actions which are allowed and those which are forbidden (Boudon *et al.* 1996, 190).

3. School deviance and juvenile delinquency

Cristina Neamțu, the author of the book *Devianța Școlară. Ghid de intervenție în cazul problemelor de comportament ale elevilor* (2003), mentions that in the specialty literature there is no definition of the term “school deviance”, as it

is extremely rarely used and associated with other concepts such as: *juvenile delinquency, violence, aggression, bullying* etc. Moreover, the researcher brings to our attention some hypotheses, in order to explain this surprising situation (Neamțu, 2003, 26):

a. Complexity of the “school deviance” phenomenon, which can discourage the researchers willing to define and analyze it;

b. The evolution of the “school deviance” phenomenon at the same time with the social rules and values, with the significance given by the individuals to this normativity, as meaning that: there is a historical relativity of the moral judgment on the particular forms of behavior in children; what used to be considered as an inadequate behavior in the inter-war educational context is now interpreted as a form of free self-expression; if in the '50s education was carried out by promoting as basic values obedience, conformity, unconditional recognition of adult's authority, at the end of the XX-th century, the values proposed by the education concern responsibility, creativity, autonomy etc.

c. Recognition of the “school deviance” phenomenon since the '90s as being a priority problem of education at global level, within the World Conference of the UNESCO from Jomtien, Thailand”.

As in the specialty literature there is no clear definition of the term of school deviance, the same author takes responsibility to define the concept and highlights that “by school deviance we shall designate, generally speaking, all behaviors that violate or transgress the school rules and values” (Neamțu 2003, 26).

Starting from this point of view, certain specialty authors consider that delinquency refers to a type of conduct that violates the law, seen as all the normative rules, prescribed and enforced by the State and political authority (Sandu 2008b). In particular, juvenile delinquency also includes those antisocial behaviors and actions which are outside the scope of the violation of the criminal law and which are committed by persons who are underage, namely 18 years old in Romania (Banciu 1999).

According to certain data provided by the Superior Council of the Magistracy, over the period from 2011 to 2015, “over the last five years, in Romania, *more than 20,000 minors have been sued*, almost 15,000 of them being convicted. The new Criminal Code (entered into force in 2014), which reduced the sanctions for most of the crimes and eliminated the imprisonment punishment for minors, has generated a decrease by 1,000 of the number of children sued, without entailing a decrease of the number of crimes committed by minors. Over the last two years, there has been evidence of a number of almost 800 children sentenced to custodial educative measures, in places designated for them (<http://www.contributors.ro/administratie/justitieordine-publica/statistici-2011-2015-ep-1-delinventa-juvenila>, accessed on 26.03.2019).

The same source shows that every day five minors are sued for theft and two for robbery. Every day, a minor who commits violence or a simple or serious injury reaches before the court. Every three days, a minor is brought before the judge for having committed a sexual intercourse regarding another minor or for

having committed a rape. It should be noted that the number of rapes committed by the minors who were sued has doubled as compared to 5 years ago. Moreover, a minor is brought before the judge every three days for having murdered another person, in most cases intentionally, only 10% of the murders being committed as manslaughter” (<http://www.contributors.ro/administratie/justitieordine-publica/statistici-2011-2015-ep-1-delinventa-juvenila>, accessed on March 26th, 2019).

Table no. 1. *Statistics of the Superior Council of the Magistracy regarding the delinquency phenomenon in Romania over the period from 2011 to 2015*

(<http://www.contributors.ro/administratie/justitieordine-publica/statistici-2011-2015-ep-1-delinventa-juvenila>, accessed on March 26th, 2019)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
No. of minor victims in the files completed by convictions	2641	4327	4482	3733	4229
<i>Total no. of files with minor victims</i>	1756	2803	2835	2379	2405
<i>of which:</i>					
Murders	96	141	130	123	100
Manslaughter	209	312	324	234	205
Violence causing death	15	21	19	13	14
Rapes	148	242	319	236	193
Sexual intercourse with minors	97	186	217	112	157
Violence and injury, intentionally or on ground of guilt	184	278	299	196	196
Deprivation of liberty	13	21	24	22	21
Trafficking in minors	178	325	286	359	261
Child pornography	12	14	24	47	76
Family abandons	376	516	553	495	556
Thefts	134	161	154	118	124
Robberies	147	258	226	155	156

In the specialty studies and literature, the school deviance phenomenon is associated with students’ behavioral disorders, indiscipline and delinquency. Juvenile delinquency includes various behaviours, such as confronting their parents, running from home, thefts, but also armed robbery or homicide. Juvenile delinquency takes place most of the time in various public places, on the streets, in stores, on stadiums, in our situation in the educational institutions (Palaghia 2012, 129).

In the context of the connections between school deviance and juvenile delinquency, the sociologist Vasile Miftode from Iasi initiated from the perspective of the sociology of the vulnerable peoples a range of research that show us the manifestation of the deviant-delinquent actions that we can meet in the school environment, namely (Miftode, 2003a, 104):

1. verbal violence (against schoolmates and teachers);
2. violence through physical aggression, “with melee weapons” (knives, tear gas bombs, cutters etc); aggressions with firearms;
3. degradation of the school goods (buildings, electronic devices, books etc); assault on the school units by the young burglars; strikes of the teachers who require strong measures and designation as sensitive units of the schools with such problems or declaration of the respective units as educational priority areas (EPA);
4. school delinquency as extension of the social delinquency, in general;
5. school-ghetto (through the proliferation of certain dysfunctional phenomena from the family area to the school area: domestic violence, child abuse etc);
6. absenteeism and even school leaving as means and “strategy” of promoting delinquency, phenomena which could be avoided or even restricted if parents and school exercised a systematic control on children’s leisure activities.

By identifying a correlation between school deviance and the delinquent behavior among minors, Mihaela Rădoi considers that many delinquent minors have a negative attitude towards school, starting from the hypothesis that “among the young people with behavioral irregularities, the lower the instruction degree the higher the risk to be involved in delinquent activities” (Rădoi 2011, 158).

The ratio between the education degree and the delinquent behavior manifested by students in the school environment is presented to us by Mihaela Rădoi in the table below:

Education degree	Offence	Repeated offence
Illiterate	13%	9.9%
Rudimentary education	48%	43%
Primary education	30%	20%
Secondary school education	6%	4%
Upper secondary vocational education	2%	16%
University education	2%	2.00%

The same author thinks that the failure to adapt to the school environment incurs an alarming rate of antisocial attitudes that manifest in a delinquent manner. However, “not any student with poor results is a potential delinquent”, as shown by the teachers as fine observers who “sound an alarm” regarding students’ disposition to delinquency (Rădoi 2011, 159).

By analyzing these deviance forms manifested by students in the school units as compared to the antisocial actions manifested by the young people in the societal environment, we can state that juvenile delinquency is an extreme manifestation of school deviance. Moreover, these delinquent behaviors of the students in the educational environment are closely related to the remarks of the American psychologist Thomas Cordon (1981), who considers that students often

resort to certain defense mechanisms when they face a range of experiences or feelings which give an affective hue to school situations.

Table no. 2. *Defense mechanisms used by students*

Feelings	Defense mechanisms
rancor, anger, hostility	revolt, resistance, lack of confidence
frustration	revenge (“an eye for an eye” principle)
hate, indisposition	lie, deception, dissimulation
discomfort, awkwardness	blaming others, calumny, gossip
shame, humiliation	fraud, plagiarism, copy
fear, anxiety	threat, intimidation, brag
sadness, melancholy	desire to win everything, rejection
helplessness, apathy	obedience, conformation
toughness, unyieldingness	courting the adult, “toady”
emulation, rivalry	risk refusal, ensuring the recognition chances before acting

Source: (Gordon 1981 *apud* Neamtu 2003, 178)

In the paper *Psihosociologia Comportamentului Deviant* (2007), the author Maria Nicoleta Turliuc considers that school deviance is often plaited with juvenile delinquency, the positive correlations between these two variables being so strong that they can hardly be dissociated. In the school environment, the young delinquents are undisciplined, agitated and they have the tendency to cheat, being often expelled from the classroom or from school (Turliuc 2007, 71).

By analyzing the current social context, we can say that “juvenile delinquency phenomenon is favored by processes taking place at macro social level, such as (Palaghia 2012, 8): development of the urban areas; massive population movements; multiplication of the economic difficulties; economic instability; unemployment; inflation; diversification of the acculturation processes; appearance of certain subcultures; dissolution of the traditional community control; increase of the social permissiveness and tolerance; decay of the traditional habits and ways of life; the authority crisis etc.

Cristina Neamtu considers, on her turn, that “school variables appear to play prominent roles in the orientation of the individual towards a delinquent career in all the famous sociological theories of deviance and education, as follows:

- a) social tension theory shows that school infantilize students, reduces their objectives and ignores their dreams;
- b) social control theory alleges the lack of commitment or involvement of the school in solving students’ existential problems and in value internalization;
- c) social conflict theory proves that the educational system is specially designed so as to provide a qualitatively inferior education to the poor students or to those from disadvantaged environments, with regard to culture and race;

- d) labeling theory analyzes the effect of the negative stigmatizations determined by school failure at the level of students' personality and behavior; the phenomenological constructivism, addressing education role in the social construction of the world, proves the manner in which school has the power to build a social identity, postulating that some students are excellent, while others are irrecoverable for a certain social role-status;
- e) social reproduction theory identified the educational differentiation mechanisms, showing that school not only reproduces the social inequities which are observable in the adult world, but also creates them by means of the curricular choices and of the evaluation practices (Neamțu 2003, 40).

The same author also notes that all the aforementioned theories highlight a certain "delinquent potential of the school, the school environment being rated as having the higher number of aggression indexes as compared to other institutional environments" (Fattah *apud* Neamțu 2003, 40). We can say, on the one hand, that the school institution fights against the dysfunctions originating from the social and family environment, and, on the other hand, if we analyze the statistics with students committing actions sanctioned by the criminal law, school deviance can be the antechamber of juvenile delinquency and an extension of the social deviance.

Referring to the causal link between the two social phenomena, there appears the question: *Which is the itinerary covered by a student until he reaches to a delinquent career?* If a student commits a deviant action in the school environment, that particular behavior can transform into an offence, then into a crime, which is not agreed and, subsequently, he will be punished and corrected by the social control agents: school, family, police, justice, but also by the members of the society. In this respect, the specialty authors highlight the need for certain preventive policies at community level and even for "social reaction models" (Sandu 2017) adequate to the manifestation of the deviant-delinquent phenomenon.

In the following example, we will present a possible model which illustrates the itinerary of a student towards a delinquent career:

- *the pre-deviant behavior* of the student in the family environment (lack of sincerity, revolt against parents, appropriation of certain objects belonging to the parents or to other family members, lack of interest for the homework, absence from home during the night, running from home, etc), all these being accentuated by "family violence" as a "risk factor in juvenile delinquency" (Sandu 2008a);
- *the verbal violence* manifested by a student against his classmates and teachers can cause in the future negative behaviors or physical violence or vandalism actions at school, these antisocial behaviors falling most of the time under the criminal law;

- *running from school* (truancy) can predict school absenteeism and finally, school abandon (leaving school early, without obtaining a diploma or a qualification); in the future, this young person will manifest a low self-esteem and will be marginalized by the rest of the society, afterwards, because of the lack of occupation or of a job, caused by his weak professional training, he risks to adhere to a neighbor gang, starting a delinquent career;
- *harassment or nickname* of a student in the school environment by the other classmates can favor the transformation of the victim into aggressor, while the victim will conceive the aggressive behavior as being absolutely normal in the educational environment; moreover, this ritual of victim-aggressor transition or slide can modify the psycho-social-educational path of the student and, subsequently, can worsen the negative behavior in the social environment, which incurs the legal punishment;
- a simple penetration in the virtual environment can transform the student into a victim of *cyber-bullying* (harassment on the Internet), which has a devastating impact on young students' thinking, growth and development; in certain cases, the victims even commit suicide, for instance, in the Blue Whale game, which killed dozens of young people in Romania, Republic of Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, the creator of the homicidal game, Filipp Budeikin (21 years old) being a former student with deviant manifestations, who was arrested and then convicted by the Russian magistrates for his crimes;
- the *consumption of prohibited substances* (drug addiction) can determine from illicit consumption and dependence to drug trafficking, crimes that are severely punished by the criminal law in force.

4. Conclusion

Taking into consideration the abovementioned aspects, starting from the historical benchmarks of deviance, polished over the years by the theories and ideas of certain notable representatives of sociology, and, subsequently reaching to defining and explaining school deviance and juvenile delinquency, we can establish that school deviance and juvenile delinquency are considered by theoreticians and practitioners as related phenomena. This connection between the two social diseases is due to the incidence of the school deviance cases in the contemporary society, which, have subsequently degenerated into delinquent behaviors and conducts, sanctioned or not by the social control agents (family, school, justice, public order bodies, media etc), but also by the members of the civil society, according to the social prevention principle which underlies the institutionalized reaction strategies and programs (Sandu 2008b, 2017).

Finally, school deviance and juvenile delinquency are two global phenomena which must be seriously treated by many categories of specialists (teacher, school counselor, social worker, psychologist, lawyer, policeman,

doctor). They come from various fields such as education, social assistance, psychology, pedagogy, justice, medicine and have the competence - role to prevent and intervene in the deviance cases manifested by the young people in the school, family, community or societal environment.

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