

A CASE STUDY OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: A GIRL FROM A FUNCTIONAL FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the specific case of a girl with a significant experience of delinquency in early adolescence (13–15 years of age). The girl is from a functional family with no known predisposition to delinquency. Therefore, this case can be considered as deviant sampling. The study has a multidisciplinary overlap (psychology, criminology and social pedagogy). The IPA (interpretative phenomenological analysis) method was used to uncover the meanings that the participant attributes to the phenomena of delinquency. The results showed that the need for peer social acceptance was at the core of the case. The accompanying manifestation of delinquency was lying, which transcended theft. In

late adolescence, the girl changed her strategy for gaining social acceptance and used her own ability to „empathically counsel” others. The results of this study evoke the creation of an evaluation study of an experimental educational program for adolescents from non-pathological backgrounds.

keywords:

adolescent delinquency,
unusual case,
social acceptance,
stealing,
lying

INTRODUCTION

The issue of delinquent behaviour has received a great deal of attention in the literature. The vast majority of this research is statistical. The dangers of statistical self-report studies have been highlighted, for example, by Hoskin (2012), who argues that these studies using questionnaires are very popular because they are an easy and inexpensive way to obtain large amounts of data (similarly Waylen & Wolke, 2004). However, the results of these studies do not tell us anything about the actual nature of the phenomenon of delinquent behaviour in adolescence. At the same time, Hoskin (2012) sees a problem in the fact that the results of such research very often appear in the media, thus having a social impact. In the Czech Republic, a broader self-report study was last conducted in 2012 (Tomášek, 2013). However, this is again a quantitative study with general conclusions.

Qualitative studies tap into the described meanings of delinquent adolescents with more robust experiences. In addition to the cases that fulfill the already well-researched assumptions of delinquent behavior, there are also those that fall outside (“deviant sampling”). According to Farrugia (2019), deviant sampling includes both downright extreme cases and notable exceptions that allow us to view the phenomenon under study from a specific perspective. This study deals with an adolescent girl from a functional family, with no apparent other predispositions to mild delinquency (stealing and lying). A similar study was carried out with a boy (Závora et al., 2024), who also came from a relatively trouble-free family, yet was prone to extensive de-

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linquent activity (drugs, cheating) in adolescence. For these reasons, we will briefly summarize the strongest antecedents to delinquency.

Regnerus (2002) states that the tendency to steal, especially during early adolescence, is related to the amount of time spent with peers. According to Elliott and Menard (1996), adolescents tend to engage in delinquent behavior and progression of delinquent behavior when they establish relationships with delinquent peers. At the same time, time spent with non-delinquent peers has not been shown to be a protective factor (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Older studies have suggested that the delinquent sibling is an important variable in the development of delinquent behavior (Loeber & Stouthammer-Loeber, 1986). Recent research has shown that the delinquent sibling has an effect on adolescent delinquency in early rather than late adolescence, namely sister sibling and pairs sibling dyads. In contrast, for fraternal sibling pairs, the delinquent sibling had an influence in late adolescence (Huijsmans, 2019). In a factor analysis of peer influences on delinquency in early adolescence, Müller et al. (2017) found boys to be more influential than girls. O'Neill (2020), based on an analysis of data from the Denver Youth Survey, conducted an analysis of the relationship between gender, empathy and delinquency and found that girls are more empathic than boys in adolescence. According to the author, empathy cannot be related to violent delinquency, but only to theft or fraud, and empathy is inversely related to delinquency.

The critical role of the family, its structure, relationships among family members, and family cohesion on the emergence or, conversely, prevention of juvenile delinquent behavior has been repeatedly confirmed (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Gove & Crutchfield, 1982; Rankin & Kern, 1994; Regnerus, 2002; Wright & Wright, 1994). Using a sample of 520 adolescents with a mean age of 14.24 years (range: 10–19 years), Keyzers et al. (2019) examined the relationship between family bonds, family problem-solving ability, and adolescent risk-taking behavior. The authors' results supported their hypothesis, namely that the quality of family bonds positively influences family problem-solving ability and is negatively influenced by incoherent perceptions of adolescent risk-taking behavior. On the other hand, the family's problem-solving ability had no effect on adolescents' differential perceptions of risky behaviour. Wilkinson et al. (2019) examined family, neighbors, and school as protective factors. They used data from national longitudinal studies focused on adolescent and adult health research. The results showed that quality (close) relationships with both parents, close connections to school, and neighbors were protective factors that contributed to lower adolescent involvement in violent crime. In the area of non-violent crime, such as theft, the protective factors were a good quality (close) relationship with the mother and good neighbourhood and school relationships. The results of that study are appropriately complemented by Sabatine et al. (2017), who also suggest that the parent-school bond plays a unique role in reducing youth crime. The authors examined parents' relationship with school and school transition in relation to later delinquency. The results showed that a good parental relationship with the school reduces delinquency if the adolescent remains in the same school. In contrast, the given bond proved to be insignificant in the case of transfers to another school.

In their study, Lee et al. (2020) assessed parent-child interactions in families with different parenting styles, and the impact of these relationships on the development or prevention of delinquency. According to the results of this study, there is a significant correlation between authoritative parenting style and lower child delinquency. Liu (2015) used a sample of 2,700 Chinese high school students to examine the impact of parental use of physical and verbal discipline on delinquency among Chinese adoles-

cents. According to the results of this study, physical punishment is generally more effective than verbal punishment, except in cases related to substance use, where verbal punishment is more effective. The effects of physical and verbal discipline also differed in terms of gender. While the father's physical punishment promoted the son's delinquency in three areas, the mother's promoted the girls' aggression and substance use. Conversely, maternal verbal punishment was related to boys' delinquency and paternal verbal discipline predicted daughters' aggression (*ibid.*).

These findings are "consistently" supported or complemented by the results of earlier studies. As early as Patterson et al. (1989) documented that children from families where not authoritative or benevolent but overly harsh (abusive) or significantly neglectful or significantly inconsistent parenting styles were practiced were prone to delinquent behavior. According to Gold et al. (2011), abusive parenting style does not only directly promote juvenile delinquency. Indirectly, according to the authors of the study, it occurs through the effects of shame, which is transformed into blaming others, leading to violent delinquent behavior. Abusive parenting practices can then influence whether children express shame or turn shame into blaming others.

METHODS

Sampling

The sample was selected using a simple purposive sampling method. During many years of dialogic teaching of psychopathology at the J. E. Purkyně University, many referrals to delinquent friends or direct siblings arose from discussions by students. A few recommendations in particular fell outside the family's assumptions about delinquency. We refined the criteria for selection: the participant must come from an apparently trouble-free, functional family, have substantial repeated experience with the phenomenon (approximately 50 thefts over a 2-year period), have no police record, have committed thefts as an adolescent (13–15 years old), no more than 3 years have passed since her last theft (insight into the recent past), and have the ability to articulate her experiences clearly.

The fulfilment of all the set criteria was verified by anamnestic interviews with the participant's brother, father and mother, conducted in the house where the family lived and resides, and from observations of the family context during these interviews. This is a girl from a functional family, with no apparent broader predispositions towards delinquency (see the introduction to this study). Apart from a rather robust experience of stealing and lying, the girl had a positive attachment and strong relational orientation towards her family (already Kruttschnitt & Giordano, 2009). The family appears to be fully functional, with no pathological parenting style, which also reduces the predisposition for delinquent behavior (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Jiménez-Iglesias et al., 2015; Mowen & Boman, 2020; Regnerus, 2002; Wilkinson et al., 2019). There was order (moderate strictness) in the family (Lee et al., 2020) and, according to family members' accounts, problems were solved "in the round" (by discussion) (Keyzers et al., 2019). Parents got on well with the participant's teachers (Sabatine et al., 2017), and there were no delinquent peers or delinquent siblings around the girl (previously Elliott & Menard, 1996; Loeber & Stouthammer-Loeber, 1986). Finally, being a girl is also specific, as girls are generally thought to be less likely to engage in delinquent behaviour (e.g. Liu & Miller, 2020; Müller et al., 2017; Pedersen & Wichstrom, 1995).

In spite of all these facts, the adolescent girl was committing quite massive delinquent activities, and therefore we consider this case as "deviant sampling" in the sense

of a remarkable exception that allows us to view the phenomenon under study from a specific perspective (Farrugia, 2019).

Prior verbal consent to conduct this research was obtained from the participant and her legal guardians. The participant and legal guardians were also informed in advance of the methods used and consented to them.

Research questions

We asked the following basic research questions:

1. How does the participant think about theft as such, and what meanings does she ascribe to it?
2. What meanings does the participant ascribe to her own theft?
3. In what contexts does theft appear in the participant's experience?

Data creation, data processing

As the plan was to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse the data, the first option offered was to use semi-structured interviews, which was eventually abandoned. The researcher's experience in conducting research interviews allowed for the use of an unstructured interview, which proved to be more appropriate given the participant's well-developed ability to speak very openly and saturated about her experience. Data generation for IPA has varied considerably, including autobiographical diaries (Smith, 1999), observation notes (Larkin & Griffiths, 2002), email communication and online discussion groups (Murray & Harrison, 2004; Turner & Coyle, 2000), video data (Lee & McFerran, 2015) and even the elaborate use of focus groups (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Palmer et al., 2010). The necessary departure from the recommended semi-structured interview is not in any way a principled departure from previously tried options and was preferable in this case study (cf. Smith et al., 2009). Data were audio-recorded during the interview and then transcribed into a commonly used IPA text format (three columns, numbered rows). The researcher took notes during the data creation process, which were used to develop the research interview through the use of "funneling" (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The researcher first asks the participant broad open-ended questions, only then gradually narrowing them down with respect to the sub-goals of the interview (e.g., by repeating a certain word from the participant's speech that relates to the sub-goal). Funnel questions also aim to reflexively reduce the researcher's intrusion of meanings. The primary topic for the interview was primarily "theft" and the phenomenon of "lying" also opened up during the interview.

The interview began with an open-ended question: V: "Okay...when you say theft, what comes to mind? The principle of "funnel questions" was used, e.g. P: "Well, it's just that it's not a problem, it's just like, to put it simplistically, it's in the family." V: "...that it's in that family?"... P: "That just from my point of view, when I didn't have the money for example, the money I needed...so I actually found my way here..." The interview was conducted in a fluid and relatively relaxed manner, with no shortage of light-heartedness and genuine, if restrained, laughter on the part of both the participant and the researcher. V: "And, when you took from the rich and didn't give to the poor...did you also give to the poor?" P: "No." V: (laughter) P: "No, I didn't." (laughter). In order to eliminate stereotyping, the researcher tried to vary the rhythm of the interview and temporarily leave the initiative of developing the interview to the participant. P: "...I don't know, I guess you get the feeling from me that...I feel the need to lie about something, I don't know" (light laughter). V: "No, no, no, not at all, even if she was sitting here...anyone else and telling me that, I couldn't believe it."

Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the data (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). In the IPA process, the researcher attempts to give meaning to the participant's experience by analysing how the individual attributes meaning to their own experience (double hermeneutic; Smith, 2011). This experience is the target phenomenon in terms of IPA (Smith, 2007; Smith et al., 1997). The emergent themes are firmly embedded in the literal quotations of the participant, which, according to Brocki & Wearden (2006), takes IPA beyond mere thematic analysis. The inclusion of literal participant citations (form of justification) also attends to the trustworthiness of meaning interpretations according to Pringle et al. (2011).

The analysis began with a rereading, which is very important in terms of alleviating the initial build-up of possible contexts, allowing the first comments to emerge, and placing them in context in line with the research aim. In line with the recommendation with Smith et al. (2009), we further developed descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments to help gradually build secondary (research) meaning with iterative leaps to higher levels of abstraction (themes, superordinate themes and connections between superordinate themes).

In the next part we developed the emerging themes. In this step, sufficient mental immersion in the text is important, which, according to Smith et al. (2009), makes it possible to "mine the topic from within" rather than just bringing it to the surface (p. 91).

We then looked for connections between the emerging themes, with a view to iteratively checking future individual steps of the analysis. A number of shifts, rearticulations, renaming or reformulations of emergent themes occurred during the development of the superordinate themes. The fit of the formulation of the superordinate themes was validated by re-immersing in the primary data.

The analysis was conducted by the first researcher and subsequently revised by another researcher to validate the conduct of the analysis in terms of the correspondence between primary data (interview transcripts) and secondary data (research data).

The results were formulated with respect to the quality assessment criteria for IPA studies developed by Smith (2011a, 2011b), and more recently articulated by Nizza et al. (2021): *Constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative; Developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account; Close analytic reading of participants' words; Attending to convergence and divergence*. We necessarily adapted these criteria with respect to the specifics of the one case study, e.g. attending convergences and divergences are sought logically within the interview, etc.

RESULTS

A total of 14 sub-themes emerged from the analysis, which fall under 7 overarching themes (see Table 1).

Overarching theme 1: Theft as a socio-legal entity

Subtheme 1.1. Theft as a criminal offence

The participant describes theft in general in a rather naive way.

"...stealing like maybe there is a shop and a robber comes in and steals something".

Subtheme 1.2. Theft (of anything) as a necessity

Theft is not seen by the participant as a sociopathological phenomenon, but as a necessity.

Table 1 Overarching themes and subthemes

Overarching themes	Subtopics
1. Theft as a socio-legal entity	1.1 Theft as a criminal offence 1.2 Theft as a necessity 1.3 Theft of money as a necessity 1.4 Theft in a rich family is more acceptable than in a poor one
2. Theft as a path to social acceptance	2.1 Theft as a path to social acceptance 2.2 Stealing as a means of fitting in 2.3 Theft as a means of compensating for lack of money
3. Lying as a facilitator to solve one's own problems	3.1 Lying precedes stealing 3.2 Lying as a separate entity 3.3 Lying is closer than the truth
4. Family as an easy source of money	4.1 Stealing money in one's own family is okay
5. Spending as concealing theft	5.1 Spending "stolen" money as a way of concealing theft
6. "Knowing how to give advice" as a way to social acceptance	6.1 The ability to give advice as a desired skill
7. Sexual entanglements as a form of social acceptance	7.1 Childhood sexual entanglements as a first experience

"...so I think that people who steal, I would initially say that they have a problem or they are so poor, for example, if I put it like this for Prague, that they have nothing else left. I don't feel like it's something... like... it's always just a problem in that person's like, life, like, otherwise they wouldn't do it..."

Subtheme 1.3. Theft of money as a necessity

The participant also perceived stealing money as a necessity with regard to her own situation and needs and maintained this attitude afterwards.

"...that just from my point of view, when I didn't have the money, for example, the money that I needed and if I'd asked for it at the time, my mum wouldn't have given it to me, so I actually found my way here and...I just didn't come to the point until now that I thought it was that bad...I'm not saying that they were stuffing me with the money by the thousands, but just to say: Mom, I'd like a new shirt, would you please give me a hundred? And her saying she'd give it to me, that was a huge problem with us. So even because of those things, I think it kind of slipped down to that."

Subtheme 1.4. Stealing in a rich family is more acceptable than in a poor one

The participant's social-moral awareness played an important role, which was manifested in the case of stealing in a non-wealthy family by "remorse". By "family" the participant meant a stranger's family where she was invited by a friend, and it was usually the friend's parents' money.

"...it was terribly important to sort of pick and choose what kind of family it was, like if they really had the money or if there was a problem with money in general, so like when I took it to one family...they really just didn't have the money...so there I felt like maybe I was the bad person...but then in return in the family where they really had it, it just didn't feel like that to me."

Overarching theme 2: Theft as a path to social acceptance

Sub-theme 2.1. Theft as a path to social acceptance

The participant's intrinsic motive for stealing was primarily a quest for social acceptance.

"...So maybe just in that adolescence, when those people get into a certain group of those people, maybe they already do that, so they adapt, or in general maybe problems at home, problems at school, that maybe people don't accept them, so they want to impress."

Subtheme 2.2. Stealing as a means of fitting in

According to the participant, stealing money was a means of acceptance into a particular social group.

"...I guess even at that school like I went to this primary school where there was just like 9 girls and they were all like really stuck up and rich and...I also wanted to impress them like I bought different sticks and stuff in the canteen and I gave it away so I wanted to like fit in with them as well I guess, well..."

Subtheme 2.3. Stealing to compensate for lack of money

The participant attributes a compensatory meaning to money stolen in her own family, as if she is entitled to it.

"...I'm not saying that they (parents, i.e. the researcher) stuffed me with the money by the thousands, but that they just say: Mom, I'd like a new shirt, would you please give me a hundred? And her saying she would give it to me was a terrible problem in our house. So even because of those things, I think it kind of slipped down to that, well."

Overarching theme 3: Lying as a facilitator of solving one's own problems

Subtheme 3.1. Lying prevents theft

Lying represents the participant's way of dealing with the consequences of delinquent behaviour. However, lying did not only serve to cover up the theft, but also preceded the theft.

"Very big so. And it was even just like you said (in the researcher's order) even afterwards, I lied a lot and then it actually went into the theft as well."

Subtheme 3.2. Lying as an experienced strategy

The participant is aware that some of the strategies she used to procure the means to "buy" attention have remained with her, and she seems to know that this is a problem.

"Well maybe I don't like myself for /stealing/...anyway I feel until now that it's kind of stayed with me...that I'm not quite straight, that I'm not quite straight...I prefer to lie a little bit as well."

Subtheme 3.3. Lying is more comfortable

The participant attributes the importance of lying to an experienced strategy.

"...that I'm kind of stuck...that I'm not completely straight...that I don't tell something straight as it is and I prefer to try to avoid it. I prefer to lie a little bit."

Overarching theme 4: Family as an easy source of money

Sub-theme 4.1. Stealing money in one's own family is okay

The participant did not regard stealing within her own family as something to be condemned.

“... I probably don't see it as I should at all. I just...like, I mean, I wouldn't go shoplifting or anything like that, but just within that family I just find it...I don't know, I can't really describe it, but I don't find it embarrassing or stupid or anything.”

Overarching theme 5: Spending as concealment

Subtheme 5.1. Spending stolen money as a way of concealing the theft

The participant concealed the theft by spending money on things of no value, and having to conceal the theft of money by spending was a barrier to buying and keeping something she really wanted.

“...it probably started with my grandmother who was staying with us...unfortunately she only had big money there...it was just horrible stuff...I couldn't even buy what was left, I just, I was spending it on purpose for nothing so that if they looked for the money they wouldn't find it on me.”

Overarching theme 6: “Knowing how to give advice” as a path to social acceptance

Sub-theme 6.1. “Knowing how to give advice” as a desired skill

Later, the participant discovered her ability to “know how to give advice to others”, which became a new means of procuring social acceptance.

“...for example, I really like it when a problem is being solved and I can solve it and give my opinion and I think I can really respect myself for that...I have...a friend...and so far I've given her like advice, like by intuition or by some experience...she thanks me all the time for everything...”

Overarching theme 7: Sexual entanglements as a form of social acceptance

Subtheme 7.1. Sexual entanglements in childhood as a first experience of social acceptance

The participant had a sexual experience with an adult male. She attributes a positive meaning to this experience, even though it was sexual abuse on the part of this man. The participant sees this experience as a means of gaining attention from her peers. This socially pathological relationship made her feel special.

“I kind of wanted to be special in something that maybe I couldn't chase somewhere else, like in appearance, so I just wanted to be special in this (relationship with a much older man) and like, I liked it, I just... like, even from a young age I'm like, I'm like, the benjamite...and I've been around these older, like, people in general, so it didn't even like...I knew it was special, like, in my situation, like, when I'm like, thirteen, fourteen.”

Summary interpretation of results

The emerging themes reveal that theft is perceived by the participant as a complex socio-legal entity that goes beyond the usual understanding of the crime. The participant describes theft in general in a rather naive way: “...stealing like maybe there's a shop and a robber comes in and steals something” (4/1)¹, and at the same time as an acute necessity in the context of social distress and psychological pressure: “... people who steal so I would initially say they have a problem...” (26/1). In the context of family as a source of money, the participant did not perceive stealing money in her own family as something reprehensible: “... I probably don't see it as I should at all.

¹ Numbers in parentheses indicate line and page numbers in the interview transcript.

I just...like, I mean, I wouldn't go and steal something from a shop or anything like that, but just in that family I just find it...I don't know, I can't really describe it, but I don't find it embarrassing or stupid or anything.” (205/7).

The participant also perceived stealing money as a necessity with regard to her own situation and needs (she remained in this position afterwards): “...that just from my point of view, when I didn't have the money, the money that I needed, and if I had asked for it at the time, my mother wouldn't have given it to me, so I actually found my way here and...I just didn't come to the point where I thought it was that bad until now...” (242/8). However, the participant also understood stealing as a necessity in the context of general social distress and psychological pressure: “...people who steal so I would initially say they have a problem...” (26/1). This understanding of theft contrasts with the meaning the participant attributes to theft in general, i.e. theft as a socially pathological phenomenon, as a criminal act: “...stealing like maybe there is a shop and a robber comes and steals something” (4/1). Seen in context, the participant also understands stealing as a socially differentiated act, not only in terms of the aforementioned “personal necessity” to steal, but also because stealing is more acceptable to the participant in a rich family than in a poor family (270/9).

Last but not least, the meanings that the participant put in the context of justifying her own thefts were somewhat paradoxically influenced by her social-moral awareness. This was manifested in the case of theft in a non-wealthy family by “remorse”, whereas theft in a wealthy family was accepted by the participant without remorse: “...it was terribly important to sort of choose what kind of family it was, if they really had the money, or if there was a problem with money at all, so for example when I took it from one family... they didn't really have the money...so there I felt like I was the bad person...but then on the other hand in the family where they really had it, it just didn't feel like that to me.” (270/9).

However, stealing was primarily a means for the participant to achieve peer social acceptance. The participant's intrinsic motive for stealing was to impress her peers: “...so maybe just in that adolescence, when those people get into a certain group of those people, so they're already doing it, so they adapt, or in general maybe problems at home, problems at school, that maybe people don't respect them, so they want to impress” (49/2). Peer social acceptance was so desirable to the participant that she did not hesitate to lie extensively, or rather use lying as a strategy to set the stage for subsequent theft: “...I lied a lot and then it actually went into the theft as well” (333/11). The participant was aware that some of her strategies for gaining resources to ‘buy’ attention remained with her and seemed to recognise that this was a problem: “Well, like I don't like myself for it /stealing/...anyway I feel up to now that it's kind of stayed with me...that I'm not quite honest, that I'm not quite straight.....I prefer to lie a bit as well” (640, 643/21). A form of lying, or rather covering up the truth, was the need to spend the stolen money lest it be found with her, which paradoxically prevented her from owning things that should serve to “impress peers” and therefore “fit in with the peer group” (91/4).

A very specific experience was sexual involvement with a much older man. Even this highly pathological experience was attributed by the participant to the importance of seeking social acceptance. It was only later that she was able to realise that this was sexual abuse for which the man had been judicially punished. This “relationship” served as a substitute for the participant's perceived lack of peer admiration and attention: “...I kind of wanted to be special in something that I couldn't maybe chase somewhere else, like in looks, so I just wanted to be special in this (relationship with a much older man) and like, I liked it, I just... like even from a young age I'm like the

benjamite...and I've been around these older like people in general, so it didn't even like...I knew it was special, like in my situation where I'm like the thirteen, fourteen" (465/15; 480/16).

In later life, the participant finds a new path to social acceptance through the use of the socially acceptable skill of giving advice to others. This new positive strategy increased the participant's sense of self-worth, drawn from the gratitude of others: *"...I like it so much when a problem is being solved and I can solve it and give my opinion and I think I can really appreciate myself for that...I have...a friend...and so far I've sort of advised her, like by intuition or by some experience of mine...she keeps thanking me for everything..."* (605/20).

The unusual case in question reveals a complex mosaic of motivations, social pressures and moral dilemmas of a girl who does not exhibit the known prerequisites for delinquency. A careful interpretation of the experience of the unusual case (deviant sampling) reveals convergences of opinion (a consistent theme of perceiving theft as a necessity, lying as an auxiliary strategy) and divergences (differing views on the acceptability of theft depending on the socioeconomic status of the victim and a complex web of moral considerations and personal justifications). The results also capture the interconnection between the participant's past and her current behaviour (especially her persistent tendency to lie), including a change in her method of gaining social acceptance - the participant moved from delinquent stealing to using her own skills to advise others. This positive shift in the participant's behaviour and actions distinguishes the deviant sampling from the usual cases of mild adolescent delinquency in both the personal, family and social dimensions.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the experience of an adolescent girl from a functional family with approximately 50 repeated thefts. The girl had committed thefts between the ages of 13 and 15. Social acceptance is a significant core issue in the case. This concept gives the participant's delinquent behaviour a motivational framework. Already according to the classic study by Shaffer (1961), low peer social acceptance is one of the precursors of delinquent behavior in adolescents (similarly Lochman & Wayland, 1994). For our participant, peer social acceptance was something for which she was willing to use stealing as a means of obtaining funds with which she purchased various trinkets, which she then gifted to peers in order to attract their attention and fit in socially. Di Giunta et al. (2018) attempted to determine the extent of peer rejection in a sample of the Italian child population, both in early and late adolescence, in relation to aggression, prosocial behaviour, physical attractiveness and adolescent adjustment. According to the authors of the present study, (a) a less prosocial and more aggressive child at age 10 is very often rejected, (b) lower physical attractiveness is related to higher rates of peer rejection at age 10–14 and (c) rejected boys aged 16–17 showed higher levels of anxiety, depression and delinquency and, conversely, lower levels of academic ambition, while rejected girls aged 16–17 had similarly low academic ambition and social competence problems. In contrast to these findings and those of other studies on this topic (Elliot & Menard, 1996; Regnerus, 2002), in which adolescents tend to steal in relation to the amount of time spent with peers and establishing relationships with delinquent peers, our participant places the onset of stealing in relation to a desire to become interesting and exceptional in relation to her peers and classmates. She attributes the coincidence of the beginning of her relationship with an older man and the beginning of her delinquent activities to chance. The motivation for the relationship with the much older man was her desire to impress her peers. The

relationship with the much older man was the participant's first clear experience of social acceptance outside the family.

The anamnestic interviews revealed that the participant was the youngest member of the family, always around older, non-delinquent siblings and in the company of her adult parents. From the participant's point of view, the relationship with a much older man was not inappropriate, and the participant did not attribute much importance to peer influence at the beginning of her delinquent behaviour. Sweeting et al. (1998) examined the links between certain aspects of family life and their results showed that the strongest social bonds are formed through shared joint activities. Jiménez-Iglesias et al. (2015) speak similarly when they state that parental autonomy support towards adolescents, family activities and parental affection towards children are the most important factors influencing healthy adolescent development. The participant's family did not experience any significant crises as prescriptors of juvenile delinquency as reported in earlier studies (Farrington, 1995; Thornberry et al., 1999). In this family, according to family members' accounts, there were warm relationships and mutual affection, which the participant made explicit in the interview, particularly in relation to her mother.

The participant characterized her relationship with her father as normal. Her relationship with her mother underwent an important development during adolescence. She could come to her mother to talk about anything, but rather only in late adolescence. The possibility to confide in her mother was related by the participant to the high frequency and intensity of contact between them during her childhood. Lee et al. (2015) reported that positive maternal behaviour towards the child reduces the tendency to steal in adolescence. According to the participant, the mother was too strict in certain situations, which the participant perceived as detrimental. For example, the participant perceived the ban on shaving her legs and armpits as humiliating because she attended a sports-oriented school where unshaven legs were visible. Consistently, unshaven legs and underarms were one of the reasons for the inability to match peers (fit in with the group). At the same time, the participant's perceived strictness of her mother was also manifested in the fact that she did not provide the participant with enough money for e.g. the desired clothes, which the participant again perceived as her social deficit, which she solved by stealing money.

The mother's strictness is linked by the participant to the breakdown of mutual trust. The participant then, in her own words, was forced to use lying as a tool to prepare for the theft and to facilitate the resolution of problems related to the theft. The participant was aware that she was often closer to the lie than to the truth. Williams et al. (2016) reported that adolescents who used prosocial lying possessed significantly better memory and self-control. Moreover, children who lied were also characterized by more advanced ability in understanding theory of mind (ibid.). The participant later substituted stealing for the ability to "be able to give advice" to loved ones, which, in her own words, she did well and "liked myself for it."

The ability to "be able to give advice to others" is associated with empathy, which O'Neill (2020) suggests may be expected in adolescent girls with a tendency to steal and minor fraud. Interestingly, expressions of empathy are inversely related to expressions of mild delinquency according to O'Neill's (ibid.) study. This relationship manifested itself in the participant's change in strategy in gaining social acceptance. There was a substitutive tendency from stealing, for example, which provided her with the means to "buy for her relatives", to "being able to give advice to others".

The family was an easy source of money for the participant. She did not perceive theft in her own family as something inappropriate, rather it was something she felt

she was entitled to. The participant also stole money outside of her family, and in her opinion it was acceptable if she stole from a family that had enough money. The participant understands stealing in general as a despicable behaviour (criminal act), but also as a necessity (poor people) and also as a socially-differentiated act (stealing in a rich family is more acceptable to her).

Reiss (2013) states that there is a consistent link between family socioeconomic status, depression, delinquency and adolescent aggression. School material status is also related according to some studies. For example, according to Coley et al. (2017), children attending wealthier schools are more at risk for intoxication and property crime. Adolescents from poorer schools are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety. The participant attended a mainstream primary and secondary school and came from a family that was by no means out of the average. In adolescence, according to family references, she had experienced only marijuana intoxication and theft. Bae (2016) relates problem behavior in adolescence to the body-material value orientation of some adolescents. The participant related physical appearance to the need to be equal to her peers, to not feel embarrassed when she does not look like others and when she does not have what others have.

CONCLUSIONS

The participant attributes to theft as such quite general meanings of socially pathological behaviour or criminal act, whereas she understands theft itself as a necessity. Her first experience of social acceptance, which was crucial for the participant, came from a sexually connoted relationship with a much older man (she 13 years old, he 30 years old).

Subsequent repeated thefts of money and belongings were a route to social acceptance by peers. Lying became a necessary accompaniment strategy to the thefts (setting the stage for the theft). By spending, the participant hid the stolen money. Hiding money by spending it on things of no value paradoxically prevented the purchase and retention of a valuable or wanted item. Thus, there was no sufficient satiation of needs, which the stolen money was supposed to provide.

According to the participant, stealing money in her own family and in a rich stranger's family had its justification (she was "entitled" to it at home and the rich family "would not miss it"). Later, she used the ability to "give advice" to others, which she discovered in herself through experience. This strategy of using empathy is also seen by the participant as a way of gaining social acceptance. With the change in the strategy of gaining social acceptance in the participant's late adolescence, the thefts did not recur, but the attitude towards lying and stealing remained unchanged. Just as the girl in this case substituted her own delinquent behavior for the empathic skill of "giving advice to other peers", the boy in the case we have already published changed his behavior in a similar way (Závora et al., 2024). The boy gradually began to use his rhetorical skills and empathy to achieve respect and dominance among his peers, which he had achieved through lying, concealment, alcohol and marijuana use. Motivational aspects such as peer respect and the need for dominance remained.

The discussion revealed that the non-pathological context of the case under study, which can be described as "deviant sampling", plays a crucial role in understanding the studied phenomenon of mild juvenile early delinquency. The results of most of the studies that examined pathological environment and relationships as antecedents of juvenile delinquency could not be used in the interpretation of this case. The studies that could be used provided associations between mild juvenile delinquency and developmental characteristics of adolescent girls. The case studied also showed that

the overarching theme of the case was the need for social acceptance, which was not necessarily saturated by delinquent behaviour, as the participant herself later came to realize.

LIMITATIONS

The results of the qualitative study obviously cannot be generalised to cases of theft in adolescence. However, more qualitative studies of such a specific type of deviant sampling could bring meaning across cases to generalise step by step. The results of the study could be followed up with an evaluation study of, for example, a social experimental educational program aimed at adolescents who show tendencies towards mild delinquency. An evidence-based social prevention programme could target adolescents from functional families with the aim of learning acceptable strategies for gaining social acceptance.

This study has been strengthened by obtaining the perspective of girl's mother, father and brother.

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