

**Bonding and attitude among the Czech, Estonian and Hungarian children and young people.  
Analysing study based on data of the International Self-Report Delinquency Study-2 (ISR2)**

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**1 Goals and methods of the research.** The National Institute of Criminology has joined the ISR2-2<sup>1</sup> latency research, which is an international study aimed at revealing youth deviancies, in 2005-2006. Within the study 2 049 students from the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> school grades were interviewed about their families, hobbies, spare time spending habits and on the smaller, not unlawful acts, which might cause nuisance or disturbance to others, as well as on criminal acts committed by them.

The present analysis is based on the sample of the ISR2-2. We tried to set up a typology of characteristics of children and youth between the ages of 12 and 16, the changes caused by their age-development through the establishment of attitudes and bonding types, furthermore, we examined the relationship between the different attitudes and the strength of the parental control. During the analysis we have compared data referring to Hungary, the Czech Republic and Estonia, as these all represented national samples in the ISR2-2.

**2 Theoretical background of identifying bonding factors.** In the field of criminology the social bond theory was developed by Travis Hirschi. According to the theory, in order to keep somebody from delinquency, it is necessary to have sound basis (bonds) by the following four elements: 1) to be emotionally bonded to a person important to one, who shows a good example in respect of social inclusion (*attachment*); 2) to accept social norms (*commitment*); 3) to participate in so-called constructive social activities and recreational activities, which are preventing one from joining deviant groups or interiorising the “values” of such groups (*involvement*); 4) to accept the society's values and rules based on the belief that one benefits from avoiding confrontation with others by the interiorization of values and norms (*belief*); (Hirschi, 1969: 197, quoted by Korinek, 2006).

According to Hirschi's theory, the stronger the bonds are and the more intensive their participation in society is, individuals are less likely to become criminals. Among the bonding elements the most basic one is the attachment, which may manifest in three forms: attachment to parents, to school and to peers. However, according to Hirschi these bonding factors are not equally relevant in young people's lives, as from prevention aspect parental and school bonds are more important than bonding to friends and peer groups (Adler et al., 2000: 230-231).

In our analysis we tried to find out which of the three bonding factors is the strongest preventive factor and if there is any difference between the examined countries – Hungary,

Czech Republic and Estonia – from the aspect of bonding actors.<sup>1</sup> Based on the research data a fourth bonding factor could be identified, namely the relevance of the neighbourhood and of the residential area. Interesting was about this factor that this has shown differences depending on what kind of neighbourhood/residential area was put in focus, although it became clear on the other hand, that this factor determines the least young people's behaviour.

**3 Factors.** Besides the bonding factors we have studied the attitude of the interviewed students. By using the means of factor analysis we managed to distinguish three types of attitudes: the *risk-seeking*, the *selfish* and the *impulsive/nervous* types. In our analysis we have examined various bonds and basic data (gender, age), leisure habits, strength of parental control, victimisation, relationship to violence and the correlation between deviant behaviours. In respect of the three attitude factors we have also analysed the occurrence of crimes and the strength of parental control on the samples of all the three countries.

**4 Relationship between bonding factors and basic data.** The result of the factor analysis was interesting from the gender and the bonding factors point of view, whereas relevant differences were identified in the three countries in this respect. Regarding parental bonding we haven't found any significant correlation between the gender and the parental bonds of those interviewed in the Hungarian sample, while it was obvious that boys were much more bonded to their neighbourhood/residential area and their peer group/friends. However from this aspect the Hungarian sample seems unique. Surprisingly the Czech young people, namely the girls were less bound to their parents than boys; however bonding to peer groups/friends appeared to be exactly the opposite as the bonding proved to be stronger by girls than by boys. Unexpectedly no measurable correlation was found between the gender and the bonds to peer groups/friends in the case of the Estonian sample. The Estonian model was in line with the Czech results from the aspect of the parental bonds of girls which were weaker than that of the boys; however, the neighbourhood/residential area bond was – as expected – stronger by boys. The only question, in which there was a consistency of results in all the three countries, was the one of school bonding. School seemed more determining in the lives of girls in each of the three countries.

However, the role of school was found prominent with respect to other parameters as well, as it proved to be significant in withholding the individual from all kinds of deviancies. The role and responsibility of educational institutions is of course very complex and neither its function nor its position could be treated separately from other bonding factors. School determines the intellectual and moral progress of children, but, moreover, school education could complement family socialization and even compensate potential harmful effects of parental attitudes and negative values brought from the family. The formation of the company of friends' could neither be independent from the school, from the school atmosphere and from the teachers' pedagogical qualities. The quality of leisure time is as well highly influenced by the facilities educational institutions provide to students (e.g. special courses, sports facilities and arts craft workshops), therefore special attention has to be paid to the role of school bonds.

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<sup>1</sup> The original goal was to examine similarities and differences of social control mechanism in the three post-socialist countries, because we had the hypothesis that due to the socialist traditions, we encounter other patterns in these states than in the Western European countries. However, our research sample did not allow us the thorough examination of the issue of control, because these questions did not prove to be sufficient for the creation of "control factors".

In all of the three countries the age of 15 seems to be a turning point when it comes to the relationship between age and bonding. By this age, children become detached from their parents, they come to feel better among their friends and the influence of school bonding becomes radically weaker. One reason for these changes could be the changing of school on one hand, while on the other hand, changes may be the result of the development-psychological change, in which the effect by the peer group becomes dominant, while the school's and the teachers' presence become undesirable, *ad absurdum* "embarrassing". It is also to be emphasized, that for the Czech youth at the age of 17, not only the bonds to school and teachers become a burden, but the attachment to parents comes to be unpleasant: the rejection of parents by the Czech youth at this age shows an outstanding value.

Given the differences between educational systems that vary from country to country, the research only studied the relationship between school types and bonding in case of the Hungarian sample. In Hungary, students of the religious education institutions are the ones most bonded to their schools and students of foundation schools are the ones most attached to their friends. Most foundation schools are special educational institutions. These schools are mostly attended by children considered different from the average, deviant or "troubled", usually after having been displaced from their previous schools. The research has justified the fact that children much bonded to friends are the most risk taking and the least adapting ones, as well as the ones committing deviant acts in most cases. Therefore from crime prevention point of view, particular attention shall be paid to special schools dealing with hard-to-be-handled children.

**5 Relationship between leisure time spending and bonding.** We were not surprised to have found that in all of the three analysed countries, those mostly bonded to their friends spent the least time with their families and most time away from home. Children strongly bonded to their schools typically studied a lot, they watched television relatively less and chatted less on internet. However, minor differences could be found regarding the relationship between bonding factors and leisure spending habits in the analysed countries.

By the Czech sample bonds to residential areas were strongly associated with spending considerable time away from home as well as by the strong emotional bonds to friends. Conclusion is that in Czech Republic the community of friends are formed by those children who live in the same residential area therefore in the case of the Czech sample bonding to friends mostly coincides with bonding to the residential area. The same is the case by the Estonian sample, but here children bonded to their schools as well as children bonded to their parents, also spend relatively much of their time away from home. Family programmes scarcely occur by those bonded to their friends or to their residential areas, while in case of the other two groups parents regularly ensure meaningful free time activities for the family – especially at weekends.

Most students, who spend their free time alone, were found within the group bonded to schools, which may be the result of that the ones considering school important are more devoted to spend their time with studying. Along this line, it is not surprising that those bonded to friends were the ones spending the least of their free time alone and the more extended the company of their friends is the less lonely they are. By the Czech and Estonian sample the residential area appeared as a loneliness-reducing factor as well. It is quite obvious that those with extended company of and intensive bonds to friends do not spend much time

on their own. However the loneliness of those bonded to school is not quite self-evident given that school bonding – logically – should involve peer relationships too, as bonds to the institution cannot be separated neither from school programmes nor from the quality of the school community.

**6 Bonding and victimisation.** We have separately studied the specific forms of victimisation by the different types: no significant correlation was found between bonding to friends and victimisation, while bonding to parents was strongly correlated with the fact whether the child has fallen victim to robbery or not. Those mostly bonded to parents usually indicated that they had not become victim of robbery so far. The same tendency showed in the case of school bonding but to a smaller degree. (It was interesting that in this respect bonding to residential area also proved to be relevant – most likely those living in a better neighbourhood are less exposed to the risk of becoming a victim and are more bonded to the residential area.) The victimisation in fight cases showed a weak correlation with school and parental bonding, school bonding seems to protect children more from fights than parental bonding. Parental bond proved to be the most protective factor in cases of exclusion. According to the data of the Hungarian sample residential bonding provides a greater protection against exclusion than school bonding.

An interesting finding was that by the Czech sample, there was no significant correlation between bonding and falling victim to robbery. However victimisation in fight cases could be interpreted along parental bonding: those who were more bonded to their parents were less likely to become victims of fight. Regarding exclusion both school and parental bonding were found relevant, and by the Czech sample, parental bonding proved to be the strongest protective factor against exclusion as well as by the Hungarian students.

From the victimisation point of view by Estonia neither the company of friends nor the residential area proved to be significant: to a smaller degree school, and to a greater degree parental bonding proved to be protective factors in this respect, since both factors are protected to the same extent against fight and robbery. In case of the Estonian sample the issue of exclusion brought up different findings. In this respect school and the company of friends were of determining nature and both types of bonding proved to be protective factors against exclusion, however parental bonding was found irrelevant.

**7 Correlation between types of bonding and deviant acts.** One of the most important lessons learned from the research was that the decisive role of friends in deviant behaviour was justified. Hirschi's fundamental theses have been verified, according to which school and parental bonding and participation in common and constructive programmes, when occurring jointly, may retain young people from deviant behaviour. The company of friends has not proved to be a "factor of less significance" but the opposite, namely a negative factor in this respect. In other words, those young people mostly bonded to their company of friends were found more active in unlawful or "renitent" behaviour than the ones considering school and family as most important social bonds.

Purposeless vandalism most frequently occurred by those most bonded to the company of friends. Peer group has an enormous influence at this age. Pressure by the peer group and the encouraging effect the presence of group members can have to one another may inspire deviant acts even more. Destruction and damaging of objects, works of arts and buildings at public spaces are kinds of acts, where the identification of the offender is difficult or even

impossible, so young people do not find risky to commit such acts. Given this nature of the aforementioned acts, it is also obvious that the chance of joint offending is much higher than that of damaging objects of public spaces on one's own.

The same applies for the cases of *spooking*, the commission of such act is unimaginable without the supporting presence of the friends' company. The frequent occurrence of spooking by this age group is not surprising given that the one spooking the other on the street just for fun obviously does not commit any crime, so there is no danger of being caught and no legal consequences shall follow. This behaviour, however, is perfectly suitable for reflecting adolescents' attitude of turning against the whole world and of aiming to scandalize adults as well as to test their limits in general. We shall take note of the fact that attitude to spooking differs in the three countries. Those bonded to school in the Hungarian sample have more strongly refused this kind of behaviour than the same groups in the other two countries. This deviancy was most common among the Estonian sample, more closely among those bonded to the friends' company.

In our analysis, we have also examined the relationship between *bonding* and *victimisation*. Against becoming victim of robbery, fight and exclusion, the strongest protective factor proved to be the bonding to parents in all of the three countries, while the protecting function of school was also found significant.

**8 Attitude of respondents to violence.** To explore the issue of violence is a key target to criminological research. The question whether youth aggression shows increasing or stagnating tendency is subject of constant discussions both within public and scientific discourses. Our study – besides revealing the occurrence of specific violent acts – targeted to explore attitudes towards violence as well. Conclusions of this aspect of the study have justified the significance of the role of schools.

In all of the three countries young people mostly bonded to schools were the ones mostly refusing violent acts and violence as a whole, they were followed by the group of youth bond mostly to their parents. It is worth to mention that those bonded to school rejected to use violence even in cases when it would have served their own self-protection. This shows that those bond to school are the most conformist ones and aggression cannot be part of their attitude. This statement was highly justified in all of the three countries involved in the study.

Those having claimed themselves as bonded to their wider company of friends proved to be tolerating manifestations of violence in more aspects. For instance they have accepted violence as a form of demonstrating man power as well as a form of self-protection, though in other respects they would have not preferred to assault or threaten others either. In case of the Czech students, bonding to residential area was found relevant in this aspect as well: they had positive judgement of physical power used for the purpose of ensuring prestige. From this we can assume that the presence of young inhabitants' gangs, in which the leading role is strongly linked to the physical intimidation of members, is quite typical by the Czech sample.

Based on responses concerning general attitudes we have identified 3 types (factors) among respondents, namely the *risk-seeking*, the *selfish* and the *impulsive/nervous* types. The most aggressive children and youth showed significant alteration from the average in their impulsivity and in their risk-seeking attitude, as well as in their supportive approach to the

self-oriented pursuit of interests. Selfish behaviour and the obvious manifestation of such were not tolerated by otherwise aggressive children and youth either.

By analysing correlation between bonding factors and attitudes we have come to the recognition that those bonded to school are the least, while those bonded to friends are the most risk-seeking ones. Selfish children with the attitude of showing no regard to others – though most of them were from among those bonded to friends – were hardly found in the samples, they have formed an absolute minority. Selfish behaviour and the pursuit of self-oriented interests were the mostly disapproved by the respondent young people, which means that egoists were uniformly excluded by the community of youth, regardless to the bonds of the latter ones. However, it was also obvious by all of the three countries that those bonded to school and to parents considered sudden bursts of anger just as negative as risk-seeking behaviour. Residential area was not found as decisive factor in this respect by most of the samples in focus, however the Czech Republic was quite an exception from this point of view as well, whereas children and youth bonded to the residential area were almost as tolerant concerning risk-seeking attitudes as those, who found the most important emotional support in their company of friends.

### **9 Correlation between the occurrence of violent acts and the four types of bonding factors.**

Violent acts and positive attitude towards violence was most typical among youth bonded to friends' company. However it is also clear that the more serious the criminal act in question is, the less typical its occurrence is. Most protected community is the one of those bonded to school. This is followed by the group of those bonded to parents, who do not tolerate violence and not behave in a way that may be disapproved by the society either, though they seem to refuse violence to a smaller degree than those bonded to school. Based on deviancies and attitudes present in peer groups, we shall conclude that in the age group focused on in the study, the company of friends and the common means of free time spending are frequently associated with aggressive forms of behaviour.

**10 Correlations between bonding and crimes against property.** Remarkable finding was that while violent acts were refused in the greatest proportion by children and youth bonded to school, crimes against property – such as shop lifting, burglary, bicycle theft, car theft, pickpocketing – were the most disapproved by those bonded to parents. Crimes against property were typically committed by those bonded to friends.

**11 Correlation between addictions and the four bonding factors.** Violent deviancies were refused the most by those bonded to schools, while substance use was disapproved the most by those with parental bonds. There may be more explanations for this. One may be related to parental control over children. Those bonded more closely to parents are usually under stronger control or are willing more to comply with parental expectations. Other possible explanation may be that those bond to parents spend the least of their time among peers, as the ones bonded to schools – though these are much likely to form a separate group at school – cooperate more with each other and school programmes as well as free time activities are associated with interacting with peers. These common activities may form basis for friend groups that may give ground to deviant behaviours. According to a different approach violent behaviour is much more disapproved by the society than drug or alcohol consumption, as violent acts hurt others while by substance use one may harm only oneself.

**12 Violence-attitudes and deviancies.** An important question of our study was to what extent the practicing of deviant behaviour is influenced by the three types attitudes. We intended to find out whether the selfishness, the risk-seeking or the impulsivity is the factor mostly determining youth's behaviour. Based on individual risk-assessment studies, impulsivity was expected to be serious determining force in committing violence, but the findings turned out to be different. Committing crimes were most typical by the risk-seeking type, they were followed by the selfish type and the impulsive/nervous type has closed this line. Risk-seeking ones were most frequently involved with alcohol and drugs. Drug-dealing was also relatively frequent by this type.

**13 Bonding types and parental control.** Even more spectacular correlation has been revealed between bonds and the different forms of behaviour. Responses to the questions, what is allowed to children; in which activities children are willing to take part; how much is it known by parents where their kids are; and how much they obey instructions on what time to go home, were interpreted as manifestations of parental control.

Through our analysis we concluded that parents know most about kids with parental and school bonds, and those bonded to school are the ones obeying most. Children and youth bonded to friends' company are the ones spending most time away from home – this tendency was not only significant but linear. It became also clear that those children spend the least time away from home, who are most bonded to their school.

**14 Summary and lessons learned.** Two basic questions were focused on in our research. We were interested in finding out on one hand the extent, to which emotional bonding influences the occurrence of deviancies; and the quality of effect the different characteristic features – risk taking, selfishness, impulsivity – have on children's and young people's behaviour on the other hand. Most important conclusion of the research was that those risk seeking children and youth, who are bonded to their company of friends, are the most exposed to the risk of offending. Their bonds and attitudes are strongly determined by the weak parental control, the lack of marking out the limits and the lack of good relationship with parents. It also became obvious that school and parental bonds are equally relevant by the age group in focus, however school bond has a primary significance in respect of violence. Children strongly bonded to their school and finding there appropriate programmes and supportive atmosphere not only abstain from aggression but absolutely reject all manifestations of violence even through their attitudes.

Findings of the research showed as well, that there are no significant differences between the three Central Eastern European countries regarding bonding structures and attitudes. Slight alterations may give ground to draw conclusions on national particularities (e.g. residential area has a more serious influence on Czech and Estonian children and youth than on their Hungarian peers), but it is indisputable that problematic hubs are the same in all of the three countries. In accordance with the above, it is clear that crime prevention programmes shall target those children and youth, who spend their days involved in "troublesome" companies of friends. Another – and most important – finding of the research from a crime prevention point of view is that the role of schools, though their situation is often described as critical within the society of the 21st century, shall not be underestimated. In children's lives, it is of determining importance where, with whom and in what sort of atmosphere they spend most part of their days and whether, in addition to parental care and support, they have any chance of feeling good at and being able to bond to their schools.

## **References**

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