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**Preventivní praxe po novelizaci Zákona o sociálně-právní ochraně dětí
Preventive Practice after the Amendment of the Law on the Social-Legal
Protection of Children in 2012**

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Summary

The subject of the entire multistage survey, which took place in 2000 - 2015¹, is the Early Intervention System (hereinafter EIS), its technical, personnel and other conditions of operation in practice. Given that the amendment to Act No. 359/1999 Coll., On the Social-Legal Protection of Children (hereinafter LSLPC) extended some procedures that were applied only in the context of the EIS in the previous period to the work of all departments of social and legal protection of children (hereinafter DSLPC) in the municipalities with extended powers and it also modified them partly, so except for EIS, our current survey attention also focuses on the aforementioned amended law, in particular on its actual use at work of DSLPC social workers and crime prevention managers.

The publication informs about the results of two empirical surveys which were focused on wider context of the current state of the Early Intervention System, particularly in relation to the situation described above. The first empirical survey included respondents of the employees of the department of social and legal protection of children in municipalities and took place in the second half of 2014; the second survey included crime prevention managers and was implemented in the first half of 2015. Both surveys were carried out in cooperation with ppm factum agency using their interviewer network.

Methodology and Survey Results in DSLPC

The interviews with respondents were conducted in 206 municipalities with extended powers, i.e. 91% of all participating localities. The questions relating to the amended law were put to all respondents, the questions relating to the EIS only to those workers who had worked in the system, which was 31% of the total number of DSLPC (64 municipalities with extended powers) and they started to work with the system after 2007.

The municipalities whose management was aware of the importance of preventive actions to increase the safety of citizens were more supportive in introducing EIS. The main reason for rejection of EIS was a concern that the introduction of new methodology would be costly and too complicated and time consuming for the existing staff. Some respondents found the problem in lack of awareness of the new strategy by the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic. Low prestige of preventive work also played its role in decision making.

¹ see Štěchová, M., Večerka, K. (2014) *Systemic Approach to Prevention of Juvenile Criminality*. Prague: IKSP.

The respondents who had had some experience with EIS were interviewed on the functionality of the system. They best assessed the fact that EIS can simplify work, facilitate the registration of clients and accelerate problems solving. The respondents assessed EIS less optimistically as a system that contributes to computerization of agenda and facilitate statistical reporting. The respondents were also rather critical to the statement that EIS is a sophisticated system, which saves labour force and facilitates the monitoring of deadlines. The respondents also assessed a success rate of EIS: about half of the opinions within six characteristics reported that work in the system more or less improved the success of social interventions, however, the other half of the respondents' held the view that, in principle, "there was no - positive or negative - change" in success rate of work. The relatively greatest success rate was seen in the possibility of a faster response to client problems and ability to coordinate an action better in a particular case.

Furthermore, we were interested in working of the DSLPC under the amended Act No. 359/1999 Coll., On the Social-Legal Protection of Children (LSLPC), which includes some important aspects of EIS. It was found that DSLPC learns about its clients most often from the Czech Police and also often from the school facilities. The most common reported problems of the DSLPC clients include truancy, discipline problems at school, especially in relation to peers (verbal abuse, threats, etc.), the issue of alcohol use by children and less intoxication by other addictive substances. Also other disciplinary problems were very common - in family as well as in school against teachers.

Presently, the most serious adverse influences on young people include, in the social workers' of the DSLPC opinion, dysfunctional family including its financial and social situation, problematic level of upbringing in family, bad friends and antisocial gang influences, addictive drugs and alcohol. Wrong use of leisure time plays negative role as well.

LSLPC in Section 10 paragraphs 3 and 5 puts certain requirements on workers of DSLPC. We asked to what extent these requirements are feasible in practice. The implementation of procedures to limit adverse influences is considered to be realistic, as well as the monitoring of adverse influences affecting children and identifying causes of these adverse influences. Less than a fifth of all respondents consider these requirements expressed by law to be hardly feasible.

The Act on Social and Legal Protection of Children in Section 10 paragraph 3 c) refers to that the municipal authority with extended powers should regularly assess the situation of children and their families, especially in terms of assessing whether they are still children covered by the provisions of this Act. Overall majority of the respondents (55%) of DSLPC said that there were (in order to improve the characteristics of the client) no case of removal from the register within a specified period. In the case of DSLPC where a removal from the register occurred, from 5% to 20% of clients were removed, rarely more.

The amendment to Act No. 359/1999 On the Social-Legal Protection of Children (LSLPC) results in (see Section 10 paragraph 3 d)) that the municipal authority with extended powers is required to prepare an individual child protection plan based on the assessment of the situation of a child and his/her family. According to their own statements, a half of all

respondents manage to do this without problems and another 29% shows only minor difficulties with this activity. A very positive finding is that an individual plan is in the absolute majority of cases created together with the child in question.

The respondents consider the real fulfilment of the law requirement to prepare an individual child protection plan within a period of one month to be problematic. In most cases (73% of responses), the respondents considered this period to be too short for a good preparation of an individual plan and the suggested extension of the period. The respondents stated that the short period does not give enough time to collect information, analyse the situation, contact and meet the client and members of his immediate surroundings, or to cooperate with other institutions. The suggestions to extend the period were - with rare exceptions - mostly between two and three months.

The respondents consider the cooperation of DSLPC with external bodies in preparing individual plans to be relatively good, but some of them consider it rather average.

Statutory holding case conferences are an important tool for dealing with child clients. It includes a discussion of experts of a particular case of a threatened child or his/her family; the purpose is to evaluate a situation in order to find an optimal solution. The respondents consider this law requirement mostly feasible, which is in contrast with the fact that a case conference did not take place in a third of the municipalities in the monitored period of the first half of 2014 and in other municipalities it did not take place so often. Although this institute has not been used much so far, some positive expectations are associated with it: in particular, a qualified agreement on procedures in solving a case, partly also educational influence on the client. It was found that a child client is, in most cases, being prepared to a case conference by DSLPC workers. A concerned social worker is in charge of case conferences, both in the preparation of the event and control of outputs.

The most important measure for dealing with antisocial manifestations of a child according to the respondents is definitely remedy of family background, i.e. a positive and systematic influencing on family members, as well as regular interviews with the child and his/her parents, more frequent use of interventions by specialized centres, stabilization of the child's behaviour at school, preventing truancy and ensuring adequate teachers' attention to problem children.

It was found that the reporting of cases of troubled children from smaller municipalities that are discussed in DSLPC of municipalities with extended powers is not at very good level, although the law gives this option. The importance of this option is obviously not appreciated yet.

On the other hand, about two fifths of DSLPC develop some methodological activities towards the smaller municipalities that are aimed at enhancing preventive work in the localities. These activities are mostly of advisory nature.

According to the amended act, a municipality with extended powers can, under certain circumstances, impose an obligation to use professional advisory assistance on parents, but

this obligation is not sufficiently appreciated by DSLPC yet, it was imposed only by a fifth of all respondents. Other possible measures that were imposed (also rarely) include supervision over a child, reprimand of a child and imposing an obligation to use a professional advisory assistance or mediation. Most of DSLPC have not used any of these or other options yet.

In general, the respondents commented on the benefits of the amended LSLPC. Two thirds of the respondents think that LSLPC serves as a functional integration node that collects and evaluates information on youth with problematic behaviour. On the other hand, almost half of the respondents doubt that their offices are operational under the amended Act, some of them even expressed serious doubts. Approximately half of the respondents (49%) sees the benefit of the amended Act in ensuring the supply of statistical and other factual data from collaborating institutions. In general, it seems that the amended form of LSLPC was accepted in practice, but it would be still useful to make some elements of social work with a client and his family to a better form of implementation.

At the end of the questioning, it was found that the absolutely biggest problem for workers of DSLPC is unacceptably high rate of administrative burden, which is negatively perceived by almost all respondents and two out of three respondents identified this as a significant problem. The respondents also negatively perceive a low level of prestige of a social worker profession and a lack of time that can be dedicated to a single case, as well as the related lack of workers of DSLPC and the level of financial evaluation of the worker of DSLPC.

Methodology and Results of the Survey between Crime Prevention Managers

The position of crime prevention manager was established in the municipalities gradually and should ensure a function of a certain liaison officer for practical communication with the Ministry of the Interior as well as a number of other preventive tasks in municipalities. The survey group includes most (88) crime prevention managers of larger municipalities. The respondents include slightly more women than men mostly between 41 - 50 years old (47%), 31 % was younger and 23% was over 50 years old. In terms of education, nearly two thirds of them were university graduates, other workers have secondary education. Three fifths of the respondents of crime prevention managers have performed this function for more than 5 years, thus they are experts in the field, conversely, only less than one tenth of the survey group were relatively new staff at this position. 38% of the respondents works full time in this function, the rest works part-time.

It was found that the vast majority of the respondents work in their municipality individually, which is reflected, for example, in creating crime prevention programs or creating safety analyses, where the crime prevention managers are key individuals in all aspects and at all stages of their implementation.

Safety analyses are targeted according to a local situation and they especially deal with youth crime and locations threatened by crime. Drug and alcohol use, situation of excluded groups, vandalism, truancy and other negative phenomena are monitored, too. Safety analyses are the basis for creating prevention programs and adequate orientation in them.

Main preventive programs are focused on the prevention of major social pathological phenomena. The means of prevention include lectures, practical motivational drill of appropriate behaviour, consolidation of legal awareness and personal development and increasing confidence in the Czech Police. Many programs are aimed at good spending leisure time. In almost half of the cases, the respondents believe that prevention programs significantly contribute to problem solving. The other half of the respondents evaluate the results of the preventive efforts more realistically, they believe that the program only reduced problems.

According to the prevention managers, the city (municipal) police is most involved in the preventive actions, along with DSLPC, elementary schools, city managements and the Police of the Czech Republic, followed by the probation and mediation service, pedagogical-psychological advisory centres, educational care centres, secondary and vocational education institutes and with a great distance by public prosecutor's offices and district courts.

Regarding social rehabilitation activities, the survey results best evaluated the DSLPC, probation and mediation service, educational care centre, city management, pedagogical-psychological advisory centres, elementary schools, city (municipal) police followed by secondary and vocational education institutes, the Police of the CR, district court and public prosecutor's office.

The Early Intervention System was assessed only by those respondents who came into contact with it within their work. They evaluated the system rather positively, albeit with reservations. They expressed the view that the EIS rather makes solution solving faster and easier, but they also expressed that the EIS is not sufficiently developed. They were often unable to clearly say if working with young clients is better coordinated, or whether the results of work with clients and their families are worse or better when applying EIS procedures.

Regarding the work of DSLPC, the crime prevention managers evaluated it very positively in all aspects. The activity of the DSLPC in the field of social work with vulnerable children was evaluated as the best, as well as the work with the families of vulnerable young people. This was followed by also very good evaluation of ability of DSLPC to provide clients with the assistance of external experts, to conduct screening and other preventive activities.

The differences in the activities of organizations operating in the EIS and those operating outside the system are not so substantial. According to the results of the survey, if a municipality formally involves in the EIS, there is a danger that instead of intensifying the problem solving a diffusion of specific responsibility can occur, as well as a mere feeling of "lightening the burden" of a particular institution. This is particularly the case of schools that, with relief, receive a team students' solving problems, which they sometimes interpret as shifting responsibility away from school. Conversely, the EIS has a relative success within activating the interference of courts and public prosecutor's offices.

Translated by: Aspenna