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## **Current family as a potential factor of risky behaviour among children and youth**

**Współczesna rodzina jako potencjalny czynnik w ryzykownych zachowaniach wśród dzieci i młodzieży**

### **Abstract**

The contribution presents the family as a potential factor of risky behaviour among children and juveniles in the Czech Republic. Youth conduct that violates social norms of the society can be labelled as deviant, risky, defective, etc. In recent years the concept of risky phenomena (or risky behaviour) has been introduced, particularly in school education; it replaced the previously used concept of socially pathological phenomena. Risky behaviour refers to those behaviours that have a negative impact on health, the social or psychological performance of an individual, or threaten his social surroundings. Such phenomena include, for example: truancy, crime and delinquency, various forms of aggression (bullying towards classmates and teachers), vandalism, self-aggression (self-harm, eating disorders), and abuse of addictive substances or dangerous phenomena related to information technology (e.g. cyber-bullying or addiction on the computer). Internal and external factors partake in the inception of deviant behaviour (signs of risky behaviour); introduced as multifactor etiology of the concept of social deviance. External factors are mostly perceived as fundamental; these are, for example: school, peers, the media, but especially the family. The post characterizes the contemporary family in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is defined by more features that can be

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perceived as risky in the forming of deviant behaviour. These include e.g. the demographic situation (low total fertility rate, increasing amount of cohabitation, high divorce rate, "missing" fathers), a deteriorating socio-economic situation (social exclusion, poverty), shifts in values (consumerism), or media coverage of human life.

**Keywords:** family, risky behaviour, social deviance, children, juveniles, etiology.

### Streszczenie

W artykule zaprezentowano rodzinę jako potencjalny czynnik wywołujący ryzykowne zachowania wśród dzieci i młodocianych w Czechach. Zachowania młodzieży naruszające normy społeczne określić można jako patologiczne, ryzykowne, niewłaściwe itd. W ostatnich latach zjawisko ryzykownych zachowań wprowadzono szczególnie w edukacji szkolnej; zastąpiło wcześniej stosowany termin „zachowanie patologiczne”. Zachowania ryzykowne to takie zachowania, które mają negatywny wpływ na zdrowie i funkcjonowanie społeczne, i psychologiczne jednostki, lub zagrażające jej otoczeniu społecznemu. Takie zachowania to wagarowanie, łamanie prawa, różne formy agresji (znęcanie się nad rówieśnikami i nauczycielami), autoagresja (samouszkodzenia, zaburzenia odżywiania), nadużywanie substancji uzależniających, jak również zachowania związane z technologiami informacyjnymi (np. zjawisko znęcania się w cyberprzestrzeni czy uzależnienie od komputera). Czynniki zewnętrzne i wewnętrzne prowadzą do zachowań łamiących normy (sygnały ryzykownych zachowań); wprowadza się wieloczynnikową etiologię odchylenia społecznego. Czynniki zewnętrzne zwykle postrzega się jako fundamentalne; są nimi, na przykład, szkoła, rówieśnicy, media, ale szczególnie rodzina. W artykule scharakteryzowano współczesną rodzinę w XXI wieku, którą określają liczne czynniki postrzegane jako formatywne występowanie zachowań odbiegających od normy. Należą do nich np. sytuacja demograficzna (niska dzietność, rosnąca liczba kohabitacji, wysoki odsetek rozwodów, ojcowie nieobecni), pogarszająca się sytuacja społeczno-ekonomiczna (wykluczenie społeczne, ubóstwo), zmiany systemu wartości (konsumpcjonizm) oraz obraz ludzkiego życia w mediach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzina, zachowania ryzykowne, odchylenie społeczne, dzieci, młodociani, etiologia.

## Risky Behaviour Etiology and Fundamental Terminology Definition

When independence was restored in 1989, the Czech Republic experienced fast social-economic and political transformation. The 21<sup>st</sup> century brought not only political release, socio-economical expansion together with emphasis on democracy and humanity, but also many social problems.

Youth risky behaviour is an interest of many scientific disciplines. Youth risky behaviour represents a broad multidisciplinary concept<sup>1</sup>; therefore it is important to start this article with basic terminology definition. Many terms are used to define behaviour that does not respect society's given social norms, for example socially pathological phenomena, social deviance, unreliable and problematic behaviour, risky behaviour<sup>2</sup>. The term social pathology has many meanings. It is a scientific discipline, but it especially represents the issue of societies and their "diseases". It denotes the socially pathological and socially undesirable phenomena<sup>3</sup>. The term social pathology is sometimes substituted with the term social deviance. The term social deviance is used to define phenomena that are not in accordance with accepted norms of social behaviour, in terms of being both negative and positive for the society (for example workaholicism). The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) uses, in its current documents, instead of the concept of socially pathological phenomena, the label "risky behaviour". Risky phenomena are defined as various forms of students' behaviour having negative impact on their health, social or psychological behaviour, or threaten their social environment<sup>4</sup>. The primary prevention in the jurisdiction of the ministry includes mainly activities in the areas of:

- violence and bullying,
- playing truant,
- criminality, delinquency, vandalism and further forms of violent behaviour,
- endangering morals and threatening the moral education of the young,
- xenophobia, racism, intolerance and anti-Semitism,
- use of addictive substances (including the neglected alcohol and smoking), anabolic steroids, medicaments and further substances,
- virtual drugs and pathological gambling,
- hooliganism,
- commercial sexual abuse of children,
- syndrome of maltreated and abused children,
- sects and sociopathic religious movements.

In the new documents MEYS works also with:

<sup>1</sup> V. Sobotková, M. Blatný, M. Hrdlička, M. Jelínek, *Rizikové a antisociální chování v adolescenci* [*Risky and Antisocial Behavior in Adolescence*], Grada, Praha 2014.

<sup>2</sup> S. Hoferková, *Různé přístupy ke společensky nežádoucím projevům chování mládeže* [*Different Approaches to Socially Undesirable Behavioural Manifestations of Youth*], [in:] *Acta sociopathologica II.*, Gaudeamus, Hradec Králové 2015, pp. 34–52.

<sup>3</sup> B. Kraus, J. Hroncová, *Sociální patologie* [*Social Pathology*], Gaudeamus, Hradec Králové 2010; P. Ondrejko, *Sociálna patológia* [*Social Pathology*], Veda, Bratislava 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Národní strategie primární prevence rizikového chování dětí a mládeže na období 2013–2018 [*National Risky Behaviour Primary Prevention Strategy for years 2013–2018*]. Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy [The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports], 2013, source: <http://www.kr-kralovehradecky.cz/cz/krajsky-urad/skolstvi/prevence-soc-patologickych-jevu/narodni-strategie-prima-mi-prevence-rizikoveho-chovani-deti-a-mladeze-na-obdobi-2013---2018-62422> [access: 31.08.2016].

- cyberbullying and other forms of risk communication (grooming) through multimedia,
- high-risk sports,
- risky behaviour in traffic,
- preventing accidents,
- sexual risky behaviour.

The multi-factorial concept of risky behaviour etiology clearly prevails in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The term “etiology” is derived from the Greek “*aitia*” – giving a reason for; and can be defined as a study of a set of causes that produce a monitored phenomenon, emphasising the existence of endogenous (internal) and exogenous (external) causes of deviant behaviour. In accordance with Kraus<sup>5</sup>, it must be stated that even though endogenous factors can not be underestimated, exogenous factors play very important role in personality formation. Experts<sup>6</sup> include especially the following factors in the exogenous factors group: family, school and other educational facilities, peer groups, local environment, and media. A family, being marked by all changes in the society within the last twenty years, plays undoubtedly the most important role from all of these factors.

## Contemporary Czech Family Characteristics

In its broadest sense, family is seen as a unit of diverse constellations encompassing the type of life that includes cohabitation between at least two generations of children and parents<sup>7</sup>. In the 1990’s there were major changes in demographic processes reflecting current changes in the Czech family<sup>8</sup>:

- a fall in marriage rates for both first time and repeat marriages – marriage was deferred by the younger generation to a later age, with its partial substitution by the expanding phenomenon of de facto relationships;
- the 1990’s also saw a continuing rise in the divorce rate that began during the Second World War. Among the main causes given for divorce are differences in disposition, views and interests;
- the most significant and widely discussed fall was in birth rate and fertility. The 1990’s saw the historically largest fall in the number of children born per year and the average number of children per woman of reproductive age.

<sup>5</sup> B. Kraus, *Sociální deviace v transformaci společnosti [Social Deviance in Transformation of Society]*, Gaudeamus, Hradec Králové 2015.

<sup>6</sup> P. Ondřejkovič, *Sociální patológia [Social Pathology]*, Veda, Bratislava 2009; P. Mühlpachr, *Sociopatologie [Sociopathology]*, Masarykova univerzita, Brno 2008.

<sup>7</sup> I. Sobotková, *Psychologie rodiny [Psychology of Family]*, Portál, Praha 2012; I. Možný, *Rodina a společnost [Family and Society]*, Sociologické nakladatelství (SLON), Praha 2008.

<sup>8</sup> National Family Report: (abridged version), Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs], 2004, source: [http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/4330/report\\_AJ.pdf](http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/4330/report_AJ.pdf) [access: 31.08.2016].

At the beginning of the 1990's, this indicator was still at 1.9. This major fall in fertility was, like marriage rates, due to a deferral in having children until a higher age: the current age of first time mothers is 25–26, while 10 years ago women first gave birth at an average age of 22–23. With the lower numbers of married women and lower numbers of children born in marriage, and as a result of more tolerance for alternative forms of family life (de facto relationships, single mothers, etc.), there has been a significant increase in the percentage of children born outside of marriage, rising from under 10% at the turn of the 80's and 90's, to more than 25%;

- a positive trend in recent years is a major fall in the number of abortions. Abortion trends are a reflection of more conscious family planning and more responsible sexual behaviour, combined with the more frequent use of contraceptive devices;
- family and parentage continues to hold a privileged position irrespective of age, education or other characteristics, although young people do not see significant differences between legalised partnerships through marriage and de facto couples more often than the older generation do;
- women's increasing employment rates in the second half of the 20th century and growing employer demands on performance in recent years; there is a growing need to effectively reconcile women's family and professional roles, while for most men, the dilemma of work and family poses practically no problem;
- the status of the child in the family is changing;
- with regard to intergenerational relations, research confirms the closeness and high standard of these relations, their so-called functional solidarity and willingness to provide mutual assistance within the context of the extended family. At the same time, however, a trend towards the greater independence of individual generations is also evident, beginning with separate living between nuclear families and adult individuals and the small degree to which assistance is requested from children or parents unless the situation acutely dictates the need. The cohabitation of older parents with their children's families in one household is not very common overall; this form is more common in the case of widowed or divorced mothers.

According to the demographic data about the contemporary family<sup>9</sup>, the total fertility rate was 1.57 in 2015, which is a number comparable to the data from the beginning of the 90's (the lowest fertility rate was detected in 1999) whether this positive trend will continue, the demographers can only speculate. The average age of mothers is still increasing; it was 30 years in 2015, primiparas were 28 years of age. Even though, the total divorce rate decreased slightly to 46% (maximum was 50% in 2010), it still represents very high percentage. The per-

<sup>9</sup> Population – annual time series, *The Czech Statistical Office (CZSO)*, 2015, source: [https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/population\\_hd](https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/population_hd) [access: 31.08.2016].

centage of live births outside marriage has been increasing since the 80's; currently it is 48%. As will be shown later in the paper, many of these demographic indicators may play a role in the etiology of risky behaviour.

## Family in Risky Behaviour Etiology

According to Marešová<sup>10</sup> adults' behaviour, mainly the behaviour of authorities, such as parents, teachers, but also the public, has an important impact on youth behaviour (also risky behaviour): "youth behaviour mirrors the behaviour of parents and other adults who form youth behaviour via social relations and pressure, positively or negatively, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly. However, in the current social climate realization of such relations is often missing. Youth is often described as an independent entity that was "given" to the society, because it is inconceivably problematic." Marešová<sup>11</sup> further mentions characteristic conditions for youth delinquency, such as confusion of values in society, hatred for workers lifestyle, disrespect for skills and knowledge of the elder, overestimation of youth skills, excusing youth antisocial behaviour, a cult of violence and etc. In the absence of positive changes in society, in the hierarchy of values, a significant change for the better cannot be expected.

A family performs many functions; it is irreplaceable especially in fulfilling an emotional function. It satisfies all fundamental needs of all its members; for example, the need for unity (to belong to one's home, the need to have a close person). A family provides space for active participation in a safe social environment, it teaches the child how to relate to the social environment, things, material equipment, and it provides a group of behaviour patterns, norms, and values (also deviant ones), etc.<sup>12</sup> Kraus<sup>13</sup> indicates the following circumstances characterizing the contemporary family as a potential factor in deviant behaviour:

- a) Demographic Situation; a growing tendency towards to non-marital relationships and therefore an increasing number of children born outside marriage (currently over 40%). A highly risky factor becomes the phenomenon of the missing father, because a child might not have an adequate male role figure in his/her life (a pronounce feminisation of our educational system also contributes to this situation, as does having no significant or long term influence

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<sup>10</sup> A. Marešová, *V dospívání se sklízí, co se v dětství zaseto* [Is Adolescence Reaping what is Sown in Childhood], [in:] M. Walancik, J. Hroncová, *Pedagogika społeczna wobec procesów żywiołowych i zachowań ryzykownych*, AKAPIT, Toruń 2013, p. 97.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> V. Bělik, S. Hoferková, T. Raszková, *Rodina v kontextu penitenciaristiky* [Family in Context of Penitentiary Work], [in:] M. Jůzl, *Sociální pedagogika v penitenciární praxi* [Social Pedagogy in Penitentiary Practice], Institut mezioborových studií, Brno 2014.

<sup>13</sup> B. Kraus, *Sociální deviance...*, op. cit.; Idem, *Společnost, rodina a sociální deviance* [Society, Family and Social Deviance], Gaudeamus, Hradec Králové 2014.

from grandparents in a family). Children raised by a single parent show, on average, in accordance with international comparative studies, poorer school performance, have more psychological problems and are also more often subjects to risk and illegal behaviour<sup>14</sup>. Another characteristic feature is the smaller number of children per family – a risk of deviant behaviour may be the same for an only child as well as for a member of a large family.

- b) Family Life Democratization; it is a result of many years ongoing women's emancipation together with an increasing level of their education and qualification. A shift in roles is notable especially in the decline of the authority of men and fathers (some authors speak even about “father crisis”). Democratic tendencies can be seen not only in the couple relationship but also in the relationship between parent and child.
- c) Family Socio-economic Situation; during the 90's an overall decline in real income and a greater number of households with lower incomes could be detected. Families living in poverty are undoubtedly vulnerable, or at its edge, socially excluded families. On the other hand, the shift of criminality towards the higher situated social classes can be interpreted as a result of the declining influence of a family on adolescent behaviour in all social classes<sup>15</sup>. It is often connected to the phenomenon called the “monetizing of childhood” which can lead to further deviant behaviour, such as alcohol and addictive substances abuse, and to gambling. The socio-economic situation of the family can be also connected with the issue of bullying; its victims are usually the children who are excluded from school events, who differ through their clothing or equipment (nowadays it is mainly via information technologies and gadgets).
- d) Disintegration of a Family Life; the number of families where its members are only “coming across each other” not truly living together or they do not communicate with each other at all, is increasing. The family becomes a so called “neutral zone” and its members are living alongside each other, not together. The phenomena mentioned: disintegration, atomization, internal instability, are reflected in a family life that is often accompanied with various social deviations.
- e) Family Solitude; the current family seems to be more closed, isolated and is living more “inside its boundaries”. Family is then getting smaller, not only by the smaller number of its members but even more so by the number and intensity of its social ties. This kind of a family is then more labile and sensitive to internal tremors<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> O. Matoušek, A. Matoušková, *Mládež a delikvence [Youth and Delinquency]*, Portál, Praha 2011.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> B. Kraus, *Základy sociální pedagogiky [Introduction to Social Pedagogy]*, Portál, Praha 2014b.

- f) Family Lifestyle; at present, the family lifestyle is marked mainly by consumerism, leading to the, above- mentioned, childhood monetizing, and materialization<sup>17</sup>.
- g) Shift in Roles; the pace of life, increasing demands and especially the socio-political and economic situation puts before a family new tasks that were unknown in the past and the family is not ready for them.

Also Helus<sup>18</sup> characterizes some problems of current families, which often start the life career of clients of socio-educational facilities: increasing number of divorces, weakening of traditional family ties, wider family environment instability.

A team of authors<sup>19</sup> from the Criminology and Social Prevention Institute conducted research focusing on 78 juvenile offenders that were convicted in 2006 of theft and who were put on probation with probation officer supervision. The subjects of the questions often had further offences in their criminal record. The offender's family situation turned out to be very important information as is shown by table No 1:

**Table 1. Juvenile Offender Family during the Years<sup>20</sup>**

Family	Youngster's family till age of 10 years		Youngster's family between age of 10 and 18 years	
	Absolute numbers	%	Absolute numbers	%
Whole family	28	38.4	21	28.8
Divorced	22	30.1	18	24.7
Single parents	12	16.4	13	17.8
Family completed again	2	2.7	8	11.0
Family is missing	6	8.2	10	13.7
Not identified	3	4.1	3	4.1
In total	73	100	73	100

Source: Author's research.

<sup>17</sup> B. Kraus, *Životní styl současné české rodiny [Lifestyle of Contemporary Czech Family]*, Gaudeamus, Hradec Králové 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Z. Helus, *Sociální psychologie pro pedagogy [Social Psychology for Educators]*, Grada, Praha 2007.

<sup>19</sup> K. Večerka, J. Holas, M. Štěchová, S. Diblíková, M. Luptáková, *Ohrožená mládež mezi prevencí a represí [Youth at Risk Between Prevention and Repression]*, Institut pro kriminologii a sociální prevenci, Praha 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 61.

**Tabela 1. Rodziny młodocianych przestępców w danym wieku**

Rodzina	Rodzina młodocianego przed 10. rokiem życia		Rodzina młodocianego między 10. a 18. rokiem życia	
	Liczba bezwzględna	%	Liczba bezwzględna	%
Pełna rodzina	28	38,4	21	28,8
Rozwiedziona	22	30,1	18	24,7
Samotni rodzice	12	16,4	13	17,8
Rodzina ponownie pełna	2	2,7	8	11,0
Brak rodziny	6	8,2	10	13,7
Nieokreślona	3	4,1	3	4,1
Razem	73	100	73	100

Źródło: Badania własne.

As table No 1 shows, 10% of young offenders lost family that was complete, between the ages of 10 and 18 years, meaning that they were brought up, in later years, by single parents, usually by mothers. Some families were completed again over the years, but there also were cases of families that virtually ceased to exist or became non-functional.

**Table 2. Family Parenting as Assessed by Social Workers<sup>21</sup>**

	Absolute Numbers	%
Without comments	2	2.7
Comments to parenting style	8	11.0
Bad parenting	35	47.9
Not identified	28	38.4
In total	73	100

Source: Author's research.

**Tabela 2. Rodzicielstwo w ocenie pracowników społecznych**

	Liczby bezwzględne	%
Brak komentarzy	2	2,7
Komentarze dotyczące postawy rodzicielskiej	8	11,0
Zła postawa rodzicielska	35	47,9
Nie zidentyfikowano	28	38,4
Razem	73	100

Źródło: Badania własne.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 62.

It was possible to get some information regarding the families parenting style from the assessment of the social workers (Tab. No 2). Even though the data is brief, it confirms a connection between inactive parenting and deviant behaviour in later years. In at least half of the cases the parenting was assessed as poor, which was concretely demonstrated by various problems, from youngsters' material situation to psychological distress.<sup>22</sup>

The following example describes a typical life story (based on the report from the children socio-legal protection body) of a boy living in a family where negative phenomena were gradually accumulated and resulted in boys criminal activities<sup>23</sup>:

John's parents divorced when he was 7. The boy was entrusted to the mother, who was unemployed and very soon after the divorce found herself a new partner. He had no siblings. John attended special school for children with speech disorder. He had serious problems with behaviour at school; since he was 10 he bullied the younger students, started to refuse to fulfil school duties etc. His behaviour was often criticised and he was given official warnings, grade II and III. His mother disparaged the problems and blamed school from her parenting failure. When the boy's problems escalated his mother decided for hospitalization of her son in DPL (Children Psychical Hospital). There his behaviour did not improve and he was medicated with drugs to calm him down. The whole situation got even worse when the mother started to work outside the Republic and the boy was entrusted to the care of her sister. At that time John began to commit crimes of petty theft. The case was always postponed due to the age of the offender.

## Conclusion

A family plays a major role in the socialization of an individual. A dysfunctional family environment is one of the main causes of behavioural disorders that start to appear even in early childhood. Focusing on juvenile convicts, according to statistics, "the number of convicted juveniles decreases, yet annually at least ten thousand children and adolescents are found guilty of conduct that would be classified as a criminal offence if it were conducted by adults. A thousand children are ordered into institutional care for their problematic behaviour every year; others are ordered protective education, and nearly two hundred are sent to prison. Not mentioning the other thousand children who are being sent to institutional facilities for an unsatisfactory family and social environment. Therefore, from central authorities to municipalities and non-profit organizations, it is im-

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, pp. 63–64.

portant to focus on risky behaviour and behaviour disorder prevention in families and schools (places where this behaviour originates and manifests itself). A simple but, somehow underrated, rule still applies; antisocial children generally become antisocial adults”<sup>24</sup>.

“Every society has such youth as it deserves by its system of norms, values, standards and by its compliance with it”<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 168.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

- National Family Report: (abridged version), Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs], 2004, source: [http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/4330/report\\_AJ.pdf](http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/4330/report_AJ.pdf) [access: 31.08.2016].
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