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**SYSTÉMOVÝ PŘÍSTUP K PREVENCI KRIMINALITY MLÁDEŽE
SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO PREVENTION OF JUVENILE
CRIMINALITY**

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Summary

This publication addresses analysis of the systemic approach to prevention of juvenile criminality in the Czech Republic and experiences so far with this system in operation. The publication draws on the results so far of a study entitled “The Early Intervention System as a Tool for Limiting Criminality” (hereinafter EIS) conducted at the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention as part of the Czech Republic Security Research Programme for the years 2010-2015 (BV II/2 – VS). This research project focuses on new forms of preventive work, at the functioning of EIS in separate localities, at mapping the experiences of officials from municipalities with extended powers with this system and also mapping concrete procedures implemented by OSPOD (Authorities for the Social and Legal Protection of Children) employees while working with problem clients within this system.

The subject of this research is the Early Intervention System, its technical, personnel and other conditions for its operation in practice.

The main aim of the research is to establish whether and under what conditions the procedures for dealing with children and youths at risk applied under the Early Intervention System are capable of eliminating or at least reducing the number of endangered juveniles engaging in delinquent activities.

Research activities have so far included the following methods and techniques of criminological research:

- study of specialised literature concerning systemic approaches to prevention of juvenile criminality and successful (positively evaluated) preventive programmes applied abroad

- study of documents concerning the EIS from the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

- questionnaire survey with wide use of open-ended questions

- modified SWOT analysis

- semi-structured interviews using answer sheets.

The results of phases 1, 2 and 3 of the study are published in this monograph (conduction is currently underway and evaluation will be made of phases 4 and 5; the entire project will be completed in 2015).

Methodology and Results of Phase 1 of the Study:

In the first phase of the EIS study, questionnaires with ample room for open-ended answers were sent out to respondents (i.e. employees responsible for the EIS at municipalities with extended powers), distributed to 36 municipalities, i.e. to all municipalities involved in preventive work following EIS methodology at the time of the survey (eventually 27 municipalities with extended powers cooperated in the survey). The task of each respondent was to provide information about 15 children or youths who were registered in the EIS network after a randomly chosen date in 2012. Using this research tool, we established not only background information about endangered children, but at the same time information about the functioning of the system. In all, information about 398 endangered individuals was received. In this first phase, all endangered children and youths were included in the programme, whether they had problems with behaviour or they were threatened by behaviour in their environment (family, school mates, etc.).

It was established that the majority of clients (63 %) had been registered in the EIS due to behavioural disorders, while a smaller proportion of the clients (26 %) were included due to problematic behaviour in their social environment, mostly their guardians. The remaining clients were included in the sample group for both of the aforementioned reasons, became victims or witnesses of problematic behaviour in their social environment (e.g. physical aggression towards them or serious conflicts between parents) and alarm signals were noticed in their behaviour. The event that led to a child being registered in the EIS was reported as a rule by the Police of the Czech Republic.

The respondents were of the opinion that social work with a client should at first consist of an interview with the child's guardian (34 %) and of an interview with the client him/herself (34 %), while not forgetting appropriate guidance of guardians (32 %), examination of the family's case history, adoption of appropriate remedial measures and so on. An ideal procedure assembled in this way is considered by the majority of respondents to be effectible (some however avoided answering this question), only about one third of the respondents considered it would be best to develop new, innovative and more effective measures and procedures.

The range of reasons behind what the respondents consider to be the main impediments to their preventive efforts is interesting. Most frequently, they identified the cause to be the impossibility of implementing the ideal strategy through parents (parent) or other guardians, and their approach to the child's problems. Other frequently named impediments concerned problems with OSPOD itself (insufficient capacity of programmes on offer, availability and overlapping of programme services for youths in general and staff shortages at OSPOD). Many see the causes of the problems in the actual organisation of the Early Intervention System, namely in lacking or limited involvement of other institutions in activities under the EIS, failure to link information of clients with EIS files, complaints also cited limited compatibility of information coming from the EIS information system and from other information sources and the resulting difficulties when working with clients.

Factual information about clients showed that only about a third of clients live in a formally complete family and a further third is in the care of only one parent, mostly the mother. Another fairly large group of clients lives in families supplemented by the partner of a parent, or in extended families (grandparents etc.).

Methodology and Results of Phase 2 of the Study:

In the second phase of the study we tried to establish to what extent EIS methodology is actually applied during modification of clients' anti-social behaviour. Because in the first phase of the study we discovered that not even in localities where the Early Intervention System was routinely used was it applied adequately. We decided to verify this fact by changing the conditions for client selection for the study sample group. The condition for selection in this phase was not that the problem child or youth had to be registered in OSPOD records via the EIS information system, but merely that he/she had been entered in general

terms into the OSPOD register of ideas after a randomly set date, while we subsequently monitored whether or not EIS tools were used for client registration.

Respondents this time were selected from the 22 localities where the Early Intervention System was functioning best. The task of each respondent was to submit information about five consecutive child or youth clients with problematic behaviour. Overall, we received information on 110 OSPOD clients.

The age range of these clients was considerably different from the age range of the clients in the first phase of the study which included young people not only with behavioural problems, but also children or youths under threat of or harmed by their social environment. In this phase, the clients were considerably older, 70 % of them being between the ages of 14 and 18 years old. More than two thirds of the sample group were boys.

Problem individuals are most often reported to OSPOD staff by the Police of the Czech Republic (49 %), considerably less by their school (18 %) and municipal police (15 %). The reasons for reporting were, in a third of cases, some recorded offence (34 %), then behaviour problems generally or in the family (total of 23 %), alcohol related problems (23 %), suspicion of committing a crime that was subsequently dealt with by criminal justice (13 %). The most serious matters reported by police included property related offences, then cases of unleashed aggression and sexually motivated crimes. Of the property related offences, the most frequently cited were various types of theft, in particular theft in shopping centres. In cases reported by schools we find reports of smoking cannabis and contact with alcoholic beverages and also of serious problems in the pupil's family which contribute to anti-social behaviour by the child.

In this phase of research it has been confirmed that when the relevant institutions report cases of child and youth clients, the Early Intervention System is not employed to any great degree. Most often clients' problem events are reported by traditional means (47 %) and only in a third of cases (36 %) did OSPOD staff learn of the case via EIS methodology. It was also established that although a considerable number of cases was reported to OSPOD electronically, this was not however via the EIS (17 %).

Methodology and Results of Phase 3 of the Study:

The third phase of field research was conceived to be an expert survey and was conducted in the field in the second half of 2013. In this phase of the study, we initially interviewed eight selected experts, applying the semi-structured interview method to topics related with the issue of the actual functioning of the EIS, then we asked them if they would give answers to some problem areas in writing. The selection of experts was based on their competence and experience with the methodology and practical use of the EIS, while personal commitment to work with the system was also taken into account.

It became clear from the respondents' answers that the main reason for municipalities with extended powers accession to EIS was the potential opportunity for more intensive and work with youth with behavioural disorders at an earlier stage and also the enhancement of communication between individual social work agencies. Some experts claimed that the decision to adopt the EIS was partly motivated by hope that the introduction of electronic client record keeping would mean reducing the administrative work load, which unfortunately has not yet happened.

The respondents commented on each pillar of EIS methodology, i.e. to the creation and development of cooperation between institutions that are (or could be) EIS stakeholders. The experts' main comments focused on the following pillars of the system:

- Creation of an cooperative and competent Team for Youth – the most frequently cited problem was the need for quality and active cooperation between team members
- Creation of the “Prevention Manager” post – experts mentioned the need for closer contacts between the prevention manager and Team for Youth
- Ensuring due cooperation between separate OSPOD employees while implementing the EIS – with reference to this, emphasis was put on the fact that, as the central element in the system, OSPOD was most burdened with problems involved with implementation of the system, and with all the other difficulties encountered while organising cooperation between individual employees, and the uncertainty with regard to future development of the system
- Collaboration with the Police of the Czech Republic – in the experts' prevailing opinion, cooperation with the PCR was at a very good level; the problem in this area was seen in the not always suppressed police tendency to solve certain cases prematurely by implementing

repressive measures. There were also certain remarks concerning administrative problems arising during work with the EIS information system

- Collaboration with city police – in the experts' opinion, cooperation with city (municipal) police was at a good level; the advantage it has in its operations is its knowledge of the terrain and immediate contact with clients and with OSPOD staff; criticism of their activities were few and far between

- Collaboration with the Probation and Mediation Service (PMS) – in many municipalities cooperation with the PMS is at an above-standard level, but the problem is that those cooperating relationships focused on the purpose of the work are too often based on personal ties and long-term work connections, rather than on the systemic basis of the EIS. Upon the departure of certain staff members, communication barriers could arise between institutions

- Collaboration with the judicial authorities (judges, state prosecutors) – the greatest problem in the eyes of the experts is that judiciary employees have too little time on their hands, which makes extensive cooperation impossible. The terrain would welcome greater ingression of these authorities into certain preventive work

- Collaboration with schools (educators) and school facilities – cooperation with schools was evaluated as being quite good, the problem being delays in reporting problem pupils, which is due on the one hand to fear of damaging the school's reputation and on the other by the belief that the school can manage the problem on its own, which often proves to be an erroneous assumption

- Collaboration with healthcare facilities (doctors) – experts signalled the main risk factor for cooperation is that medical workers have too little time on their hands and doctors are unwilling to cooperate in preventive activities, citing medical confidentiality and personal data protection of their patients

- Cooperation with non-profit organisations – the respondents saw the advantage of cooperation with NPOs in their flexibility, motivation, volunteer work and collective implementation of specific measures, while the main problem is the certain instability of NPOs due to their reliance on uncertain financing from donations

- Other partners – experts named a wide range of other partners working within the EIS; these are primarily various city and municipal council departments, community centres,

Educational Care Centres, Social Prevention Centres, Education Psychology Advisory Centres, school psychologists, Marital and Family Advice Centres, organisers of probation programmes, procedures for prevention and organisations working with drug addicts. According to the experts, cooperation with these organisations is mostly in its infancy and tends to be short-term.

Experts' statement on the further pillars of EIS methodology:

- Creation of a unified information and communication environment – this was one of the most controversial issues connected with the introduction of the EIS; it came mainly from misunderstanding between the creators of the computer information system and its users, when the expert opinion (i.e. the opinion of one side of the dispute at the time) was that their needs and requirements were not taken sufficiently into consideration. Amongst other things, interconnection of the IS with municipal registries and the civil registry is still lacking.

- Measures which form the actual process of delinquent rehabilitation, i.e. development of methods for working with endangered youth – in the main, the experts expressed the opinion that before the introduction of the EIS, measures were applied roughly in the same way, but they stressed that after introduction of the EIS, application of preventive measures became faster. Also the flow of information about clients also became faster.

- Complementarity of EIS methodology with the amended Act No. 359/1999 Coll. on the Social and Legal Protection of Children - for the main part, experts stated that both forms of approach to preventive work interconnect with and supplement each other. More sporadic was the opinion that the amendment of the Act does not complement the EIS, or that it does so only in certain areas. The respondents considered it to be positive that the amendment to the SLPC Act introduces standards into the area of social and legal protection and they hope for the creation of a uniform EIS information system and for reinforcement of OSPOD staff with further preventive workers. Experts also noticed that not even the amendment of the Social and Legal Protection of Children Act mentions EIS methodology as support for a systemic approach to care for endangered children.

The overall opinion on whether the EIS programme has played any significant part in regulation of juvenile crime, was as follows:

The majority of respondents expressed the opinion that thanks to the introduction of the EIS, a better communication environment has come into existence for cooperation of all entities involved in the issue of prevention of criminality. They stated that it was hard to say whether or not any significant drop in youth criminality has occurred thanks to application of the EIS (that could only be documented in the future). In certain municipalities, however – according to experts – juvenile criminality has fallen, but it cannot be said with certainty that this is directly due to the effects of the EIS; there may be more factors behind such positive development. A fundamental obstacle to quality work with the EIS is the unclear future of development (or stagnation) of the EIS, which is reflected in a lack of unequivocal support from municipalities in this area. The overall opinion expressed by experts on hitherto experience with the EIS and on the next stage of this project suggested that the architecture of the new version of the EIS should be compatible with the electronic records of documents that is standard in most municipalities, and should also comply with the requirements of the MoLSA instruction concerning the scope and content of file documentation on children kept by OSPOD, including the keeping of registries and statistics (MoLSA Instruction No. 21/2000).

Conclusion: It is perfectly obvious from the conducted survey that a systemic approach to solution of anti-social behaviour in young people is very necessary. Experiences both at home and abroad show that preventive work has a greater chance of succeeding the earlier it is applied on a child, therefore problematic behaviour of a child and his/her family must be reacted to as early as possible. It showed that the Early Intervention System is founded on the correct principles, but their fulfilment is an extremely hard task for the reasons cited above.

Translated by: Presto