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FAMILY DETERMINANTS OF SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENT AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY ACCORDING TO NATALIA HAN-ILGIEWICZ

S u m m a r y: The purpose of the article is to review the key thoughts of Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz on the causes of social maladjustment and criminal delinquency in minors, related to the family environment. The text is based on the analysis of the content of selected works and research by the Polish scholar. According to Han-Ilgiewicz, among the most important causes of social maladjustment related to the functioning of the family are inadequate child-rearing practices and contacts, lack of strong family ties, the improper structure of relations in the family, and imitation of inappropriate behaviours.

K e y w o r d s: Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz, social maladjustment, criminal derailment, juvenile, family

Introduction

The issue of social maladjustment is often defined in the context of an individual malfunctioning in society because of character disorders, certain personality traits formed by internal factors or related to developmental conditions and the immediate environment.² One of the settings that is central to the emergence and development of social maladjustment is the family environment; the family being the place in which children realize their fundamental needs, acquire certain behavioural patterns and internalize a system of values. The family influences the

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² Bronisław Urban, *Zaburzenia w zachowaniu i przestępczość młodzieży* [Behavioral disorders and delinquency in youth] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2000), 29.

child's development in the intellectual, emotional, moral and social dimensions, which is the reason why many studies focus on exploring a relationship between the family and social maladjustment. Among the factors influencing the emergence of social maladjustment and juvenile criminality related to the family situation are the failure to meet the basic needs of the child, the previous criminal record of a parent, parental addictions, family violence or structural disorders in the family.³ Another factor that features heavily when it comes to social maladjustment and juvenile delinquency is the quality of interactions between parents and children.⁴

The impact of family environment on social maladjustment and the involvement of juveniles in criminal acts was one of the subjects of interest to the Polish researcher, pedagogue and criminologist Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz. Based on her experience of working with children and adolescents and her research, she reached certain conclusions about the impact of family conditions on the personality formation process as well as their role in the emergence of social maladjustment, and put forward suggestions regarding ways of dealing with morally neglected children and adolescents.

The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct Han-Ilgiewicz's criminological and pedagogical analysis of the role of the family environment in the emergence of social maladjustment, criminality and delinquency in children and adolescents. The method used was the content analysis of her selected publications. The criterion for the selection of literature for the analysis was the research problem, posed as the question 'In what way, according to Han-Ilgiewicz, is family environment relevant to the emergence and development of social maladjustment, criminality and delinquency in children and adolescents?'

Family in the works of Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz

According to the concept proposed by Han-Ilgiewicz, the family is the fundamental environment in which human development, including the development of personality, takes place. In her work, she stressed the need to treat the family as

³ See Helena Kołakowska-Przełomiec, "Środowisko rodzinne w świetle badań kryminologicznych" [Family environment in the light of criminological research]. In: *Zagadnienia nieprzystosowania społecznego i przestępczości w Polsce* [Issues of social maladjustment and crime in Poland], eds. Jerzy Jasiński, Stanisław Batawia (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1978); Jan M. Stanik, "Warunki opiekuńczo-wychowawcze w rodzinie, radzenie sobie z wymaganiami szkolnymi a stopień ryzyka przestępczości nieletnich" [Care and educational conditions in the family, coping with school requirements and the degree of risk of juvenile delinquency]. In: *Przestępczość nieletnich. Aspekty psychospołeczne i prawne* [Juvenile Delinquency. Psychosocial and legal aspects], eds. Jan M. Stanik, Leszek Woszczyk (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005); Monika Noszczyk-Bernasiewicz, "Family as a predictor of criminal behavior among juveniles". *The New Educational Review* 2 (2012); Ivan F. Nye, *Family Relationships and Delinquent Behavior* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958).

⁴ See James D. Unnever, Francis T. Cullen, Robert Agnew, "Why is bad parenting criminogenic: Implications from rival theories". *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 1 (2006), 5.

a single organism, functioning as a system that includes family members who are interrelated. In addition to the functions of the family linked to the provision of the conditions necessary for life and socialization, the researcher also distinguished the function of the educational influence of children on parents.⁵

A properly functioning family, Han-Ilgiewicz says, should share a hierarchy of values, and promote mutual respect for the rights and duties of each family member while striving for the healthy psychological development of each individual. Various interactions and kinds of contact occur within the family, among them the provision of care and affection, but also exposure to authority, tradition and shared aspirations.⁶ In addition, Han-Ilgiewicz noted the significance of dialogue in interactions and the fact that respect for dignity, sense of belonging and the provision of safety are particularly important for the development of the child's personality.⁷ A properly formed system of family relationships allows for the realization of regular contact with others⁸ and the formation of family bonds, which are the conditions for the proper development of the personality.⁹

According to Han-Ilgiewicz, the family is subject to continuous change which is not only the result of its everyday functioning, the personal development of its members and its social and economic status, but also a consequence of trans-family changes or events.¹⁰ She divided the factors affecting the quality of the family system into:

- wide-ranging factors (e.g., tradition, natural disasters, culture);
- individualized factors pertaining to a specific family (e.g., economic, health, social situation of the family);
- episodic factors (e.g., illness of a family member, loss of a job).¹¹

Another issue of interest to Han-Ilgiewicz was child-family conflict. Family conflicts, she pointed out, are an inevitable part of life and affect the personality development of family members. The source of the child's conflict with the family can be differences in aspirations or the involvement of the child in the business of adults. Conflicts can also result from inadequate or incomprehensible demands

⁵ Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz, *Więź rodzinna w aspekcie pedagogiki specjalnej* [Family ties in aspects of special Pedagogy] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966), 33.

⁶ Ead., *Trudności wychowawcze i ich tło psychiczne* [Difficulties of upbringing and their psychological background] (Warszawa: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1961), 53.

⁷ Ead., "Prawidłowy i nieprawidłowy układ stosunków w rodzinie" [Proper and improper relations in the family]. *Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze* 5 (1970). In: *Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz. Pisma: szkice, artykuły, rozprawy* [Writings: sketches, articles, dissertations], ed. Karol Poznański (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WSPS, 1995), 409-411.

⁸ Ead., *Dziecko w konflikcie z prawem karnym* [The child in conflict with the criminal law] (Warszawa: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1965), 89.

⁹ Ead., "Prawidłowy", 410.

¹⁰ Ead., "Dziecko w konflikcie z rodziną" [The child in conflict with the family] *Szkola Specjalna* 10 (1969). In: *Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz*.

¹¹ Ead., "Prawidłowy", 411-412.

made on the child.¹² According to Han-Ilgiewicz, apart from the conflict itself, the most relevant aspect of this for the child's development is the opportunity to participate in conflict resolution and have a say in the way a conflict is resolved. A positive resolution of conflict gives the child an experience of resolving demanding situations and gives them an opportunity to prevent conflict in the future. Han-Ilgiewicz argued that badly handled conflict resolution is one of the elements that make up the child's "negative psychological dowry,"¹³ which is a risk factor when it comes to social maladjustment.

Causes of social maladjustment and juvenile delinquency related to the family environment

Han-Ilgiewicz defined antisociality as "the inability to adapt to the demands of the environment and to subordinate one's self to the interests of other individuals."¹⁴ She defines social maladjustment as a dynamic process consisting of inappropriate development in the ethical sphere, the breaking of social ties and "the prevalence of interactions that drive those participating in the process away from one another."¹⁵ She also mentions the various aspects of maladjustment as conditions, people, norms, chosen goals and values.¹⁶ Maladjustment to conditions is particularly relevant in view of the overall theme of her research. Economic conditions that cause poverty and consequently may lead to aggression, rebellion, discouragement or striving to change by engaging in criminal behavior, among other things, are crucial here. Han-Ilgiewicz points out that "conditions associated with excessive wealth pose a serious threat to the proper growth of a personality, as they may induce indolence, atrophy of the will, inability to stand tall in the face of unavoidable difficulties."¹⁷ Social maladjustment can result from the overall atmosphere in the child's immediate environment, inability to establish contacts or the making of inappropriate contacts, which negatively affect the moral development of the child. An adolescent may also manifest a form of maladjustment to commonly accepted norms, which may consist of the rejection of a particular norm or of involvement in factors that cause the individual to act against the norm.¹⁸

¹² Ead., "Dziecko", 379.

¹³ Ead., *Trudności*, 58.

¹⁴ Ead., "Dziecko". All quotations from the works of Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz have been translated for the purposes of this article by Marta Robson.

¹⁵ Ead., *Trudności*, 38.

¹⁶ Ead., *Dziecko*, 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 87-100.

When studying the causes of social maladjustment, especially in the dimension of maladjustment to goals and values, Han-Ilgiewicz used the concept of ‘mental immunity’, understood as the ability to resist negative factors using inner resources that help individuals comply with norms.¹⁹ She discusses a connection between the possession of mental immunity and factors related to family life.²⁰ Mental immunity provides protection against adverse external factors, enabling one to act in accordance with one’s values and goals.

In her discussion of the causes of social maladjustment and delinquency, Han-Ilgiewicz asserts that among juveniles who commit crimes, there are those who are not able, cannot or do not wish to act in accordance with the law. In the first category, she included individuals with mental illness or intellectual disabilities, causing an inability to manage their behaviour or understand the consequences of an act. The second group includes juveniles who are unable to conform to the norms of the law. According to Han-Ilgiewicz, this is a consequence of “pedagogical delay and neglect”, preventing the acquisition of the skills necessary to observe certain ethical and social norms.²¹ The behaviour of the last group of adolescents who do not wish to follow legal norms is typically characterized by an attitude of resistance. Interestingly in this context, Han-Ilgiewicz did not fully support the division into exogenous and endogenous offenders. She pointed out that educators did not always have enough information to accurately determine the causes of criminal delinquency. In addition, making the distinction between innate and acquired characteristics behind the derailment of a young person is, as she says, “an extremely difficult and complicated task.”²² The difficulty is related to uncertainty about whether certain factors in the external environment, including the family environment, affect people with innate traits that are risk factors in the same way as people without these traits.

Based on the results of her research, in her works Han-Ilgiewicz emphasizes the significance of a range of factors that determine the social maladjustment of children and adolescents. Among them, worth mentioning are those related to physical conditions or economic circumstances, difficulties at school, including educational issues, and functioning in an inadequate system of social contacts.²³ There are also risk factors that are directly linked to the functioning of the family

¹⁹ For more on mental immunity, see ead., “Immunitet psychiczny i jego rola w pedagogice leczniczej” [Mental immunity and its role in therapeutic pedagogy], *Szkoła Specjalna* 3 (1957), 129–146.

²⁰ This conclusion was formulated by Han-Ilgiewicz based on an analysis of documents from the notes on former patients or inmates.

²¹ Ead., *Dziecko*, 77.

²² *Ibid.*, 75.

²³ Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz, “Więź rodzinna u młodzieży społecznie niedostosowanej” [Family bonds in socially maladjusted adolescents]. In: *Materiały do nauczania psychologii* [Materials for teaching psychology], ed. Lidia Wołoszynowa (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1965). In: *Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz*, 319–320.

as one of the environments that directly affects the development of socio-ethical maturity. As Han-Ilgiewicz says “because of poverty, hereditary burden, negative influences of the environment and mistakes of an educational nature, such features as envy and aversion to people who are of higher material status are formed in the psyche of these children. Along with an abnormal psychophysical make-up that makes it difficult for them to fight the inherited bad inclinations, they easily succumb to influence, seeking the easiest path, following the line of least resistance to satisfy their desires.”²⁴

Factors related to the characteristics of parents and family type, or structure may be specified as belonging to the first group. Han-Ilgiewicz suggests that parents’ criminal record, antisociality and unsuccessful personal life influence their attitude towards the child. Based on her research, she points out that socially vulnerable children are raised in decomposed and reconstructed families, where parental criminality, constant quarrels, and alcoholism are among the basic social problems.²⁵ The helplessness of parents and their inability to recognize the emotional states of the child may also pose a threat to proper (including social) development. As Han-Ilgiewicz asserts, the incorrect psychological development of the child may also be influenced by parental errors in upbringing. Constant prohibitions or punishments can cause maladjustment to norms through the child’s sense of dependence, and lack of initiative or autonomy.²⁶ It is worth pointing out that Han-Ilgiewicz suggests the existence of a correlation between an inability to act independently and social derailment.²⁷ Speaking of inappropriate upbringing practices, she also identifies the negative impact of an upbringing that is too strict and also spoiling the child. A harsh upbringing, involving failure to understand the child’s needs or disallowing of independent expression and restricting the child’s autonomy are behind the activation of defensive responses such as aggression, running away, isolation or indifference in the same way as an upbringing that is too overly permissive.²⁸ Responses in the form of aggressive behavior, vagrancy, and truancy from school are the direct symptoms of social maladjustment.

Another reason for this is related to the contacts established by the child, with the most important being those inside the family environment.²⁹ Han-Ilgiewicz

²⁴ Ead., “Specyficzne rysy psychiki dzieci moralnie zaniedbanych” [Specific features of the psyche of morally neglected children]. *Szkoła Specjalna* 3 (1931/1932), after: Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz, 67–68.

²⁵ Ead., *Nieznosni chłopcy. Typy plastyczności psychicznej w diagnostyce szkolnej* [Unbearable boys. Types of mental plasticity in school diagnostics] (Warszawa: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1960), 76–77.

²⁶ Ead., *Dziecko*, 101.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁸ Han-Ilgiewicz, *Trudności*, 132–134.

²⁹ Ead., *Dziecko*, 89.

speaks also of the prenatal period³⁰ and the role of the mother's attitude toward the child. According to the researcher, a woman's attitude towards her child in the prenatal period is of fundamental importance for the processes of personality development and future social maladjustment. Her research showed that only seven percent of socially maladjusted children were planned by their parents. Throughout her work Han-Ilgiewicz often emphasizes the significance of the child's contact with the mother in the process of psychological development, which is, in her opinion, most dominant in the first years of a child's life, influencing the overall atmosphere that determines the mother's behavior toward the child. Additionally, contacts taking place in an atmosphere lacking care, with disrespect for the child's dignity or property, as well as a lack of understanding of the child's mental states or experiences, causes disorders in the emotional sphere, and the observance of norms becomes perceived through the prism of negative feelings.³¹

Within the family environment bonds are formed between individual members, which secure the child's need for belonging. Han-Ilgiewicz emphasizes the importance of a child seeing "my own" people as distinct and separate from "others", that is the formation of a family union. As she understands it, children who do not have a sense of their family's distinct character, in the family's interactions with the external world, perceive the boundaries of ownership in a 'flexible' manner,³² which could result in behaviours symptomatic of social maladjustment or criminal derailment. The results of Han-Ilgiewicz's study on the relationship between family ties and the degree of rehabilitation of children are worth quoting in this context.³³ In the initial breakdown, attention is drawn to the data indicating that children who underwent either complete or partial rehabilitation were attached to the family. On the contrary, children who were unattached to the family or were hostile to it were less likely to change their behavior towards socialization.³⁴

Referring to the concept of the family as an organism, Han-Ilgiewicz highlights the role of reconciliation and the formation of a proper system of relationships. In her opinion, an improper formation of relationships in the family results in the weakening of the mental capacity for the development and assimilation of certain educational content. As she asserted,

³⁰ Ead., *Potrzeby psychiczne dziecka* [The child's mental needs] (Warszawa: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1963), 40.

³¹ Ead., "Specyficzne", 68-69.

³² Ead., *Potrzeby*, 45.

³³ In the study, it was assumed that complete (full) rehabilitation was evidenced by a fundamental change in attitudes toward oneself and other people, toward the life situation and the supreme value (e.g., a sense of responsibility, an increased sense of dignity, socialization). To the category of partial rehabilitation were assigned individuals who manifested a change in one attitude but were characterized by a lack of formed mental immunity. The category of no revalidation included individuals who showed no signs of socialization and influenced others in a negative way; ead., "Więź", 326.

³⁴ Ibid., 326-333.

A young child is for a long time a receptor of the norms of behavior instilled in it. A correct or defective behavior towards the child impregnates it in a specific, tangible way. The matter becomes especially complicated when negative educational impregnation from early childhood not only instills the wrong content but leads to much more dangerous consequences closing certain mental structures, reducing plasticity, stiffening the child's character.³⁵

Conflicts are also a risk factor for social maladjustment, arising from the arrangement of relationships, discrepancies between one's own and externally prevailing norms, social contacts and activities. Negative effects on the development of the child can be caused by unresolved or inadequately resolved conflicts as well as failure to learn from past conflicts or from their own experience.

Another element related to the family environment and influencing the child's future behavior is imitation. By observing the behaviours of parents, the child begins to discover norms of behaviour. According to Han-Ilgiewicz, this takes place through assimilation "without the special involvement of the child's will, as if it were drawn into the orbit of certain behaviour."³⁶ Children accept that the conduct of their family members is correct and assimilate certain models of behavior, especially since their capacity for critical thinking is still in the early stages of development. Han-Ilgiewicz indicates that such characteristics as repetitive behaviour, shared values behind the actions observed by the child, and emotional relationship with the role model consolidate the process of assimilation of behavioural patterns.³⁷ Through imitation, the child learns not only correct behaviour, but may also assimilate inappropriate models of behaviour which manifest in social maladjustment.

Conclusions

The views of Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz are characteristic of the positivist concept. She saw the causes of social maladjustment as rooted directly in the personality of the child but also stressed the importance of environmental conditions in the process of personality formation,³⁸ with one of the most important roles in this regard being played by the family. An important task in the process of socializing children is raising awareness of these issues within the socially maladjusted family; work here should focus on explaining the causes of social maladjustment and drawing attention to the child's positive qualities. Han-Ilgiewicz says that "influencing the parents and their attitude to the child is such an important part of educational

³⁵ Ead., "Prawidłowy", 413.

³⁶ Ead., *Nieznosni*, 196.

³⁷ Ead., *Dziecko*.

³⁸ Justyna Kuształ, "Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz's concept of rehabilitation and its contemporary interpretation" *Pedagogical Biography* 2 (2020), 21.

work that overlooking the right moments sometimes directly derails our efforts.”³⁹ A prerequisite for educational work with children should be the recognition of the conditions in which they develop, which means, first of all, the family environment, which in this model has the greatest influence on the behavior displayed by the child. Learning about its causes, such as family conflicts, functioning within certain relationships between family members or the personal failures of parents, leads to the proper understanding of the child’s behaviour.

Nowadays, the highest importance is attributed to the family as the primary place of the child’s socialization and upbringing. The functioning of the family may contribute to social maladjustment or the criminal derailment of a child or adolescent. The literature on the causes of criminal delinquency related to the family environment draws attention, among other things, to the child’s needs not being met within the family, or family ties being weakened,⁴⁰ proper care not being provided,⁴¹ appropriate parental control not being exercised, educational methods being inadequate,⁴² or the presence of social pathologies.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that many of Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz’s thoughts on the causes of social maladjustment and criminal derailment inherent in the family remain relevant today, providing solid foundations for further research. As examples of issues worthy of further consideration, we should mention the emergence of conflict within the family, and ways of resolving it from the perspective of the child, as well as ways of working with the family of a child who is socially maladjusted or commits criminal acts, especially in the context of children who are placed in 24-hour care.

Translated from Polish by Marta Robson

Rodzinne uwarunkowania niedostosowania społecznego i przestępczości nieletnich według Natalii Han-Ilgiewicz

S t r e s z c z e n i e: Celem artykułu jest zrekonstruowanie najważniejszych myśli Natalii Han-Ilgiewicz dotyczących przyczyn niedostosowania społecznego i wykolejenia przestępczego nieletnich, związanych ze środowiskiem rodzinnym. Tekst został oparty na analizie treści wybranych prac i wyników badań polskiej badaczki. Według Natalii Han-Ilgiewicz wśród najważniejszych przyczyn niedostosowania społecznego związanych z funkcjonowaniem rodziny należy wymienić

³⁹ Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz, “Konflikt dziecka z rodziną” [The child in conflict with the family]. *Szkoła Specjalna* 1(1933), 80. In: *Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz*.

⁴⁰ Mariusz Dobijański, Arkadiusz Kamiński, *Niedostosowanie społeczne nieletnich. Profilaktyka i resocjalizacja* [Social maladjustment of minors. Prevention and Resocialization] (Siedlce: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach, 2020), 13, 20.

⁴¹ Paweł Kobes, *Orzekanie i wykonywanie kary pozbawienia wolności wobec nieletnich w Polsce* [Sentencing and detention of the underaged in Poland] (Warszawa: Difin, 2015), 133.

⁴² Kołakowska-Przełomiec, “Środowisko”, 321-324.

nieodpowiednie praktyki wychowawcze i kontakty, brak więzi rodzinnej, niewłaściwy układ stosunków w rodzinie oraz naśladownictwo.

Słowa kluczowe: Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz, niedostosowanie społeczne, wykojenie przestępcze, nieletni, rodzina

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