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THE EARLY ONSET OF CRIMINAL CAREERS OF ORGANIZED CRIME OFFENDERS IN POLAND AS A FACTOR SHAPING FUTURE CHRONIC OFFENDERS

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: *Although the research on criminal careers of juveniles or adolescents is more common in criminology than research on mature offenders, life-course analyses are beneficial because they provide a new perspective on the issue. The purpose of this publication is to characterize the early onset of criminal careers of the members of organized criminal groups and the future criminal career of offenders in the context of the Polish experience. The main questions the present study strives to answer are as follows: Which crimes are typical at the early stage of the criminal careers of the Polish members of organized criminal groups? Does the age at which a person begins a criminal career influence the type of the first offence committed? Which circumstances, in the opinion of respondents, were crucial to the onset of their criminal career?*

Research methods: *In this particular study, classical methods and techniques developed within the framework of humanities and social sciences were applied to address the raised questions and to formulate conclusions. Therefore, the primary research method included statistical analysis and legal methods (including formal-legal method). The study was based on the authors' own research, and the research sample was designed to enable both: qualitative and quantitative research.*

Results: *The present article constitutes part of a broader research on criminal careers of organized crime offenders in Poland. The article presents only a selected group of respondents characterized by the early-onset of criminal careers. The research sample was divided into two groups: offenders with a childhood-onset of criminal careers (up to the age of 12) and offenders with an adolescence-onset of criminal careers (at the age of 13-17). According to the conducted research, a characteristic feature of the respondents was a criminal trajectory that began with some minor property offences. However, in contrast to the offenders with a childhood-onset of criminal careers, the respondents with an adolescence-onset of criminal activity exhibited faster pace than criminal career development. The representatives of the older group paid more attention to the material benefits derived from criminal activity. Their crimes were not motivated by a desire for adventure.*

Conclusion: *In Poland, the members of organized crime groups constitute approximately 3% of all convicted offenders, therefore represent a relatively small segment of the convicted. The research findings indicate that offenders with a childhood-onset of criminal careers were often under the influence of criminal subcultures from an early age and provided with some criminal role models. Under the influence of such patterns, they became involved in organized criminal groups. The early onset of criminal activities before the age of 12 frequently forecasts a long term criminal career.*

KEYWORDS: *criminal career, offender, criminal behavior, organized crime, criminology*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of organized crime has dynamically evolved in the 21st century research. Interest in the criminal careers of organized crime offenders has increased over the last decades. It is interesting to consider that researchers often apply the comparative methods to indicate similarities and differences in criminal careers across European and other countries (e.g. Calderoni, Comunale, van der Geest and Kleemans, 2024, pp. 694-724; Morgan and Payne, 2021, pp. 1-20; Savona, Calderoni, Campedelli, Comunale, Ferrarini and Meneghini, 2020, pp. 192-312).

It is significant that, in criminology, the research on criminal careers of juveniles and adolescents is more common than on research mature offenders (Cullen, 2011, pp. 126-131). However, the need for the further research on adults is emphasized in the subject-related literature (Zara and Farrington, 2010, pp. 257-273; Kleemans, 2014, pp. 42 ff.; Sheley, 2000, pp. 117 ff.). As far as criminal careers are concerned, the research on the offenders involved in high-volume crime, high-profit crime (e.g. white-collar criminals) (van Onna, 2018; Shover and Hochstetler, 2006; Weisburd et al., 2001), and organized crime offenders has become popular (Kleemans and van Koppen, 2020; Savona et al., 2020; Campedelli et al., 2019; Kleemans and de Poot, 2008; van Koppen et al., 2010; Wang, 2013; Francis et al., 2013; Kleemans and van de Bunt, 1999). Life-course analyses are valuable because they provide a new perspective on criminal behavior and its development (Cullen, 2011, p. 310; Carlsson and Sarnecki, 2016; Gozubenli and Unal, 2014, pp. 1-9). G. Zara and D.P. Farrington emphasize the importance of consideration of dynamic psychological factors in order to improve targeted prevention and intervention programs designed for the offenders of different onsets of criminal activity (2013, pp. 235-249).

On 8-11 September 2010, during the 10th Conference of the European Society of Criminology in Liège, Vere van Koppen, Christianne de Poot, and Arjan Blokland presented their conference paper entitled *Comparing criminal careers of organized crime offenders and general offenders*. The paper provided a comparative analysis of the criminal careers of organized crime offenders and high-volume crime offenders. According to authors, organized crime offenders begin their careers much later than high-volume crime offenders

(van Koppen, de Poot and Blokland, 2010, pp. 356–374). The age of organized crime offenders is an important factor in the analysis of their criminal careers (Kleemans and de Poot, 2008, pp. 69–98; Sokalska and Kotowska, 2022, pp. 134–158). An overrepresentation of the older offenders is noticeable in organized criminal groups (Francis et al., 2013; Kleemans and De Poot, 2008, pp. 69–98). It is significant that from the perspective of developmental criminology, the influence on criminal behavior constitutes one of the most significant issues.

It is noticed that a great amount of organized crime offenders have short or very short ‘official’ criminal careers. According to Edward R. Kleemans and Christianne de Poot (2008), 28% of the treatment group had no prior judicial contacts (criminal proceedings). However, due to the character of their occupation, their involvement in crime must have lasted for a certain period. The results of research of other scholars are similar. The data indicate that offenders who had not previously been identified by law-enforcement authorities were often immigrants who had lived abroad. Therefore, the available data were incomplete because the police records were not fully complete. An important aspect of the mentioned research was also that in the case of organized crime offenders, a significant amount of offenders had their first contact with the judiciary at a stage when their criminal career should already have come to an end.

In Poland, the members of organized crime groups constitute approximately 3% of all convicted offenders, therefore represent a relatively small group of the convicted population. Although their activities have been the subject of the scientific literature (e.g. Klaus, Rzeplińska, Wiktorska and Woźniakowska-Fajst, 2021; Klaus and Woźniakowska-Fajst, 2021, pp. 9–30; Rzeplińska, 2021, pp. 91–120), a more systematic and theoretically grounded analysis is still required in order to fill existing research gaps. The purpose of this publication is to characterize an early onset of criminal careers of the members of organized criminal groups and to examine the future criminal career of offenders in the context of the Polish experience. Unfortunately, since the modest scope of this article does not allow for an exhaustive treatment of the subject, the present work is contributory in nature. Therefore, the analysis focuses primarily on offenders whose criminal activities began before

the age of 18. Nevertheless, offenders with an adult-onset of criminal careers also constitute an interesting group for the further research. The main questions the present study strives to answer are as follows: Which crimes are typical at the early stage of the criminal careers of the Polish members of organized criminal groups? Does the age at which a person begins a criminal career influence the type of the first offence committed? Which circumstances, in the opinion of respondents, were crucial to the onset of their criminal career?

The study consists of two parts. The research on the offenders with a childhood-onset of criminal careers (up to the age of 12) is presented in the first part of the article. The second part of the publication is devoted to the offenders with an adolescence-onset of criminal careers (at the age of 13-17). In this particular study, classical methods and techniques developed within the framework of humanities and social sciences were applied to address the research questions and formulate conclusions. Therefore, the primary research methods included statistical analysis and legal methods (including formal-legal method). The study is based on the own authors' research, and the research sample was designed to enable to allow both: qualitative and quantitative analyses.

It should be mentioned that the present article is part of a broader research project on criminal careers of organized crime offenders in Poland (Kotowska, 2019; Kotowska, 2022a, pp. 331-347; Kotowska, 2022b, pp. 37-54; Sokalska and Kotowska, 2022, pp. 134-158). There were examined 157 offenders from 16 detention centers. During the selection of members of organized criminal groups in order to examine their criminal careers, it was assumed that they would be offenders sentenced by a final court judgment according to Art. 258 §1 of Polish Penal Code, and/or Art. 258 §2 of Polish Penal Code, and/or Art. 258 §3 of Polish Penal Code (Journal of Law of the Republic of Poland, 1997, no. 88, pos. 553), who were sentenced to imprisonment, and at the time of the research, they stayed at selected detention centers or prisons in the period from October 2012 to December 2017. This constituted the formal criterion for identifying respondents and distinguishing them from the other offenders involved in crime (Sokalska and Kotowska, 2022, pp. 138-140). The subject of analysis included penitentiary files and conducted interviews. The data were anonymized, and each offender was assigned a number from B.1

(the first respondent) to B.157 (the 157th respondent). The research was conducted personally in the period from the 1 October 2012 to 30 December 2019. It should be taken into closer consideration that only a selected group of respondents with an early onset of criminal careers is presented in the article below.

THE EXAMINED OFFENDERS WITH AN CHILDHOOD-ONSET OF CRIMINAL CAREERS (UP TO THE AGE OF 12)

In the subject related literature, it is assumed that an early onset of criminal activity (up to the age of 12) often predicts a long criminal career (Sokalska and Kotowska, 2022, p. 143). Taking into account the length and persistence of criminal involvement, risk factors occurring during childhood and early childhood are considered the most significant, although researchers emphasize that key risk factors appear very early, even before the age of 5 and during the first years of education (Morizot and Kazemian 2015, p. 4). Aaggression, impulsiveness, hyperactivity, and other behavioral problems manifested at the age of 8, may predict future involvement in criminal activities at age of 30 (Thornberry, 1987, pp. 863-891; Gozubenli and Unal, 2014, pp. 2 ff.; Uggen, 2000, pp. 529-546).

In the group of respondents up to the age of 12, the first crime was committed by almost 17% of perpetrators (26 persons). Criminal perpetrators dominated this group – 7,64% (12 persons), followed by drug trafficking involved offenders 3,82% (6 persons). Finally, frauds offenders (2,55% – 4 persons) and multi-offense offenders (2,55% – 4 persons) were identified. Both analyses of penitentiary files and interviews indicate that all respondents had committed numerous crimes. From adolescence into these individuals remained involved in criminal activity whenever opportunity arose. They represent the category of a chronic offenders. Based on the own research, we can assume that the characteristic feature of the members of organized criminal groups is over-representativeness of individuals with very early criminal careers among chronic offenders in comparison to the other research. It is interesting to consider that, according to the research of T. Moffit, the chronic offenders, with an early-onset of their criminal careers who continue their criminal activities until they are no longer

able to do so constitute 10% of the research group (Moffit 1993, pp. 674-701). The research of M.E. Wolfgang, R.M. Figlio, and T. Sellin (1972) shows that chronic offenders constitute 6% of the research group.

In our research, all examined persons were brought up in the families, where various problems were noticed. The most frequently reported issues included: alcohol abuse by one or both parents, unemployment of one or both parents, and an unfavorable educational atmosphere within the family (quarrels between parents, neglecting children). All respondents reported that their families were in a difficult financial situation, which contributed to feelings of social disadvantage compared to their schoolmates. All respondents also mentioned problems with school education. During the interview, respondents often had problems with determining the onset of their criminal activities. In their perception, it was a continuous process rather than a single event.

An example of an offender who meets the above descriptive criteria is B.50 (the respondent was sentenced for leading an organized armed criminal group involved in drug trafficking, kidnapping, and profiting from prostitution. Using an illegally possessed mobile phone, a landline phone in a prison, and his visitors, offender issued some instructions to the members of his criminal group. He provided briefings on the group's operation and activities, and pointed out persons who were to carry out certain crimes). During the interview, the respondent stated that he had been a thief from an early age, according to his family members – this likely began in kindergarten. At the age of 12, a protecting educational measure was imposed, and he was placed in an educational center. From the age of 17, he was in a detention center, and at the age of 19 he was sentenced to 4 years imprisonment (for robbery). The respondent served his imprisonment sentence for three and a half year. Then, his criminal career continued, with only temporary interruption during the period spent in detention centers and prison.

The onset of a criminal career of B. 136 was similar (the respondent participated in an organized armed criminal group, in which he committed robberies using firearms and engaged in kidnapping). During the interview the respondent reported: *I come from a large voivodship city. I am from a poor working class family. My mother raised us without our father. I grew up in such a district where most people around stayed in prison. (...) There were financial problems*

at home, and I began running away from home. My education was poor because I was absent at school and did not study. I had an older sister. We had a small apartment. The conditions and atmosphere at home were not good. At the age of 15, I was sentenced by a court for assault. Then, at the age of 17, I was imprisoned for the first time, also for assaulting a boy. These assaults were coincidental events; I didn't accept many things at home or at school, and I reacted when someone provoked me. (...) I am aggressive, and I became aggressive when someone is in my way. In my life, I committed robberies – only armed robberies....

The interviews show that the respondents with an early-onset of their criminal careers usually committed their first criminal activities of curiosity, in order to spend time in a different way, to establish their position among peers, to impress their colleagues, or due to a lack of pocket money. 18 assessed their early offences as incidental in nature. Only during adolescence, approximately at the age of 14-15, did the frequency of offenses increase. 3 respondents stated that they had been committing crimes from the beginning, whenever they had the opportunity. In their opinion, the frequency of crime commitments was high. 3 respondents were not able to answer the question.

As for type of the first offense, it almost always involved property crime: theft and then burglary. As respondents grew older and physically stronger, they also began to commit robberies. According to the respondents, the change in the type of committed crimes resulted from the persuasion or influence of the older colleagues with criminal experience, whom the respondents perceived as authority figures. On the one hand, they impressed the respondents; on the other hand, the shift in profile of criminal activity was associated with the greater profit.

In most cases, the examined offenders committed crimes as members of a group consisting of other minors or adolescents. Initially, they often watched the older colleagues who committed criminal offenses. Over the time, they became passive members of such groups, watching other members until they eventually began to commit offences themselves, thereby earning the respect and of their older co-offenders.

The example of B.30 illustrates the above conclusion (the respondent was sentenced to 1 year of imprisonment for participation in an organized criminal group involved in so-called car crime – theft and illegal transfer of stolen cars

within the territory of the Republic of Poland. As a member of a criminal group, the examined dealt with car breaks-in and thefts). He grew up in a poor, big family. The first offense he committed was the theft of cigarettes at the age of 10. At the age of 11, he was educated in the emergency care center, and from the age of 12, he was held in the detention center. Recalling the onset of his criminal activities, the respondent attributed its origins to the poverty of his family: *we were lack of money, that's why I was stealing (...). I didn't like going to school. Usually, I was hanging around with my friends. In the city and at shops, we often stole things. I generated problems. I don't know the hotbed of such behavior. I think I had such friends. My friends were from my street, my age, the others were one year older.*

The dominant feeling accompanying the criminal activity at such a young age was a sense of impunity. Respondents committing criminal acts at the stage of primary school usually perceived themselves unpunished. From the first crime to the application of the first custodial measure or imprisonment, which is considered by most respondents as the first contact with a criminal justice system, usually several years have passed. The sense of adolescent impunity meant that respondents quickly and imperceptibly transitioned, both for themselves and for the justice system, from juvenile delinquency to 'adult crime'. In the perception of respondents, once they reached adulthood, criminal justice system appeared 'lenient', and did not cause any significant consequences, as the first court case usually ended with a sentence of imprisonment with conditional suspension, which were effectively experienced as impunity. During the interviews, many respondent stated retrospectively that if the initial reaction to their offending had been more severe, they would have tried to give up the criminal activities. In the matter of fact, the offenders, who had began their criminal career during their childhood, remained 'invisible' for many years to both law enforcement authorities and the judiciary.

The above phenomenon is illustrated by the case of B.115 (who was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment for participation in an organized armed group, he was involved in many criminal offenses including robberies, physical assaults, killings, and drug trafficking. He also owned firearms, ammunition, and explosives without permission). During the interview he reported: *I 'have been involved in cars' since my childhood, from the age of 8, maybe 9.*

The older colleagues from the district taught me this profession. I have been involved in the car theft for more than ten years, as long as it was profitable. His trajectory of 'transition' from juvenile delinquency to the 'adult' crimes was aptly presented in a psychological and penitentiary judgment by the expert from the Diagnostic Center of the Detention Center in O. According to this document, B.115 at first broke the law in 1990 by breaking into a car. Therefore, a matter was taken to the juvenile court. Since 1994, he has been called to the criminal responsibility before the criminal court and misdemeanor court for offenses many times. The first sentence was conditionally suspended by the court. In 1996, he was imprisoned for the first time for breaking into a car, however, the detention was revoked. In 1997, he was imprisoned again, and he served the rest of his sentence. At the same time, the other criminal cases (thefts, burglaries, car thefts, fencing) have been conducted.

Apart from the issues mentioned above, some common feature of the members of criminal groups with the career onset before the age of 12 was also the fact that they were inhabitants of big cities or medium-size cities, and rather poor districts. This enabled the respondents to come into contact with typically criminal subcultures from a relatively young age. Living in city districts, where various forms of adult crime existed, has provided young people with some criminal role models. Under the influence of such patterns, they became involved in various types of collective crime, which eventually took the form of organized crime groups. Participation in the groups of demoralized young people was in some sense a criminal internship. In this situation, illegal opportunities for success were available, and crime was often treated as a normal way of life.

THE EXAMINED OFFENDERS WITH AN ADOLESCENCE-ONSET OF CRIMINAL CAREERS (AT THE AGE OF 13-17)

The respondents who have began their criminal career during adolescence constitute the largest group of criminals who were examined. The research shows that 78 persons committed their first crimes at this stage of life, i.e. almost 50% of the respondents (49,68%), of which the major part were property offenders (16,56%) and multiple-offence offenders (15,29%). They were followed by drug offenders (12,74%) and fraud offenders (5,10%). The largest number of respondents (52 persons) declared that they committed their first crime at the age between 14 and 15.

According to the research, similarly to the respondents at the age of 12 and below, the criminal trajectories of the offenders with an adolescence-onset of criminal careers began with minor acts against property. However, the criminal career of the respondents with an adolescence-onset of criminal activities developed faster than in the case of younger offenders. The respondents paid attention to the material values of criminal activities. They did not commit crimes driven by the desire for adventure. They appreciated some material values acquired thanks to their criminal activities. For example, B. 99 (the respondent was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment. He took part in the activities of two organized criminal groups. As a member of the first group, he was involved in numerous armed robberies and several burglaries. Later, he joined the second group, where he was involved in the production of significant amounts of amphetamine and drug trafficking). At the age of 15, he began truanting from school, and he met older boys dealing with theft and vehicle related crimes. Recalling his biography, the respondent stated: *I've started with car theft. My colleagues were older, and they had an extensive experience. It gave me [crime] so much in my life that I've drove extraordinary cars, I've received extraordinary money for my participation in the criminal actions. I felt 'someone' thanks to all that.*

A significant number of respondents in this group (40 persons) stated that at the age of 15-17 they were living off the crime. Their fathers either abused alcohol, or did not live with them. They did not contribute to household support. All respondents mentioned that they suffered poverty as children.

It is significant that all the respondents remember how low was their mothers' salary in comparison to the money they were able to get monthly through the criminal activity. They also reported that the first bicycles, motorbikes, and even cars were acquired thanks to the money they got from crime.

All examined offenders came from large or medium-sized cities. Most of the respondents had problems at school. The persons who began offending at primary school age more often exhibited some behavioral problems. In the group of people who began committing crimes at secondary school, there were more problems with their absence at school (70% of respondents). Playing truant had a negative impact on the teaching results. According to the interviews, none of the perpetrators, apart from attending lessons, devoted their leisure time to learning. Respondents spent time outside their school and home, mostly, at the parties or games with the older colleagues, which were accompanied by some legal or prohibited drugs and/or alcohol. The respondents had already accumulated some educational deficits and failures. In addition to the problems related to teacher-student relationships, they also suffered rejection from peers from 'good homes'. This lack of acceptance at both levels influenced their conviction that they could be understood and esteemed only by the older, often demoralized, colleagues. In such conditions, the examined offenders with an adolescence-onset of criminal career began acts of committing their first offences. Initially, these included petty theft, acts of vandalism, and aggression. The respondents' parents were not interested in the company of their children, and their passive attitude implied tacit acceptance of the first offenses, particularly when it alleviated household financial difficulties. This situation is illustrated by the statement of B.76 (he extorted bank loans together with the other members of an organized criminal group): *the thefts began at the time when I was attending secondary school. I've always had a company of the older colleagues. These days they are considered to be booms. Then, in my opinion, they were as gods. They were recidivists involved in burglaries and thefts. I've also started hanging around with them. It was my own choice. I've even strove to improve the financial situation of my family, because we didn't even have money to pay rent. Everyone at home understood that my money came from crime, but nobody intervened.*

During the interviews, there were also several cases of respondents, in which parents fought for their children in order they did not go down 'the wrong path'. In fact, the period of adolescence was the time, when the influence of their legal guardians on them was marginal.

In the opinion of organized crime offenders, the onset of a criminal career at the age of 13-17, apart from the fact of adolescence and some age-related difficulties which become part of this stage of life, also marked the period of first offending. At that time, various life events influenced the development of criminal activities. Respondents identified several events, which might be interpreted as turning points from the perspective of life-course criminology:

1. the change of school, and therefore, the change of the peer environment – 17 respondents;
2. the loss of an important family member – a parent, a grandmother, a grandfather, a brother, or a sister – 13 respondents;
3. the removal to the different city or district and deteriorating living conditions – 12 respondents;
4. the occurrence of alcohol addiction of the parent/parents – 8 respondents.

In numerous cases, turning points occurred in sequence. A certain pattern of events in the respondents' lives is noticeable during the interviews. Usually, at the age of 11-13, a respondent lost one of his parents (death, separation, or divorce). In the case of divorce or separation, a respondent was brought up by one of the parents. They often moved to the different city or district. A lonely parent, usually without educational and financial support, struggled to cope materially and / or emotionally with the situation. In several cases, the mother of the respondent completely devoted themselves to work, and the child was in fact deprived of any care and control, or only nominal control was provided by neighbors or family members, who could not cope with an adolescent boy. In all cases, it was the father who left the household and subsequently lost interest in his child's life.

B.20 is an example of the above pattern (he was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment for participation in an armed group acting jointly with the other members, committed premeditated murder with particular cruelty, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and drug trafficking). His problems

began after the divorce of his parents, when he changed with his mother and brother the place of living. His mother had to work a lot to support herself and her children, therefore the sons were out of control. They quickly came into contact with the older, demoralized colleagues who impressed them. They began to cause some educational problems. The mother was helpless, and the father was indifferent. B.20 recalls: *I had cases in a juvenile court for theft, it was at the age of 16, and it was a shop in Barczewo. It was the onset of my career in prison. Earlier, outside the school, some minor thefts had happened. My mother knew that something wrong was going on. She was dissatisfied. My father didn't know because we didn't live together, he simply wasn't there. The examined person perceives his mother as hard-working and caring to her children. According to the acts of the probation officer, the parents of the respondent were not demoralized, both with secondary education, but working a lot abroad, the mother as a minder. The brother was also punished (...). The mother lives alone in a luxurious apartment (60 square meters), the brother of the offender stays permanently in Greece.*

The example presented above illustrates the situation when one of the legal guardians is obliged to ensure the living conditions for the family and the care for children. Despite their efforts, they cannot devote enough time to the children. However, the situation of the other respondent was also recorded, when after his parents' separation, because of the increasing socio-economic difficulties, parental behavior was dysfunctional: excessive drinking of alcohol, inviting unknown people, and quarrels ended with the police intervention. The excessive alcohol consumption of a parent caused that the respondent was not able to have a close relationship with any of his parents. There was nobody who would have been able to exercise a constant care and control over him. This contributed to behavioral and educational problems, including the first truancy, usually followed by alcohol initiation. In the perception of respondents whose mothers had alcohol problems, that fact was identified as the most decisive indicator of the criminal activity from the perspective of the genesis of criminal career onset. Generally, it was the most traumatic experience in life.

In situations where the alcohol problems concerned the father, many women were still able to provide their children with a minimum sense of security, and despite adverse conditions, they struggled to protect a 'normal'

childhood. Respondents mentioned that their mothers tried to fulfill their fathers' duties, and they did everything to minimize the effects of the fathers' alcoholism. In the case of families where the mother was an alcoholic, almost none of the examined fathers (except one case) tried to support his wife in the fight against the addiction, to take care of children, or to become more involved in the household duties. Instead, fathers tended to form new relationships with partners whom the respondents were not able to establish close or supportive bonds.

In the opinion of many respondents, it was the moment which determined their full involvement in crime. The examined offenders stated that they have just 'drifted away', *my mother has went down, and I with her, we have both went down, she with alcohol, and I've drifted into the city*. Such a situation took place, for example, in the case of B.76 (who jointly with the other members of an organized criminal group was extorting bank loans). During the conducted interview, he reported: *my mother and father separated. My father was an alcoholic, but the worst thing it was that my mother later also started drinking (...). When I was 16, my family problems began. I looked after my younger sister. My mother tried to work, but she was drinking at work with her friends (...). It was my aunt who supported me*.

It is significant that many respondents emphasized the problems with excessive alcohol consumption by their fathers, and even the occurrence of violent behavior, which was not reported in relation to mothers with alcohol addiction. From the perspective of respondents, the paternal addiction was not so important for the genesis of criminal behavior than the maternal addiction. It resulted from the fact that mainly the mothers of respondents were responsible for raising children, supporting the family, and organization of family life. For this reason, it was only the mother's alcoholism and the loss of her control over the functions of the family, which completely degraded this basic social unit. It should be also taken into account that the alcoholic mothers in contrast to the alcoholic fathers, were perceived by respondents as victims. In the opinion of the respondents, maternal addiction resulted from the factors beyond the mothers' control.

From the perspective of the raised issue, B. 104 is an interesting case (he was the member of an organized criminal group, in which he committed

crimes connected with the alcohol and cigarettes trade without the state excise, purchasing, storing, transporting, and selling illegally). He started his education a year earlier, and at the age of 14, he was a student of the secondary school. The respondent was convinced that until the age of 14, he was brought up by his biological mother. In fact, it was his father's partner. Unfortunately, after the birth of her own child, the woman radically changed her attitude towards the respondent. Such a change coincided with the situation, when the boy accidentally met his biological mother at a sports camp. The woman introduced herself as a friend, and only after her departure, did he learn the truth. According to him, this event was very traumatic. He began to ask his grandparents about his mother. They told him that three months after his birth, his mother left the family. She has never been interested in her son. She was 18 years old, and his father was 23 years old. In order to support a new family, his grandparents bought a flat. Unfortunately, it did not succeed. As far as his stepmother is concerned, the respondent reports: *I felt that something was wrong. My sister was 8 years younger and his stepmother treated her in a different way. I was beaten. I've been often sent to my grandparents. Finally, I moved out to their apartment.* His grandparents loved him, but they were not able to provide effective behavioral supervision.

B. 104 believes that his adulthood began very early. None of the adults close to him showed interest in his activities. At the age of 14, the respondent regularly got money working as a tout, a person who sells tickets at an inflated price before various events, and then as a black-market currency exchanger. At the age of 16, he met an older gentleman who was a colleague of his friend. Through this contact, he became a middleman in regular illegal transactions between this man and his colleagues, who were burglars stealing and distributing jewelry, silver, gold, and amber products from shops. The local district officer quickly learned about the whole procedure. According to the respondent, one day, he informed his colleagues that if they wanted to continue their criminal activity, they would have to share their profit with him. In response, the group abducted him and assaulted him in his own apartment. The adult respondent was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment for the armed robbery, in which the victim was a public official.

B. 104 mentions that all his life he blamed his mother for his own crime. When he was forty years old, he began to take responsibility for the consequences of his own choices: *I've just had grudges against everybody. It was at the wrong time of my life. When I've learned the truth, it was my turning point, just like for every human being.* During the interview, when he analyses the onset and development of his criminal path, the respondent concludes: *crime starts at the very beginning. Then, it is a habit, and it becomes second nature to you. The only honest job I've ever had is in prison. I'm working honestly here.* Subject B. 104 began so-called 'institutional' career in adulthood, however, for many people with an onset of a criminal career at the age of 13-17, the first court cases take place at juvenile courts, and they result in the application of educational measures.

The manifestation of demoralization and criminal acts at the age of 13-17 typically resulted in before juvenile courts, which, as in the case of perpetrators with a very early onset of a criminal career, reinforced respondents' sense of impunity. The respondents who committed criminal acts at the analyzed stage of life, and their activities were disclosed, in most cases were placed under the supervision of probation officers. All respondents assessed the actions of probation officers as the means, which did little or no impact on their lives and everyday activities, including criminal engagement. This is illustrated by the statement of B. 20 (he was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment for participation in an armed organized criminal group, together with the other members of the group he committed premeditated murders with a special cruelty, took part in kidnapping, extorted protection money, and distributed drugs): *the probation officer came from time to time, asked what was at school, what was at home, and then left. So, my career at the age of 13-17 started with shop break-ins, stealing car radios, then, it was the car theft. Since the age of 23, I have been involved with cars.*

CONCLUSION

It is significant that interviews conducted with the chosen sample of organized crime offenders, as well as analyses of penitentiary files, confirm that the criminal offenders with an early onset of criminal careers were consistently 'accompanied' by crime, often seizing opportunities to commit a crime. As such they might be classified as chronic offenders. The findings indicate overrepresentation of individuals with an early-onset of criminal carriers among chronic offenders compared to the findings reported in other studies.

According to the conducted research, a characteristic feature of the group with an adolescence-onset of criminal careers, similarly to the respondents with an early-onset of a criminal career (at the age of 12 and below) – is criminal trajectory that begins with minor property offences. However, in contrast to the group of individuals with the onset of a criminal career up to the age of 12, the career of the respondents with an adolescence-onset of criminal activities was characterized by the faster progression from the very beginning compared to younger offenders. Respondents in this group, more often than those in the younger group, began to place greater emphasis on the material benefits. Unlike younger respondents, they were not primarily motivated by a desire for adventure, but mainly because for the material values derived from their offences.

All examined persons were brought up in families experiencing various difficulties, including alcohol abuse, financial problems, or unfavorable educational atmosphere. Such turning points (from the perspective of life-course criminology) as the loss of an important family member, the removal to the different place, deteriorating living conditions, parental alcohol addiction, or the change in the social environment often triggered involvement in criminal activities. The offenders with a childhood-onset of criminal careers, often under the influence of criminal subcultures, from a relatively young age, were provided with criminal role models, and became involved in organized criminal groups. It is significant that in numerous cases the examined offenders with a childhood-onset of criminal careers felt a sense of impunity accompanying their crime. In contrast, the offenders with an adolescence-onset of criminal careers were, in most cases, subjected to the supervision of probation officers,

which, from their perspective, had little impact on their lives. It is interesting to consider that in the case of the individuals with an early onset of criminal careers, a process of 'growing into' crime can be observed, whereby their criminal activities evolved and became more serious with age. The involvement in organized crime was the final stage of this criminal trajectory.

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