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Analysis of the Effectiveness of Prevention Programmes Aimed at Eradicating Juvenile Delinquency in Slovakia: Comparative Study of Different Approaches within Criminological and Pedagogical Methods

Abstract

Crime prevention among students of secondary vocational schools is a key challenge for the education system in Slovakia. This paper focuses on analysing the effectiveness of various prevention programmes that have been implemented to reduce juvenile delinquency in these schools. The comparative study focuses on the effectiveness of different approaches using both criminological and pedagogical methods. The effort is to identify which programmes and strategies are the most successful and can serve as models for other schools and institutions. Research is based on data obtained from police statistics, questionnaire surveys, and expert analyses, which allows deep insight into the issue and contributes to a better understanding and solution of juvenile delinquency in the secondary school environment.

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1 | Introduction

School and its environment play a fundamental role in a child's development, influencing its physical and mental growth, as well as its knowledge and character traits. After the family, the school is the second most important educational factor. As Shakuntala Devi, known for her mathematical prowess, once said:

Education is not just about going to school and getting a degree. It is about expanding your knowledge and accepting life's truths^[1].

This quote underscores the importance of school not only as a place to acquire academic knowledge, but also for the development of moral values and social skills, which are key to the future life of each child. Therefore, the school environment is responsible for creating a safe and supportive space where pupils can develop their skills and learn appropriate social norms. Interpersonal relationships, building positive moral competences, a sense of justice, mutual respect and tolerance, as well as a sense of security, are key aspects of this process.

Negative human behaviour is complex and multifaceted, making it difficult to fully eliminate it. Everyday school life can involve a variety of negative phenomena, from bullying to more serious delinquency. Therefore, it is necessary to develop effective tools for prevention. Prevention programmes must be continuously updated and adapted to changing needs and circumstances. It is important that these programmes are not only focused on academic aspects, but also on the moral and social development of pupils. The goal is to ensure that future secondary school graduates are not only well educated, but also morally strong individuals who can integrate into work and social life without problems.

¹ Shakuntala Devi, *Book of numbers* (Orient Paperbacks, 2006).

Given the statistics on crime in Slovakia^[2], it is obvious that it is necessary to raise the level and update the preventive measures in secondary vocational schools. Therefore, this article focusses on the prevention of criminal acts, while the secondary vocational school itself should play a key role as an educational institution. Implementing effective prevention programmes is essential to creating a safe and supportive school environment that will allow pupils to reach their full potential and become valued members of society.

2 | Literature Review

Delinquency among secondary vocational school pupils represents a significant problem that affects not only the pupils themselves, but also the school environment and the wider community. This is evidenced by the number of professional book outputs devoted to the given topic in Czechia and Slovakia, when these publications focus on the various strategies that Slovakia and Czechia use to prevent juvenile delinquency, mention specific projects and initiatives that have been introduced in schools and communities, and evaluate their effectiveness. Equally important is the identification of social and economic factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency^[3]. These publications primarily examine the influence of family history, education, and socioeconomic status on the likelihood of juvenile involvement in criminal activity.

Scientific articles and studies dealing with this issue are also worth mentioning. Among the most significant, we can include the study by

² *Štatistika kriminality v Slovenskej republike*, 2023. <https://www.minv.sk/?statistika-kriminality-v-slovenskej-republike-xml>.

³ Tatiana Tomčíková, *Kriminalita mládeže* (Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici, Pedagogická fakulta, 2012); Jaroslav Oberuč, Gustav Ušiak, Pavel Sečka, *Kriminalita mládeže* (Strážnice: Veřejnosprávní vzdělávací institut o.p.s., 2016); Jana Firstová, *Kriminalita mládeže v sociálních souvislostech* (Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2014); Zdeněk Martínek, *Agresivita a kriminalita školní mládeže* (Praha: Grada Publishing as, 2009); Ivana Zoubková, *Kontrola kriminality mládeže* (Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2002); Jakub Chromý, *Kriminalita páchaná na mládeži: aktuální jevy a nová právní úprava v České republice* (Praha: Linde, 2010); Eva Moravcová, Zuzana Podaná, Jiří Buriánek, *Delikvence mládeže: trendy a souvislosti* (Praha: Triton, 2015).

Vávrová^[4], which describes various types of crimes committed by juveniles, highlighting that their aggressive behaviour may be due to faster physical, but slower psychological development, lack of sports activities, and the influence of violent computer games. Next Čonka and Čonková^[5], who analyse the causes of juvenile delinquency, offer various preventive approaches. The authors focus on prevention in the school environment and propose pedagogical strategies to reduce criminal activity among pupils.

The analysis of the School Portal website^[6] emphasises the role of domestic violence as a key factor that can lead to aggressive and criminal behaviour among young people, identifies the mechanisms of how domestic violence affects the psyche of children and these are identified, and this portal proposes intervention programmes aimed at supporting victims of domestic violence.

The fact that juvenile delinquency is a real global problem is clearly confirmed by, for example, Fazilov^[7], Polglase and Lambie^[8], Ullman et al.^[9] or Caulfield et al.^[10]. The study by Young et al.^[11] provides a comprehensive review of different interventions for juvenile delinquency around the world. It highlights the mixed effectiveness of multisystemic therapy (MST)

⁴ Vanda Vávrová, „Za brutalitou mladostvých je aj domáci násilie” *Pravda*. 2016. <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/380920-za-brutalitou-mladistvych-je-aj-domace-nasilie/>.

⁵ Peter Čonka, Andrea Čonková, „Kriminalita mladistvých a možnosti jej prevencie” *Pedagogika.sk*, No. 3 (2015): 160-175.

⁶ *Prevencia sociálno-patologických javov*, 2024, <https://www.minedu.sk/prevencia-socialno-patologickych-javov/>.

⁷ Gavrat Fazilov, „Youth Crime: The Main Problems and Ways to Solve Them” *Академические исследования в современной науке*, No. 13 (2024): 175-178.

⁸ Liam Polglase, Ian Lambie, „A Sharp Decline in Youth Crime: Reviewing Trends in New Zealand’s Youth Offending Rates Between 1998 and 2019” *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, No. 1 (2024): 42-62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10345329.2023.2236730>.

⁹ Rebecca Ullman, Stephanie T. Lereya, Frances Glendinnin, Jessica Deighton, Ania Labno, Sarah Liverpool, Jessica Edbrooke-Childs, „Constructs Associated with Youth Crime and Violence Amongst 6-18-Year-Olds: A Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews” *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 75 (2024): 101906. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2023.101906>.

¹⁰ Laura Caulfield, Sharon Brooks-Wilson, Jo Booth, Mark Monaghan, „Engaging Parents to Reduce Youth Violence: Evidence from a Youth Justice Board Pathfinder Programme” *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, No. 4 (2023): 401-426. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41300-023-00190-4>.

¹¹ Susan Young, Blair Greer, Ray Church, „Juvenile Delinquency, Welfare, Justice and Therapeutic Interventions: A Global Perspective” *BJPsych Bulletin*, No. 1 (2017): 21-29. <https://doi.org/10.1192/pb.bp.115.052274>.

in different countries, suggesting that outcomes can vary significantly depending on the context and local approaches to juvenile justice. The study also discusses motivational interviewing and mindfulness-based interventions as promising approaches for substance abusers in juvenile offenders, highlighting the need for more research in these areas. Simoes et al.^[12] discuss various factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency, such as family dynamics, peer influence, and socioeconomic conditions. It also evaluates different prevention and intervention programmes, highlighting the importance of tailoring these programmes to the specific needs and contexts of the juvenile populations they serve. Enzmann et al.^[13] present data from the second international study on self-report delinquency. This research provides insight into the patterns of youth delinquency in different countries, exploring the relationship between delinquency, victimisation, and police data. It underscores the importance of comparative research in understanding the global dimensions of juvenile delinquency and the effectiveness of various interventions. The study by DeLisi^[14] examines the link between violent video games and juvenile delinquency. This study finds a correlation between exposure to violent video games and increased delinquent behaviour, suggesting the need for more research on the impact of media consumption on juvenile behaviour.

Not only the aforementioned studies and sources, but many others collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of juvenile delinquency and the effectiveness of various intervention strategies globally. They highlight the complexity of juvenile delinquency and the need for context-specific approaches to prevention and rehabilitation. In addition, they discuss not only the content of delinquency and crime, but also a number of individual

¹² Mário Simões, Joana Martins, Ana Paula Monteiro, Isabel Cristina Relva, „Juvenile Delinquency”, [in:] *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2024), 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68127-2_29-1.

¹³ Dirk Enzmann, Ineke H. Marshall, Martin Killias, Jan Junger-Tas, Majone Steketee, Beata Gruszczynska, „Self-Reported Youth Delinquency in Europe and Beyond: First Results of the Second International Self-Report Delinquency Study in the Context of Police and Victimization Data” *European Journal of Criminology*, No. 2 (2010): 159-183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370809358018>.

¹⁴ Matt DeLisi, Michael G. Vaughn, Douglas A. Gentile, Craig A. Anderson, Jeffrey J. Shook, „Violent Video Games, Delinquency, and Youth Violence: New Evidence” *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, No. 2 (2013): 132-142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204012460874>.

theories about the causes of delinquent activity that have been developed since the 18th century”^[15].

On the subject of preventing or eliminating juvenile delinquency, the scientific literature is much poorer in knowledge and mostly contains general lessons that are repeated over and over again. It may be that creating a truly functioning preventive programme so that it works properly is extremely difficult and it is even more difficult to control its operation. Longer-term research is needed in individual areas, such as regions or cities.

It is obvious that it is necessary to start preventing delinquency as early as possible.

Preventive activity has the highest chance of success among juveniles. The so-called social pathological phenomena can appear already in preschool or at the beginning of school age. These phenomena include, for example, lying, defiance, petty theft, running away from home, etc. among young people. The existence of these phenomena may be a harbinger of a so-called delinquency career in some individuals^[16].

An addiction career usually begins at a young age with the first crime. This is also why it is necessary for every state to have a sophisticated crime prevention system^[17].

A criminal act, as a name for human illegal activity, is not only the behaviour of an individual expressed in law, but an activity that actually interferes with human coexistence, disrupting and degrading the perceived level in a significant way, causing damage that can be expressed financially. Non-property damage is often larger and more extensive, and the process of returning it to the state before the crime was committed is more lengthy and demanding^[18].

¹⁵ Helena Válková, Josef Kuchta, Jana Hulmáková, *Základy kriminologie a trestní politiky* (C.H. Beck, 2019), 53.

¹⁶ Eva Moravcová, Zuzana Podaná, Jiří Buriánek, *Delikvence mládeže: trendy a souvislosti* (Praha: Triton, 2015), 13.

¹⁷ Helena Válková, Josef Kuchta, and Jana Hulmáková, *Základy kriminologie a trestní politiky* (C.H. Beck, 2019), 398.

¹⁸ Vladimír Kratochvíl, „Případ, trestný čin, společenská škodlivost a vina v trestním právu” *Právník*, No. 7 (2015); Jakub Drápal, „Ukládání trestů v případech jejich kumulace: Jak trestat pachatele, kteří spáchali další trestný čin předtím, než vykonali dříve uložené tresty” *Jurisprudence*, 2 (2020); Piotr Bogdalski, Waldemar Jarczewski, „Crime and Criminality-Problems of Definition, the Ability

In the calendar year 2022, a total of almost 51,000 crimes were committed, and the total damage caused by such activities was calculated at 689,143,000 euros in Slovakia^[19]. However, it is important to point out that these astronomical figures represent only those crimes and offences that were reported or discovered, properly registered and investigated. One can only guess how many crimes and delinquencies went undetected.

Offences were committed by an offender described in the criminal proceedings as a juvenile, i.e. the offender was 14 years old and under 18 years of age. A total of 696 offences were committed by minors, i.e. those under the age of 14^[20]. In general, we can say that in 2022, children under the age of 18 committed a total of almost 2,500 crimes, which is about 5% of all registered crimes in Slovakia. If we divide the aggregate figures into types of crime, we find that in 2022, children committed 260 violent crimes, the largest representation being the crime of bodily harm. In the area of moral crime, 338 acts were committed, the largest of which was the crime of sexual abuse. Property crime, which was committed by up to 1,425 offenders who did not exceed 18 years of age, has the highest representation in the form of theft. Other crimes are distributed between economic crime and other types of crime.

The calendar year 2022 and the crimes that were committed during it can also be assessed from a point of view in which we focus not on the perpetrators, but on the victims. Of the total number of crimes, up to 1,017 cases involved a person under the age of 18, of whom 565 were between the ages of 14 and 18, and 452 crimes were committed against children under the age of 14. From the point of view of the type of crime, there were 355 violent crimes committed against children, 497 moral crimes and 63 property crimes, in which, as in the case of the monitored object of the perpetrators, the crimes of bodily harm, sexual abuse and theft have the highest representation. Table 1 provides an overview of the various statistical indicators

to Analyze this Issue in Conceptual and Structural Terms” *Przegląd Strategiczny*, 16 (2023): 103-115. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ps.2023.1.8>; Holly Nguyen, Rachel McNealey, Kyle J. Thomas, „The Contextual Generality of Crime: Workplace and Street Crime” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224278231166073>;

¹⁹ *Štatistika kriminality v Slovenskej republike*, 2023. <https://www.minv.sk/?statistika-kriminality-v-slovenskej-republike-xml>.

²⁰ Ibidem.

Table 1.

Criminal acts committed in 2022 in Slovakia (own processing)

	Violent criminal acts / Harm to health	Moral criminal acts / Sexual abuse	Property criminal acts / Theft
Crime committed by children	260 / 90	338 / 202	1425 / 1164
Crime committed against children	355 / 99	497 / 449	63/63

In 2023, 41,788 criminal acts were committed in Slovakia, and the total damage caused is estimated at 332,257,000 euros^[21]. Of these, the three most monitored types of crime, violent, moral, and property criminal acts, represent a total of almost 23,500 criminal acts. Dividing the aforementioned criminal acts into the indicators we monitor, that is, into criminal activity committed by children and criminal activity committed against children, we find that 1,886 children committed any crime and 868 children were in the position of an abused person^[22].

Of the total number of crimes committed by children during the period, 175 crimes were of a violent nature, of which 81 were classified as intentional bodily harm. Moral crimes were committed by 280 offenders under the age of 18, of which up to 160 were of a sexual nature, and property crimes were committed by 1,130 juvenile and minor offenders. Of the above number of property crimes, 921 were thefts. This was followed by 295 violent crimes against children, of which 94 were assaults, 422 moral crimes, of which 368 were sexual assaults, and 52 property crimes, of which all 52 were thefts.

For the sake of simplicity and transparency, we have edited the statistical indicators in Table 2.

²¹ Štatistika kriminality v Slovenskej republike, 2023. <https://www.minv.sk/?statistika-kriminality-v-slovenskej-republike-xml>.

²² Ibidem.

Table 2.**Criminal acts committed in 2023 in Slovakia (own processing)**

	Violent criminal acts / Harm to health	Moral criminal acts / Sexual abuse	Property criminal acts / Theft
Crime committed by children	175 / 81	280 / 160	1130 / 921
Crime committed against children	295 / 94	422 / 368	52 / 52

Statistics clearly show the need to pay more attention to the field of prevention in secondary vocational schools, to strengthen the building of knowledge and skills in the field of law, which can be understood as a tool of protection. At the same time, it can be seen as a warning finger that, by acquiring at least basic knowledge of the legal field, warns the potential offender that the action being prepared is a crime, that the interest he/she is about to attack is protected by valid law, that its protection is enforceable in the sense of the law, and that its violation can be sanctioned.

Prevention of juvenile delinquency is a key aspect of the effort to reduce criminal activity among young people and, at the same time, to support their healthy development and integration into society. Effective prevention strategies can include a variety of approaches, from educational programmes to community initiatives. Eliminating juvenile delinquency is a complex task that requires a systematic approach and the cooperation of all interested parties. Preventive programmes that combine pedagogical, social, and legal strategies are shown to be the most effective. Long-term, well-implemented programmes can make a significant contribution to creating a safe and supportive school environment in which students can develop to their full potential.

For research on the prevention of juvenile delinquency in Slovakia, several relevant sources and studies can be found that deal with this problem. The Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic provides comprehensive information on crime prevention, including specific measures aimed at young people. The aim of these measures is to reduce the level and severity of crime and social pathological phenomena and to increase the feeling of security among residents and visitors. Various documents and strategies related to crime prevention are available on the website of the Ministry of the Interior.

The Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention offers publications and studies that focus on a systemic approach to the prevention of juvenile delinquency. One of the important studies is the analysis of the Early Intervention System (SVI), which attempts a systemic approach to the prevention of delinquent behaviour in children and adolescents at risk. This publication by the authors Štěchová and Večerka^[23] provides a detailed overview of the effectiveness of these interventions.

These sources provide important information and data for an in-depth study of youth crime prevention and offer concrete examples of successful strategies and programmes that can be applied not only in Slovakia, but also in a wider context.

The prevention of juvenile delinquency is an important issue that has been addressed by scientific studies from different perspectives. Some key studies and approaches to the prevention of juvenile delinquency are presented below:

- Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP): This project examined the long-term effects of youth-focused prevention programmes, such as developing skills and fostering social connections^[24]. This project has shown that strengthening protective factors can reduce the risk of criminal behaviour among young people.
- Fast Track Project: This project focused on the long-term effects of interventions aimed at children with social and behavioural problems^[25]. This project has shown that systematic intervention and support at an early age can reduce the risk of antisocial behaviour and crime in later life.
- Blueprints for Violence Prevention: This programme evaluates various prevention programmes in terms of their effectiveness and efficiency. Provides an overview of proven programmes that reduce the risk of criminal behaviour among young people based on empirical evidence^[26].

²³ Štěchová, Markéta, Kazimír Večerka. *Systémový přístup k prevenci kriminality mládeže* (Praha: Institut pro kriminologii a sociální prevenci, 2014).

²⁴ *Seattle Social Development Project*, 2023. <https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/Benefit-Cost/Program/70>.

²⁵ Fast Track Project, 2024. <https://fasttrackproject.org/>.

²⁶ Sharon Mihalic, et al. *Blueprints for violence prevention* (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2004). <https://doi.org/10.1037/e302992005-001>

- **Multisystemic Therapy (MST):** MST is an intervention programme that focusses on adolescents with behavioural problems and their families^[27]. This programme has shown that MST can reduce recidivism and improve family relationships.

Each of these programmes brings valuable knowledge about how preventive measures can be used to influence and reduce juvenile crime. These findings are further supported by long-term scientific research, and the relevant results are published in the studies of Hawkins et al.^[28], Farrington and Welsh^[29], Lösel and Farrington^[30], Farrington and Ttofi^[31], Petrosino et al.^[32], Van der Knaap and Vermunt^[33], Sweeten and Steinberg^[34], Vassallo et al.^[35],

²⁷ *Multisystemic Therapy*, 2024. <https://www.mstservices.com/>

²⁸ David J. Hawkins, Richard F. Catalano, Janet Y. Miller, „Risk and Protective Factors for Alcohol and other Drug Problems in Adolescence and Early Adulthood: Implications for Substance Abuse Prevention” *Psychological Bulletin*, No. 1 (1992): 64-105. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.112.1.64>.

²⁹ David P. Farrington, Brandon C. Welsh, *Saving Children from a Life of Crime: Early Risk Factors and Effective Interventions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195304091.001.0001>.

³⁰ Fridrich Lösel, David P. Farrington, „Direct Protective and Buffering Protective Factors in the Development of Youth Violence” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, No. 2S1 (2012): 8-S23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2012.04.029>.

³¹ David P. Farrington, Maria M. Ttofi, „School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization” *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, No. 1 (2009): 1-90. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2009.6>.

³² Anthony Petrosino, Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino, James O. Finckenauer, „Well-Meaning Programs Can Have Harmful Effects! Lessons from Experiments of Programs Such as Scared Straight” *Crime & Delinquency*, No. 3 (2000): 354-379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001128700046003006>.

³³ Leontien M. Van der Knaap, Jeroen K. Vermunt, „Reconsidering the Measurement of Delinquency: Moving Toward a General Deviance Scale” *Criminology*, No. 3 (2007): 449-483.

³⁴ Gary Sweeten, Alex R. Piquero, Laurence Steinberg, „Age and the Explanation of Crime, Revisited” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, No. 6 (2013): 921-938. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-013-9926-4>.

³⁵ Suzanne Vassallo, Daryl Smart, Ann Sanson, Sarah Cockfield, Alexandria Harris, Annie McIntyre, „Risk and Protective Factors for Different Intensities of Adolescent Substance Use: When Does the Prevention Paradox Apply?” *Drug and Alcohol Review*, No. 3 (2010): 278-287.

Gawrych^[36] or Porubčanová and Paternáková^[37]. These highly cited publications cover a wide range of topics and approaches to the prevention of juvenile delinquency, including risk and protective factors, the effectiveness of school programmes and the critical evaluation of various prevention initiatives. Each article focuses on different aspects and approaches to this important issue. From more up-to-date sources, Campie^[38] should be mentioned, whose article focusses on the role of family and community in the prevention of juvenile delinquency based on a global review of evidence. Next, Shi and Cheung^[39] researched various components of SEL programmes and their effectiveness in improving youth behaviour and reducing violence. Olsson et al.^[40] dealt with the effectiveness of interventions in early childhood in the prevention of youth delinquent behavior, and Orlando and Farrington^[41] observed the long-term effects of mentoring programmes on juvenile delinquent behaviour.

Therefore, we believe that it is more than necessary to take such measures and steps that will arouse interest in the observance of the law and raise the moral values of students at secondary vocational schools to such an extent that we will be able to suppress illegal activities in their infancy by means of adequate and timely prevention, and not only by sanctioning the perpetrators. The success of repressive units should be expressed in

³⁶ Roman Gawrych, „Usefulness of the Theory of the Organizational Cycle in Managerial and Professional Work” *Prawo i Więź*, No. 2 (2024): 409-431. <https://doi.org/10.36128/PRIW.VI49.913>.

³⁷ Dáša Porubčanová, Lenka Pasternáková, „Influence of Socially Disadvantaged Environment on Aggressiveness of Pupils at Primary Schools” *Acta Educationis Generalis*, 8.1 (2018): 104-115. <https://doi.org/10.2478/atd-2018-0007>.

³⁸ Patricia Campie, „Five Evidence-Based Takeaways Policymakers Need to Know About Preventing Youth Violence”, 2020. <https://www.air.org/resource/field/five-evidence-based-takeaways-policymakers-need-know-about-preventing-youth-violence>. [accessed: 28.06.2024].

³⁹ Jiannong Shi, Alan C. Cheung, „Effective Components of Social Emotional Learning Programs: A Meta-Analysis” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, No. 4 (2024): 755-771. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-024-01942-7>.

⁴⁰ Tina M. Olsson, Niklas Långström, Therése Skoog, Cecilia Andrée Löfholm, Lina Leander, Anna Brolund, Knut Sundell, „Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Noninstitutional Psychosocial Interventions to Prevent Juvenile Criminal Recidivism” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, No. 6 (2021): 514.

⁴¹ Maria S. Orlando, David P. Farrington, „Prevention of Youth Offending and Recidivism”, [in:] Maria S. Orlando, David P. Farrington, *Understanding and Preventing Recidivism of Young Offenders in Argentina* (Cham: Springer, 2024), 71-86. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54146-9_6.

the degree of citizens' sense of security, not in the ratio of solved criminal acts to the overall idea.

3 | Material and Methods

The main objective of the research is to identify the relationship and connection between theoretical knowledge from the field of law, especially general concepts of normative legal acts and key concepts from the field of criminal law, and the personal experience of illegal activity of selected secondary vocational school students. Furthermore, with their experience in the implementation of preventive programmes, which are mainly organised by the Slovak Police, and in this context to define the status of secondary schools in Slovakia.

We will achieve the above by using qualitative and quantitative research based on the analysis of the current state of the problem solved in particular secondary schools and at the same time on the analysis of the preventive activities of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic as the primary repressive security force of the state. By comparing the detected state with current statistics of committed criminal acts, we determine those criminal acts that most often occur among juveniles aged 14 to 19, where they appear in a given illegal proceeding as the injured party or as the perpetrator of the given act. Thus, on the basis of the results of the questionnaire survey, we will determine the level of theoretical knowledge in the field of criminal law and find out the experience of secondary school students with illegal activities, which the legislation defines as criminal offences in terms of the applicable standards.

In addition, the following secondary objectives were formulated in relation to our research process in order to achieve relevant results:

- using a self-constructed knowledge test to find the level of normative legal acts with regard to the Criminal Code and selected criminal acts, which according to the Slovak Republic statistical tables of the Police Force are most often committed by juveniles 14 to 19 years of age (secondary school pupils),

- using a self-constructed questionnaire to find out the actual performance of preventive programmes in Slovak secondary schools and to find out the real experiences of pupils with illegal activities,
- to compare the level of knowledge, empirical experience, and actually implemented preventive programmes.

Based on the determined primary aim and its partial components, we defined a number of problems, which we summarised in several research questions.

- RQ1: Do secondary school pupils know the term „criminal act” and its characteristic features and the basic differences between a crime, a misdemeanor, or generally antisocial and illegal activity?
- RQ2: Do secondary school pupils have a dedicated teaching space for issues in the field of criminal law? Are they interested in learning about this issue?
- RQ3: Do secondary school pupils have personal experience with illegal activities, either as a victim or as a suspect/perpetrator?
- RQ4: Do secondary school pupils know the preventive programmes of the police force and participate in some preventive measures? If so, was this prevention useful to them and did it bring new knowledge?

In the context of the current state of the solved issue determined by the objective of our research, we established the following research assumptions.

- A1: Secondary school pupils do not have a sufficient level of theoretical knowledge in the field of criminal law and illegal activities.
- A2: The empirical experience of secondary school pupils with selected types of crime will be at a high level, but without sufficient theoretical awareness and naming of the problem.
- A3: Preventive activities carried out simultaneously in secondary schools, despite the wide-spectrum scope, do not cover specific pressing problems, which creates space for increasing crime in juveniles.

The research, which used a knowledge test and a structured questionnaire focusing on pupils’ experiences of illegal activities and preventive activities, approached a relatively consistent sample of secondary school pupils. The secondary schools surveyed provide general and specialised

education and train the next working generation of today's teenagers. They develop moral values and instil basic principles of proper behaviour, thereby influencing their future paths in both their professional and personal lives.

The schools and their educational programmes attended by the surveyed pupils are comparable and of identical quality. Similarly, the sample of pupils is comparable, with an average age of $M = 17.3$ years.

We obtained sufficient initial data based on the summary results of 100 knowledge tests and 100 questionnaires. We evaluated a total of 1,200 questions with 3,600 possible answers, which we can compare with the analysis of preventive activities organised by the Police Force of the Slovak Republic thus providing a comprehensive picture of the impact of preventive activities in secondary schools.

By comparing and analysing the results obtained, we can determine the causal relationship between legal knowledge, experience of illegal acts, and the need for targeted prevention at specific times and places. This will improve the effectiveness of preventive measures and reduce the negative impact of crimes committed by and against secondary school pupils.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 closed items with 5 possible answers, determining agreement or expressing positive, neutral or negative attitudes towards the given item. The scoring was done as follows: each test was assessed individually, determining the percentage success rate, with each question having an equal proportional weight towards the total. Then each anonymously completed individual test was aggregated and the success rate for each secondary school was evaluated.

The questionnaire was divided into two main parts: the first part, item no. 1-10 and 17, addressed pupils' experiences with illegal activities. The second part, items no. 11-16, reflecting the experiences with preventive activities in secondary schools organised by the Slovak Republic Police force. Items no. 18-20 were supplementary, expressing interest in working with the Police of the Slovak Republic.

Evaluation and processing of the responses to the questionnaire, similar to the knowledge test, were performed individually for each questionnaire, evaluating the responses that expressed positive, negative, and neutral attitudes toward the given item. Subsequently, a content analysis of individual responses was conducted for each secondary school. After processing the data for individual schools, their mutual comparison was performed, and a comprehensive summary was compiled.

4 | Results and discussion

The overall average percentage pass rate for all knowledge tests was 66.2%, which corresponds to almost 800 correct answers. These statistics represent a mathematical calculation based on the number of questions and the number of correct answers, without considering the type of question or any other aspect.

Furthermore, these statistics provide an answer to the key question RQ1, in which we state that students in vocational secondary schools understand the concept of a „criminal act” and its characteristics, as well as the basic differences between a criminal act, a misdemeanour and generally antisocial and illegal behaviour. However, this knowledge is not enough.

The first area of the questionnaire survey (items no. 1-10 and no. 17) focused on the pupils’ experiences with illegal activities. The summary results of this section are processed in Table 3.

Table 3.

Aggregate number of responses to items focused on pupils’ experience with illegal activities (own processing)

	Yes	Rather yes	Do not know	Rather not	Not
Item No.1	83	7	3	4	4
Item No.2	24	36	19	21	4
Item No.3	20	6	11	21	43
Item No.4	18	9	17	16	42
Item No.5	9	5	5	12	69
Item No.6	8	2	1	4	83
Item No.7	31	10	26	12	22
Item No.8	21	13	11	18	40
Item No.9	23	18	23	16	24
Item No.10	21	1	1	1	75
Item No.17	17	11	13	18	40

By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the questionnaire survey, we found that up to 83 out of the total 100 pupils had definitely encountered the term „criminal act” in their lives, and another 7 pupils chose the option „rather yes”. Thus, we can state that 90% of secondary school pupils understand the meaning of the term „criminal act” and have encountered it during their lives. A total of 60 pupils indicated in the questionnaire that

they believe that they have sufficient theoretical knowledge in the field of criminal law to differentiate their activities within the limits of the law.

Although this is a relatively high number and we cannot undermine its value, we must point out the other side of this finding: 40 pupils reported that they cannot accurately assess their activities in real-time and therefore cannot ensure that they stay within the legal boundaries. This is crucial since ignorance of the law is not considered a mitigating factor, let alone a justification for illegal behaviour. Therefore, we need to increase the number of positive responses in this area.

The exact opposite of the desired state is represented by item 3, which asked whether the pupils had ever been a victim of a criminal offence. Although negative responses predominated, 26 pupils around the age of 17 years had this experience. Mathematically, this means that every fourth secondary school pupil has been the victim of a crime.

Item No. 4 investigated the opposite position in the process of illegal behaviour. A total of 58 pupils denied ever having engaged in any illegal behaviour, while 27 pupils anonymously admitted to having done so.

Item No. 5 assessed intentional violations of current laws in Slovakia. In this case, the responses „rather not” and „not”, which we interpret as negative responses, prevailed. A total of 81 pupils responded in this way.

Whether a pupil had ever been sanctioned for illegal behaviour was explored in Item No. 6, where we received 87 negative responses and only 8 pupils answered definitively „yes”. In practice, sanctions are imposed for activities that can be classified as at least a misdemeanour. Various forms of sanctions can also be imposed for committing a criminal act.

Item No. 7 examined the perception and indirect experience of illegal behaviour. Positive and negative responses to this item were relatively balanced, with a ratio of 41:34 in favour of positive responses, supplemented by the neutral response „I don't know”, which may indicate a lack of interest in their surroundings and events.

Two items, No. 8 and No. 9, focused on experience with illegal behaviour as a witness, mostly yielded negative responses. Therefore, pupils do not have significant personal experience as witnesses and did not assess whether the behaviour in question was a misdemeanour or a crime. The difference between positive and negative responses was not large, and potential prevention activities need to address this area to ensure that pupils, if they find themselves in such a situation, know how to react and have theoretical knowledge of how memory traces are used in criminal proceedings and related processes.

We enquired about the pupils' experiences with the police by obtaining the aforementioned memory traces in Item No. 10, where we wanted to know if the pupils had ever been interrogated. Only 22 pupils confirmed such an experience, 76 denied it, and 2 selected the option „I don't know”. The last item related to experiences with illegal behaviour examined whether pupils had ever helped to clarify or uncover any illegal activity during their lives. Being helpful in clarifying or uncovering does not necessarily mean being a witness or being interrogated, so we included this aspect as a separate item in the questionnaire survey. Only 17 pupils directly answered „yes”, and another 11 leaned towards the option „rather yes”.

The second part of the questionnaire survey (items 11-16) focused specifically on the pupils' experiences of preventive activities and we have summarised the results in Table 4 below.

Table 4.

Summary of responses to items focused on pupils' experiences with preventive activities (own processing)

	Yes	Rather yes	Do not know	Rather not	Not
Item No.11	18	7	15	14	47
Item No.12	20	7	44	16	14
Item No.13	17	24	49	4	6
Item No.14	13	16	43	9	20
Item No.15	20	27	32	7	14
Item No.16	41	30	17	9	4

We began addressing the issue of experiences with preventive activities in Item No. 11, where we asked pupils if they had participated in a preventive event. The evaluation of this item from the analysis of the first school alone was quite alarming. As we continued to analyse other schools, it became clear that this was not an anomaly of one school, but that the current state of preventive activities in secondary schools is at a very low level. This is evidenced by the fact that of a total of 100 pupils, 61 gave a negative response, meaning that they had not participated in any preventive activity. If we add 15 neutral answers of „I don't know”, we get an alarming result of only 25 positive answers.

A neutral character prevailed in Item No. 12, where 44 pupils indicated that they did not know if the school, as an educational institution, organises preventive activities. The second most common response was negative,

with 30 pupils. The fewest responses, a total of 27, were in the options „yes” and „rather yes”. A similar neutral character was maintained in Item No. 13, where the response „I don’t know” to the question about the benefit of preventive activities was chosen by 49 pupils.

Item No. 14 examined the relationship between participation in a preventive activity and its subsequent influence on individual behaviour. Again, the option „I don’t know” was chosen by 43 pupils, 29 pupils denied any influence, and 29 pupils confirmed that the preventive activity had affected their subsequent behaviour. Taking into account the number of pupils who positively responded to participation in a preventive activity and comparing it with the positive response to this item, we can say that the preventive activity had a direct impact on the subsequent conscious behaviour of each participant. This comparison is purely mathematical, but highlights and directly points to the urgent need to organise preventive activities.

Item No. 15 investigated whether the preventive activity was a way for pupils to gain new knowledge, and nearly half, 47 pupils, chose positive answer options. Given the significantly lower number of pupils who reported participating in a preventive activity, we can assume that some positive responses were given without direct experience, based on the assumption that the activities would be beneficial if they attended them. We could neither confirm nor refute this during the analysis; it is a logical inference without tangible evidence.

The last item, No. 16, which focused on experiences with preventive activities, was designed for pupils to express agreement or disagreement with a given statement. Up to 71 pupils agreed that secondary school, as an educational institution, significantly positively influences the mindset of young people and is a substantial preventive tool against committing crimes.

Despite the not entirely positive results, we answered research question RQ4 by concluding that pupils are not aware of the preventive programmes of the Police of the Slovak Republic and do not participate in any preventive activities.

5 | Evaluation of research questions

From the evaluation of the knowledge tests, it is clear that the question, which is a prototype of a general law question and appears first in the test: „The Constitution of the Slovak Republic is?” with the correct answer „the highest law of the state”, received the most correct answers. Along with this question, questions from the category of general law overall achieved a high number of correct answers, which indicates a well-set content standard for subjects that cover the basics of law, fundamental legal norms, the functioning of the state, and similar topics.

On the other hand, except for one instance where this question was second to last in terms of the number of correct answers, Question No. 11, which asked who is considered a child under the Criminal Code, had the fewest correct answers. The Criminal Code, which represents the substantive aspect of the criminal justice system in the Slovak Republic, is perceived as a highly specialised area of knowledge, and its teaching is not included in the types of secondary schools that participated in our research. Although this question achieved only 4 correct answers out of 20 in some cases, no question was qualified without a correct answer, which we can evaluate as an indication that secondary school pupils have some, albeit very shallow, knowledge in this area. Therefore, we answer research question RQ2 by stating that, based on the results of the knowledge test, secondary school pupils have allocated classroom space to issues in the field of criminal law and are interested in knowledge on this topic. However, this space is not systematically used and does not clearly lead to the prevention of illegal behaviour.

The analysis of the part of the questionnaire that focused on pupils' experiences of illegal activities clearly showed that, despite their young age and almost carefree school life, pupils have sufficient personal experience of illegal activities, regardless of their nature, severity or position in them, thus providing a clear answer to research question RQ3.

Although we cannot close the doors of reality to illegal activities, such behaviour, and especially its effects on society, should not be part of their lives to such an extent. This fact can significantly influence their moral development, attitudes, and opinions. Not to mention personal experiences with illegal activities as victims, where the impact on the psyche of a person aged 17.3 years is extensive and significantly affects the normal development of their personality.

Taking into account their intellectual maturity and the level of theoretical knowledge in the field of general law and the specialised field of criminal law, which we verified with the knowledge test, the clear result of our survey is the need for a comprehensive and complete innovation of preventive activities in educational institutions of the assessed level. This includes the targeted content, the quantitative aspect and the overall reconstruction of its implementation.

6 | Assumptions verification

To verify Assumption A1: „Secondary school pupils do not have a sufficient level of theoretical knowledge in the field of criminal law and illegal activities”, we can use the answers to the research questions RQ1 and RQ2.

To verify Assumption A2: „The empirical experience of secondary school pupils with selected types of crimes will be at a high level, but without sufficient theoretical awareness and naming of the problem”, we can use the answers to research questions RQ2 and RQ3.

The evaluation of part of the research focused on pupils' experiences with illegal activities clearly showed that pupils have sufficient personal experiences with this negative manifestation of human behaviour. This fact can significantly influence their moral development, attitudes, and opinions. Not to mention personal experiences with illegal activities as victims, where the impact on the psyche of a 17-year-old is extensive and significantly affects the normal development of his personality. It is therefore more than necessary to maximise prevention activities and to structure them according to real needs and to target them in terms of time and content, so that their effectiveness achieves real and measurable results. On this basis, we can confirm the validity of Assumptions A1 and A2.

Assumption A3: „Preventive activities carried out simultaneously in secondary schools, despite the wide spectrum scope, do not cover specific pressing problems, which creates space for increasing crime in juveniles” was evaluated through the answers to research question RQ4.

We found that the current state of preventive activities in selected secondary schools is at a very low level, as evidenced by the fact that of 100 pupils, 61 gave negative answers, indicating that they had not participated in any preventive activity. If we add 15 neutral responses of „I don't

know”, the alarming result is only 25 positive responses. The relationship between participation in a preventive activity and its subsequent influence on individual behaviour was examined in item No. 14, where „I don’t know” option prevailed. It was chosen by 43 pupils, 29 pupils refuted the influence, and another 29 confirmed that the preventive activity had an impact on their subsequent behaviour. Taking into account the number of pupils who answered positively to participating in a preventive activity and comparing it with the positive response to this item, we can state that the preventive activity had a direct impact on the subsequent behaviour of each participant. This comparison is purely mathematical exercise but highlights and directly points to the urgent need for preventive activities. Item No. 15 examined whether the preventive activity was a way for pupils to acquire new knowledge, and almost half, 47 pupils, gave positive answers. Given the significantly lower number of pupils who reported participating in a preventive activity, we can assume that positive responses were expressed without direct experience, based on conditioning, that is, they would be beneficial if they participated. We were unable to confirm or refute this fact in any way during the analysis; it is a logical inference without tangible evidence. The last item that focusses on the experience with preventive activities was designed for pupils to express agreement or disagreement with the presented statement. Up to 71 pupils agree that secondary school significantly influences the thinking of juveniles and is a significant preventive tool against committing crimes. This means that assumption A₃ is also confirmed.

By comparing all the data obtained, we concluded that it is unequivocally necessary to increase preventive activities conducted in secondary schools and at the same time modify them to cover those criminal offences that, according to statistics, are most frequently committed by pupils and have the most significant negative impact on the pupils themselves.

The analysis of the collected data showed that the Police of the Slovak Republic currently has more than 20 different forms or topics of active preventive activities, which, however, are more or less only passive paper descriptions of possible preventive activities. The questionnaire focused on pupils’ experiences with preventive activities clearly expressed a very low participation of pupils in such forms of education and presentation of police work. This fact was the most alarming finding in the entire survey, and the absolute disproportion between the number of preventive activities in the Police Forces’ portfolio and the real experience of pupils clearly points to the need for rapid reconstruction of prevention. Lectures,

real-life demonstrations and the presentation of the most frequently committed crimes with a description of the *modus operandi* can significantly increase interest in this social phenomenon in an engaging way, and at the same time actively influence their moral values and level of education in the area studied.

Secondary schools, as educational institutions, do not have the means and competencies that fall under the police force, and therefore the need for mutual cooperation and interactivity is the right key to eliminate illegal behaviour. A young, educated, value-oriented, and morally pure individual should be the „product” that leaves the ranks of secondary schools and becomes an active and beneficial member of society.

From the analysis and subsequent comparison, it follows that prevention, in order to be a tool that eliminates illegal behaviour, must move from the textbook to real implementation among pupils. Adapting to pupils' thinking and using their own language to highlight those problems that can and often do directly affect them, whether it involves minor violations of the law or violent, moral, or property-related criminal acts, which do not avoid secondary school pupils, as evidenced by crime statistics published by the Police Force of the Slovak Republic.

7 | Conclusion

A school, as an educational and formative institution supported by the education of the police force, represents an effective tool to reduce illegal activities in society. Harmonising the school schedule with activities from the Slovak Police Prevention Department creates an efficient means of suppressing crime based on knowledge and education. Both institutions, school and police, must combine their theoretical knowledge and practical skills to achieve a common goal: to ensure safety and order through young, educated and promising individuals.

Without an active preventive policy in schools, the incidence of illegal activities cannot be expected to decrease, as schools have a significant influence on the mindset of juveniles and are an important preventive tool. Just as the main goal of local governments is a satisfied citizen, the goal of schools is an educated and useful graduate for society. The task of

the Police of the Slovak Republic is to contribute to the creation of a safe environment that allows for a dignified life.

Although the success of prevention activities cannot be measured precisely, it is clear that it is essential to continue the trend towards prevention. It is necessary to develop moral and legal awareness and to regularly update preventive activities. The combination of these preventive measures with repressive measures aims to achieve a society in which the police do not have to intervene in everyday life, but rather monitor its peaceful course.

Educational programmes aimed at preventing juvenile delinquency, implemented in schools and supported by police activities, play a crucial role in shaping responsible and law-abiding citizens. Through education, young people can be provided with the tools and knowledge necessary to identify and avoid risky situations, thereby contributing to a general reduction in crime.

It is important that schools and police forces continue to develop and strengthen their partnerships. By working together, they can create a comprehensive approach to crime prevention that not only increases safety but also promotes positive social change. The combined efforts of these institutions help to create a stable and safe society where young people have the opportunity to develop in a safe and supportive environment.

In conclusion, the integration of education and policing initiatives is a crucial step towards effective crime prevention. This requires not only joint planning and implementation of prevention programmes, but also continuous evaluation and adaptation of strategies based on the current needs and challenges of society.

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