

FIGHTING CRIMINALITY AND SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE RISK - BASED SOCIAL GROUPS

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Abstract: *The issue of criminality is currently one of the most dangerous phenomena and stringent concerns of the local authorities, both from legal and sociological perspectives. The criminality phenomena cover several forms, but a common feature is characterized by the fact that they impact over the broad individual groups. In this regard, from a social point of view, the actions of combating criminal phenomena is an aim very difficult to be achieved. The current paper focuses on identification of the risk-based social groups which could be involved in criminal activities or reintegrated in the criminal conduct. Equally, the paper tries to clarify the issues regarding the vulnerable persons' involvement in some specific categories of crimes or even serious crimes. Moreover, the main aim of the current paper is to discuss the manner in which the social services of support contribute to identifying these persons' issues and to diminishing the risk of developing criminality among the vulnerable social groups. In order to achieve the proposed goals, the main methodological tool was referred to analysing doctrinal references. They are organized within an ample doctrinal framework along with personal argumentative hypotheses and ideas, based on theoretical suppositions, in purpose to observe modalities in which the criminal phenomena could be controlled by the authorities when they are developed within risk-based social groups.*

Keywords: *fighting criminality; risk-based social groups; vulnerable persons; supporting programmes; sociological approach.*

Introduction

As a general theory of doctrine, the criminal phenomenon is a category of issues frequently discussed by the theorists of several social sciences. It is focused on the two sides – legal element and social element. The aspects regarding the issue of criminality cannot divide the two sections due to the fact that both of them concern the social phenomenon, on the one hand, and suppose connected interactions, on the other hand. These aspects are relevant ones, even if the notion of criminality is not yet standardized. This is because the criminality could be highlighted under diverse forms and phenomena, as the traffic and illicit consumption of drugs are (Franț, 2021; Crețu, 2021). Moreover, it could also be developed as occasional crimes, in missing specific character of the phenomenon, often discussed by the specialists in the field of criminology (Mihaiu, 2021).

Thus, combining the two above-discussed elements – legal and social – is a real challenge due to the fact that it generates a complex doctrinal approach on the criminal phenomenon. This is, however, the major interest in specialized studies, carried out on the criminal phenomenon, as general one, which is focused on the idea of criminality meets in social environment (Tomiță & Ungureanu, 2023) as well as on the diverse forms it is featured with.

One of the most frequent approaches of criminality, both from a legal and social points of view, involves the issue of combatting criminal phenomenon. The complex instruments of combatting criminality are the responsibility of both legislative and administrative fields, due to the fact that the legal provisions regarding the issue of combatting criminality must be transposed in practice and carried out by means of administrative tools. For these reasons, it is emphasized that, in order to carry out securely the activities which refer to combatting criminality, a strengthened connection between the two fields is necessary. Equally, the issue of preventing criminality is an essential activity in the fight against criminal phenomenon (Fennelly & Perry, 2024). Nevertheless, in cases in which the legal and social instruments are not implemented enough in the

matter of preventing criminality, other mechanisms of the law enforcement agencies are provided in purpose to combat the phenomenon of criminality (Sîrbu, 2023).

Thus, from the point of view of passing time, the activity of preventing criminality is placed before committing crimes, but, once they are present in society, then the mechanisms of combating criminality are identified and implemented in practice. In fact, these mechanisms are carried out through both legal and social instruments provided by the legislation in the field. The diversity of working instruments in the field of combatting criminality makes us understand the efforts made by the authorities in diverse areas of social matters, as the situation of the institutionalized young people, incarcerated convicts or disadvantaged people is, for example (Banciu & Rotariu, 2021).

Categories of risk-based groups

The criminality is a wavering phenomenon which can develop itself within diverse criminal environments (Behl & Steverson, 2022), according to several factors and circumstances which influence the process of developing criminality. The criminality often rises as a consequence of the individual's response to certain personal feelings, but equally it can appear as a consequence of the group's social impulsion. A significant part of this phenomenon supposes the action of spreading criminality within vulnerable groups. From them, the most frequent ones are those related to the institutionalised young people, incarcerated convicts and rural population. In the next section of the current paper, some pertinent ideas based on these categories of vulnerable people will be discussed.

Institutionalized young people

From the point of view of the social integration, the institutionalized young people shouldn't rise any difficulty when analysing criminality and the manner in which it appeared and was spread within this kind of social group. Nevertheless, the studies carried out in

the last period of time have identified some criminal phenomena which are also committed especially within the young people. It is firstly about the illegal consumption of drugs, the phenomenon which has been developed unprecedentedly. For this reason, the national authorities have been focused on this kind of crimes in order to identify solutions of combatting the phenomenon. From the point of view of the consequences produced, the solutions are not enough at the moment in purpose to control such a developed phenomenon among the young people. This fact is also observed in the field of institutionalised young people.

In this context, it could be pointed out that, referring to the efforts made in the matter of combatting the phenomenon of illegal consumption of drugs among the young people, the authorities have permanently fought along with the other judicial authorities and other public institutions as well (Anti-Drug National Agency, Ministry of Education), and NGOs with competences in the field (Şuteu, 2020). They together have drawn up certain programmes and submitted endeavours within the schools, having as purpose the awareness, among the scholars, on the issue that the drugs mean toxic and damaging substances for the human body which create addiction and generate other forms of criminality, usually committed by violence, including the bullying in schools.

Incarcerated persons

As a general theory of risk-based groups, the persons who executed deprived of liberty punishment belong to the vulnerable people. Their vulnerability is not generated only by their legal status, namely of deprived of liberty persons, but also by the fact that, at the time of their incarceration or even after liberation, it is possible for them to commit other forms of criminality or simply continue their previous behaviour in committing the same kind of crimes. These persons' situation should carefully be surveyed due to the fact that the main scope of executing punishments in detention is that of re-education of convicted persons (Magherescu, 2024).

Thus, if the society could not enhance in these persons' mind a good behaviour in accordance with the rules of social life, then the time

spent in detention facilities should be devoted to improve the convicts' behaviour in such a manner, after liberation from detention, they would not be able to commit other crimes. Taking into consideration these arguments, it is obvious that the main responsibility in re-education of the convicted persons belongs to the employers from detention facilities (Basilisco, 2024; Nichols, 2021). They are also involved in changing their perception about the society and life, generally speaking. Only by a qualified team, specialized in the areas of the involved topic, including sociological perspectives, it is possible for the incarcerated persons to be re-educated and gave them to society in good behaviour conditions (Flynn, & Higdon, 2022), beyond any doubt that they would be involved in committing crimes for the future.

Vulnerabilities of the incarcerated persons are also related to their social and legal status (Vanliefde, 2024; Goossens, 2024) as well as their familial situation. Firstly, it could be taken into account that, after liberation, along with the social reintegration, these persons should imperatively be supported in order to be professionally reintegrated as well. This issue must be achieved through finding a job (Durnescu & Istrate, 2020), adequate to their needs and professional qualification which could guarantee a sure income, came from legal activities. In this manner, they will not be tempted to commit other crimes. Moreover, the social services in detention have a determinant role in finding solutions in the matter of professional reintegration of convicted persons, once they will be liberated from prisons.

Rural population

The rural communities are, to some extent, a criminogenic potential. The phenomenon of criminality does not have borders and is not present only in the urban area, as long as it does not depend on this issue. However, taking into consideration the degree of vulnerability of the people who live in the rural communities, it could be expressed that some of these persons could be more involved in committing criminal activities, either as perpetrators or victims (Puigvert et al., 2021). From petty thefts to trafficking in persons, all of them are committed in small

communities from rural areas. the most frequent phenomenon is currently called as "*Loverboy*" (Heinrichs, 2023) and is frequently meet in Romania.

In these circumstances, the authorities have to establish and identify the vulnerabilities existed within the rural communities in order to remove the dangerous situations and threats, knowing the fact that often these persons are missing material support, but missing jobs is reflected on developing criminal phenomena. These persons are thus characterized through difficulties in their action of finding jobs, a poor level of education, missing familial support, missing a professional perspective a.s.o. All of them create a more vulnerable situation for these persons which finally chose the way of criminality, on the one hand, or they are victims of crimes, on the other hand (Tompea, 2023). They could be victims of serious crimes, as trafficking in persons for a sexual exploitation purpose is (Becucci, 2024), especially in cases in which the girls are victims of the "*Loverboy*" phenomenon.

Acting in identifying the vulnerabilities of this kind of persons, the authorities will be able to initiate supporting programmes adequate to each category of person, which conducts not only to reducing these vulnerabilities, but to reducing crime rate in rural area as well.

Forms of criminality within the risk-based groups

Taking into account the above-stated remarks, the pre-eminence of the individuals' behaviour to the illicit consumption of drugs cannot be disregarded. This is because, during a period of five years, the phenomenon of consumption of drugs has led an alarming size at the national level. Thus, statistically speaking, at the moment the age of consumers is very much reduced, being even of thirteen years old, as declared age of beginning the consumption of cannabis (Anti-Drug National Agency, 2022).

It is considered that this phenomenon is as uncontrollable as many illegal transactions on drugs are committed in online environment, a situation which infringes the judicial bodies in their action of discovering

these crimes and prosecuting perpetrators. Doctrine has discussed about the preponderance of the crimes of illicit consumption of drugs and on the process of "digitalization" of some categories of crimes, as the case of sexual exploitation in a virtual environment is (Vesmaş, 2023). Some crimes are considered real dangers for teenagers, along to other vulnerabilities of the young people in online context (Micle et al., 2023).

All these aspects are serious premises for achieving the quality of crime victim for the persons who belong to vulnerable groups, being situated in front of the serious criminal phenomena. For this reason, it is very important the manner in which the authorities choose to adopt certain relevant efficient social policies of fighting criminality, on the one hand, and to remove the risk of victimization (Magherescu, 2023) of these vulnerable categories of people, on the other hand (Banciu & Rotariu, 2020). The role of the judicial bodies is also a useful one, taking into account their involvement in achieving the criminal justice's goals by means of criminal proceedings. One of them is related to the manner in which the judicial bodies proceed in solving the criminal cases in a shorter period of time. Doctrine has emphasized the concept of reasonable time of criminal justice (Bălan, 2021) as a multifactorial premises in the respect of the victims' rights during the criminal proceedings. Thus, it is well-known that the issue of reasonable time is not just in the perpetrators' processual interest, but in the victims' interest as well. The victims' processual interest could also be viewed from the perspective of their involvement in the procedures of claiming compensations in those criminal cases in which the right to a reasonable time was infringed by the competent courts (Bălan, 2018).

Last but not least, the activities of bullying make teenagers to be real targets for their colleagues in the upper degree of school. From this point of view, it could be concluded that the scholar environment becomes, in this context, an occasion of expanding vulnerabilities the young scholars pass through. For this reason, doctrine has highlighted that the issue of bullying is a very spread phenomenon (Grădinariu, 2021), whose control needed the legislator intervention which succeeded in assuring an effective control upon the phenomenon through adopting

an adequate legal framework in the matter. Taking into consideration the consequences produced because of several cases of bullying, the legal sanctions came in accordance with the authorities' involvement in the process of maintaining a low level of risk among teenagers.

Supporting activities in the field of social services

The activities carried out within the social services have as the main objective providing speciality support to vulnerable persons. Mainly, they are referring to social life (Vârlan & Dița, 2019), familial and professional ones, being featured by certain specific characters for each other. For example, in cases of incarcerated persons, the supporting activities have as final result the social reintegration of convicted persons. From this point of view, the supporting activities provided to the vulnerable persons are complex and, at the same time, diversified ones.

During the supporting activities, the main role of the social officer is a determinant one, due to the fact that it must identify the premises which determine a deviant behaviour, in cases in which they are produced. At the same time, the social officer must find appropriate solutions under the case-by-case principle. Within the meeting organized in this scope, the social officer is entitled to analyse the issues the vulnerable persons are faced with, on the one hand, and the factors which act as aggravating circumstances in their own behaviour and which could constitute impediments in achieving objectives of social services entirely, on the other hand. By doing so, the social officer could contribute to removing any form of deviant behaviour or a social exclusion behaviour. The activities of social services are firstly processes of knowing pertinent needs of the risk-based groups which should imperatively be brought within their social life in purpose to solve the existed issues and remove any difficulties.

An essential character of the activities carried out by the social officer is that regarding the social relationships of individuals, and the vulnerable persons need as much as possible these relationships. If an example is required, then it refers to the incarcerated persons convicted

for their criminal conduct of committing crimes. In this context, they need to maintain relations with the society. The achievement of this aim is in the social officer's duty, which plays a significant role in this field, taking into account the fact that the relationships between the incarcerated persons and the society is mostly carried out by the social officers. Among other activities carried out by the social officers, calling for social partners either public or private bodies interested in workforce from the convicted persons is emphasized. Doctrine does consider that the convicted persons belong to vulnerable group which necessitate specializing social services in order to hurdle difficult situations, prevent and control renewing criminal behaviour and the risk of social exclusion, increasing life quality, and promoting their social inclusion (Tomiță, 2015).

The activities carried out by the social officer suppose covering some relevant stages. They begin with the activity of carrying out a social inquiry (Țurcan & Țurcan, 2013) in order to identify issues that the person concerned is faced with. On that occasion, the level of graduation, professional qualification, marital status, housing possibilities, finding a job, all of them should be established. Equally, the psychological assistance of vulnerable persons is of high interest, especially when speaking about the issue of illegal consumption of drugs among teenagers. In this regard, doctrine has pointed out several aspects regarding the psychological factors and their connection with the social ones, which are directly involved in the drug consumption in the teenage stage (Stanciu, & Cotruș, 2014). Referring to the last aspect, it is obvious that the context could be expanded and associate the first two factors – psychological and social – with another one which refers to the legal factors. This is because the last ones also play a significant role in the architecture of establishing the context in which the social services for the vulnerable persons will be developed in order for the authorities to avoid as much as possible the risk-based criminality.

Taking into account the above-discussed aspects, they are considered as necessities of social services which impose connecting social services and concrete supporting activities within the vulnerable

groups. Regarding the issues involved, it should be pointed out that the problems arisen in the vulnerable persons' condition are impossible to be solved by themselves in missing a consistent and useful help of the specializing services, as the social services are.

Conclusions

The current study carried out on the topic of the risk-based social groups has identified certain aspects which has the merit of clarifying issues both from society, viewed as a specific environment, and from the social groups, generally speaking, and particularly from vulnerable groups. These categories of persons present a higher risk of criminality regarding their criminal conduct, on the one hand, and the status of victims of crimes as well, on the other hand. Being indifferent from which categories they are belonging to these persons should be qualified as social risk-based ones which supposes several aspects to be concluded in this context.

First of all, the authorities involved in the process of managing their situation should pay a special attention on establishing a pertinent strategy of identifying real problems these persons are confronted with, and secondly, they should find efficient solutions in purpose to diminish the risk of these persons to become both criminals or victims of crimes. Thus, if discussing the incarcerated persons, during the executing deprived of liberty punishments, they are integrated in special programmes of surveillance of social issues managed by the social officers, in such a manner that, after their liberation, they need a social integration which assure avoiding any criminal behaviour for the future.

Moreover, discussing the institutionalised persons with a particular focus on the young persons, thus the situation must imperatively be into the authorities' attention, due to the fact that these persons are more prone to commit criminal activities because of the multiple factors, including those related to the previous criminal behaviour and the risk of developing their criminal conduct.

Taking into account all these aspects, it should be concluded that the supporting programmes for persons who belong to the risk-based groups need to be accustomed to the real needs they are confronted with. This is because these persons should be protected from the social exclusion which is currently one of the most serious dangers. By doing so, an efficient mechanism of preventing crimes is assured, and the vulnerable persons will be directed to the specialised social services, to finding a job, and, finally, to living a better social life in accordance with the legal and social rules they have to respect.

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