

**THE CURRENT STATE OF SOCIAL  
AND PEDAGOGICAL WORK WITH MINORS  
TO PREVENT DELINQUENCY IN UKRAINE**

**WSPÓŁCZESNY STAN PRACY  
SOCJALNO-PEDAGOGICZNEJ Z NIELETNIMI  
W ZAKRESIE ZAPOBIEGANIA PRZESTĘPCZOŚCI  
W UKRAINIE**

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**Abstract**

The article examines modern aspects of social and pedagogical work aimed at preventing juvenile delinquency in Ukraine. The article highlights current social challenges, in particular, the maladjustment of adolescents, the increase in crime in the context of war and social crisis. The author analyses the factors that cause deviant behaviour: economic instability, lack of proper parental supervision, negative peer pressure, alcohol and drug abuse, and traumatic events caused by the armed conflict.

It is emphasised that the legal framework in Ukraine provides ample opportunities for preventive work with children and youth. The study summarises recommendations for preventive measures: work with families, monitoring of 'risk groups', involvement in legal education activities, trainings, consultations, and peer

mediation. Particular attention is paid to interagency cooperation between educational institutions, social services, law enforcement agencies and other actors, with a focus on the establishment of an educational security service in schools in 2024.

It is generalised that the effectiveness of prevention work is possible only with an integrated approach that takes into account the individual needs of adolescents, the creation of a favourable educational environment, and the active participation of the community. The importance of pedagogical technologies that stimulate positive socialisation, the formation of legal awareness and the prevention of deviant behaviour is substantiated.

The Author emphasises the need for an integrated approach and interagency cooperation for effective prevention of juvenile delinquency. To improve the prevention of juvenile offenses in schools, socio-pedagogical recommendations have been proposed.

**Keywords:** social and pedagogical work, prevention of delinquency, minors, Ukraine

### Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje nowoczesne aspekty pracy społecznej i pedagogicznej mającej na celu zapobieganie przestępczości nieletnich w Ukrainie. Artykuł podkreśla aktualne wyzwania społeczne, w szczególności niedostosowanie nastolatków, wzrost przestępczości w kontekście wojny i kryzysu społecznego. Autor analizuje czynniki, które powodują dewiacyjne zachowania: niestabilność ekonomiczną, brak odpowiedniego nadzoru rodzicielskiego, negatywną presję rówieśników, nadużywanie alkoholu i narkotyków oraz traumatyczne wydarzenia spowodowane konfliktem zbrojnym.

Podkreślono, że ramy prawne w Ukrainie zapewniają szerokie możliwości pracy profilaktycznej z dziećmi i młodzieżą. Badanie podsumowuje zalecenia dotyczące środków zapobiegawczych: praca z rodzinami, monitorowanie „grup ryzyka”, zaangażowanie w działania edukacji prawnej, szkolenia, konsultacje i mediacje rówieśnicze. Szczególną uwagę zwrócono na współpracę międzyinstytucjonalną między instytucjami edukacyjnymi, służbami społecznymi, organami ścigania i innymi podmiotami, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ustanowienia edukacyjnej służby bezpieczeństwa w szkołach w 2024 r.

Uogólniono, że skuteczność działań profilaktycznych jest możliwa tylko przy zintegrowanym podejściu, które uwzględnia indywidualne potrzeby nastolatków, tworzenie sprzyjającego środowiska edukacyjnego i aktywny udział społeczności. Uzasadniono znaczenie technologii pedagogicznych, które stymulują pozytywną socjalizację, kształtowanie świadomości prawnej i zapobieganie zachowaniom

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dewiacyjnym. Podkreślono konieczność kompleksowego podejścia oraz współpracy międzyresortowej w celu skutecznej profilaktyki przestępczości wśród nieletnich. W celu usprawnienia działań profilaktycznych w szkołach zaproponowano rekomendacje socjalno-pedagogiczne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** praca socjalno-pedagogiczna, zapobieganie przestępczości, nieletni, Ukraina

## Introduction

In the context of the development of civil society and Ukraine's accession to the European space, the issues of educating a personality capable of active participation in these processes are becoming increasingly important. However, in the context of the war in Ukraine and as a result of the economic and social crisis, the problem of adolescent maladjustment is becoming more acute. The number of minors who are unable to adapt to the conditions of the social environment is growing, which leads to complex consequences: distortion of life values and social attitudes, conflict, antisocial behaviour, alienation from family and school, adolescent alcoholism and delinquency [Glushko 2017].

In this regard, updating the content and forms of social and pedagogical work with minors to prevent delinquency is an important task of the state's social policy in the field of childhood, as evidenced by the provisions of the Laws of Ukraine On Protection of Childhood,<sup>1</sup> On Education,<sup>2</sup> On Complete General Secondary Education,<sup>3</sup> On Social Work with Families, Children and Youth,<sup>4</sup> On Promoting the Social Formation and Development of Youth in Ukraine,<sup>5</sup> and the National Programme

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<sup>1</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Law of Ukraine on the Protection of Childhood of 26 April 2001, No. 2402-III, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2402-14#Text> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>2</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Law of Ukraine on Education of 5 September 2017, No. 2145-VIII, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19#Text> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>3</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Law of Ukraine on Complete General Secondary Education of 16 January 2020, No. 463-IX [hereinafter: Law on Complete General Secondary Education], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/651-14#Text> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>4</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Law of Ukraine on Social Work with Families, Children, and Youth of 21 June 2001, No. 2558-III, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2558-14#Text> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>5</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Law of Ukraine on Promotion of Social Formation and Development

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*National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* for the period up to 2021.<sup>6</sup> For example, Article 15 of the Law on Complete General Secondary Education states that it is necessary to educate students to respect the dignity, rights, freedoms, legitimate interests of a person and citizen; intolerance to humiliation of human honour and dignity, physical or psychological violence, as well as discrimination on any grounds, and intolerance to violation of laws and responsibility for their actions.

### **1. Causes and conditions that lead to juvenile delinquency in modern Ukraine**

Currently, the problem of increasing crime among adolescents is extremely acute, as every fifteenth crime in Ukraine is committed by minors [Lazarenko 2013].

Offences committed by juveniles are a dangerous social phenomenon because, firstly, they have a negative impact on the formation of the individual; secondly, they cause significant damage to society through the loss of labour resources (only one third of those punished return to full social life); thirdly, they play a significant role in the formation of recidivism (two thirds of recidivists begin their criminal career as minors). Scholars note that juvenile delinquency is primarily influenced by general criminogenic factors (at the macro level), which are the result of deep socio-economic, political, moral and psychological contradictions. Stratification of society, socio-economic inequality, lack of real opportunities to meet material and non-material needs, poverty, forced labour migration, death of parents, family breakdown are some of these factors [Babenko, Busol, and Kostenko 2018, 20].

Researchers T.Y. Bilobzhytska and H.L. Shvedova have identified the following main negative trends in modern juvenile delinquency in Ukraine: 1)

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of Youth in Ukraine of 5 February 1993, No. 2998-XII, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/29-98-12#Text> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>6</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, Resolution No. 453 on Approval of the State Social Program 'National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child' for the Period up to 2021 of 30 May 2018, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/453-2018-%D0%BF#Text> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

quantitative indicators of crime in the period from 1991 to 1996 were growing, and after 1997 a steady decline of 0.5-1.5 per cent annually; 2) a steady increase in the number of criminal offences requiring ‘qualification’ (racketeering, theft, etc.); 3) ‘rejuvenation’ of crime, i.e. an increase in the number of crimes committed by adolescents under the age of criminal responsibility (14 years), i.e. not being subjects of a crime; 4) an increase in the number of crimes committed for minor reasons or for no reason, with particular cruelty and audacity being highlighted; 5) the emergence of atypical types of crime (ritual murders, vandalism, etc.); 6) a characteristic increase in criminals with signs of an unhealthy lifestyle (drug and alcohol use, prostitution, spread of venereal diseases and AIDS); 7) a sharp increase in the number of persons with certain mental disorders or limited sanity; 8) the formation of organised crime, i.e. the strengthening of the group nature of juvenile delinquency [Bilobzhytska and Shvedova 2022].

A study conducted by centres of social services for young people found that the reasons for committing crimes were: lack of awareness of the consequences of their actions – 67 per cent; excessive use of alcohol and drugs – 28 per cent; ignorance of the laws of Ukraine – 5 per cent; insufficient upbringing and attention from parents – 59 per cent; influence of friends, negative company – 50 per cent; difficult financial situation – 18.5 per cent.<sup>7</sup>

Warfare is another extremely important challenge for modern Ukraine in terms of preventing juvenile delinquency. Thus, according to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the Russian Federation involves minors in the war against Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> According to Ukrainian law enforcement agencies, the Russian Federation involves minors in the armed conflict as spies and shelling adjusters, as well as in the campaign of forced mobilisation of Ukrainian citizens in the temporarily occupied territories. A number of tools are used to recruit children: video games, militarisation of education, recreation in military-patriotic camps, membership in the ‘Yunarmiya’ and other military-patriotic

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<sup>7</sup> *Juvenile delinquency and its prevention*, <https://vdolynske.od.gov.ua/pravoporushennya-ta-profilaktyka-pravoporushen-sered-nepovnolitnih/> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>8</sup> *The Russian Federation involves minors in the war against Ukraine – Ombudsman*, <https://suspilne.media/516473-rf-zalucae-nepovnolitnih-do-ucasti-u-vijni-proti-ukraini-ombudsman/> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

movements.<sup>9</sup> In addition, there have been cases of children being forced to participate in the armed conflict, including by setting up checkpoints, being used as spies, and being recruited by Russian military criminals. Children are involved in collecting information on the movement or deployment of the Armed Forces. Crimes against the foundations of Ukraine's national security encroach not only on the security of the state, but also on national security in general, which, according to the the Law of Ukraine On National Security of Ukraine<sup>10</sup> is defined as the level of protection of vital interests of a person and citizen, society and the state, which ensures sustainable development of society Other crimes that are also directed in one way or another against the security of the state, unlike crimes against the foundations of national security of Ukraine, which are not characterised by openly anti-state motives and whose purpose is to undermine or weaken the Ukrainian state, change its constitutional order, or cause significant damage to juvenile delinquency. When determining the types of crimes against the foundations of national security of Ukraine's juvenile delinquency, one should first of all proceed from the juvenile delinquency of the above-mentioned Law, according to which the threat to the national security of Ukraine can be carried out in various areas.

Given the diversity of causes and conditions that lead to crime, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of preventive measures largely depends on the joint efforts of families, teachers, psychologists, social workers, law enforcement officials, children's services, doctors, lawyers, representatives of penitentiary institutions and other involved structures that are subjects of preventive activities.

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<sup>9</sup> Ombudsman of Ukraine, *Special report of the Commissioner of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Human Rights: Gross violations of children's rights as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine*, <https://ombudsman.gov.ua/childrenofwar-2023/hrubi-porushennia-prav-dytny-vnasli-dok-zbroinoi-ahresii-proty-ukrainy-zahalnyi-ohliad> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>10</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Law of Ukraine On National Security of Ukraine of 9 August 2024, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2469-19#Text> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

## **2. Directions and recommendations for conducting preventive social and pedagogical work with minors to prevent offences in Ukraine**

One of the most effective measures to combat juvenile delinquency is prevention. However, ways to implement it and introduce such measures are a rather difficult and lengthy process. Using the traditional approach, special attention should be paid to the prevention of juvenile delinquency, which includes measures aimed at identifying, eliminating, weakening and neutralising criminogenic factors, as well as correcting the behaviour of people who are hypothetically capable of committing a crime.

When developing preventive measures, all factors contributing to the risk of juveniles falling into the risk group should be taken into account, in particular, the following: lack of attention and control by adults; domestic violence; influence of environment and friends; influence of the media.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, measures to prevent juvenile delinquency include: 1) preventive conversations with parents to increase responsibility for inadequate upbringing, education and development of children, the role of parents in fostering a negative attitude of children to alcohol, nicotine and drug use; 2) preventive conversations with minors on responsibility for committing offences by minors; 3) identification of children engaged in vagrancy; 4) maintaining a database of children registered with the juvenile prevention department, probation sector and intra-school registration.

Preventive activities to prevent juvenile delinquency can be carried out both within the educational process and outside of school hours. The forms and methods of work should be appropriate to the age of the children, arouse their interest and encourage reflection.

Prevention of offences is also carried out using the peer-to-peer methodology, when minors themselves receive legal training and conduct activities for their peers, organise their leisure time, and provide counselling.

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<sup>11</sup> Supreme Court of Ukraine, *Judicial practice in cases of juvenile crimes and their involvement in criminal activities*, "Bulletin of the Supreme Court of Ukraine" 4 (2003), p. 15-18.

Training and individual methods are considered to be the most effective methods of preventing juvenile delinquency.<sup>12</sup>

The problem of preventing juvenile delinquency is seen mainly as part of pedagogical activities, in particular within educational institutions in Ukraine. However, educational work within educational institutions alone is not enough to overcome juvenile delinquency.

To improve the prevention of juvenile delinquency at school, we can offer the following recommendations: 1) establish cooperation with organisations working in the field of preventing juvenile delinquency, and involve civic organisations in cooperation; diversify the forms and methods of prevention, increase the use of verbal methods: in addition to lectures and conversations that involve passive perception of information, use debates, discussions, quizzes that actively engage students, as well as interactive methods of presenting information (trainings, role-playing games, exercises); 3) promote the development and implementation of programmes that organise leisure activities for adolescents; 4) involve law enforcement officers in joint leisure activities for children (sports competitions, contests) and in role-playing games to familiarise them with the work of law enforcement agencies; 5) train volunteers who can become contact persons for children prone to deviant behaviour; 6) conduct legal education activities by specialists and by minors themselves using the peer-to-peer method; 7) establishing school services of mutual understanding in educational institutions with the help of mediators (intermediaries).

Another effective form of work is the introduction of the model of a *school-based service of understanding*, which was developed as an approach to creating a safe environment in educational institutions in Ukraine in 2006-2010. Since the development of the model, the understanding of its effectiveness has spread and gained particular importance not only as a tool for resolving conflicts in the school environment and assisting school administrators in preventing negative phenomena, cruelty and violence among students, but also as an effective approach to establishing an atmosphere of respect and cooperation among students, teachers, parents and all those who are part of the school community. The most

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<sup>12</sup> *Juvenile delinquency and its prevention*, Retrieved from <https://vdolynske.od.gov.ua/pravoporushennya-ta-profilaktyka-pravoporushen-sered-nepovnolitnih/> [accessed: 15.02.2025].



well-known procedure used in school mediation to achieve this goal is peer mediation. Although it is not the only activity of the School Service Understanding, it is one of the main ways of responding to conflict situations in the school environment and is well known both in developed Western countries and in some countries of the former Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup>

*Peer mediation* (restorative practices in schools, school mediation) are different names for the same phenomenon: a system of peaceful conflict resolution in school groups with the help of specially trained mediators from among high school students. This form of work, although innovative, already has a history, and this history is quite successful.

Peer mediation programmes provide a unique opportunity for different students to acquire and develop communication skills, build human relationships and problem-solving abilities in a real-life environment. The *School Mediation Service* model includes youth empowerment, skilled adult supervision, cultural awareness, diversity, programme relevance to the specific needs of the target population, fair conflict resolution with mediators, and measurable and evaluable outcomes.

Peer mediators are responsible for adhering to the Model Standards of Conduct to ensure the integrity of the mediation process. Their conduct should promote confidence in the mediation process and the competence of mediators.

These Model Standards of Conduct for Peer Mediators have three main objectives: 1) to guide and shape the behaviour of peer mediators; 2) provide information to the parties to the dispute; 3) foster confidence in peer mediation as a dispute resolution tool.

*Mediation* is a process in which an impartial third party facilitates communication and negotiation, and helps the parties to a dispute to reach a mutual agreement on a voluntary basis.<sup>14</sup>

In the context of the war in Ukraine, in order to improve the prevention of juvenile delinquency and to strengthen security in schools, on 10 November 2024, the Government of Ukraine adopted

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<sup>13</sup> *Methodical recommendations on the prevention of juvenile delinquency*, <https://surli.cc/vqqeqt> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

a resolution „On the implementation of an experimental project aimed at enhancing the security of the educational environment in general secondary education institutions under the legal regime of martial law on the establishment of the Educational Security Service.<sup>15</sup> This decision was based on public support: over 70% of parents approved of the idea of introducing inspectors in schools, and more than half supported their physical presence.<sup>16</sup>

The powers of officers of the Educational Security Service are clearly regulated and do not involve interference in the internal processes of educational institutions and operate in accordance with the Instruction on the organisation of the work of the National Police of Ukraine to ensure a safe educational environment in general secondary education institutions.<sup>17</sup>

According to the above-mentioned instruction, the activities of police officers in educational institutions are clearly regulated. They do not interfere with the educational process, but instead focus on preventive work to prevent juvenile delinquency, such as preventing bullying, drug trafficking, detecting suicidal tendencies, informing about cyberspace safety, and responding to emergencies.

The activities of the *Educational Security Service Officers* contribute to the formation of a legal culture among children, they monitor the security situation in schools, propose changes to security plans, conduct inspections of the territory, interact with other services, and inform and support participants in the educational process in case of offences.

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<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Order No. 663 on Approval of the Instruction on the Organization of Work of the National Police of Ukraine to Ensure a Safe Educational Environment in General Secondary Education Institutions of 1 October 2024, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1590-24#Text> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, *More than 70% of surveyed parents supported the introduction of a security officer in educational institutions*, <https://mvs.gov.ua/news/ponad-70-opitanix-batkiv-pidtrimali-vprovadzennia-v-zakladax-osviti-oficera-bezpeki-mariana-reva> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

<sup>17</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, Resolution No. 1245 on the Implementation of an Experimental Project to Strengthen the Security of the Educational Environment in General Secondary Education Institutions under the Legal Regime of Martial Law of 1 November 2024, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/nps/pro-realizatsiiu-eksperymentalnoho-projektu-shchodo-posylennia-bezpeky-os-a1245> [accessed: 15.02.2025].

In summary, the creation of the Educational Security Service in Ukraine is a strategic step that not only prevents juvenile delinquency but also increases the overall level of security and legal awareness in the context of martial law.

## Conclusions

In the current conditions of severe challenges for Ukrainian society, the issue of preventing juvenile delinquency is extremely relevant. An analysis of the current state of social and pedagogical work shows that the prevention of juvenile delinquency requires a comprehensive approach, taking into account both social and pedagogical and psychological factors that contribute to overcoming deviant behaviour among minors

A significant role in the implementation of preventive measures is played by the activities of educational institutions, school counselling services, involvement of the parental community and law enforcement agencies. Modern innovative practices include peer mediation and the creation of the Educational Security Service (2024), which are effective tools for creating a safe educational environment and preventing juvenile delinquency.

In 2024, an important step of the Ukrainian state was the creation of the Educational Security Service, whose activities are aimed at preventive work in schools without interfering with the educational process, which allows to effectively counteract juvenile delinquency under martial law.

The success of activities aimed at preventing juvenile delinquency depends on interagency cooperation (educational institutions, families, psychologists, social workers, police) and systematic professional development of specialists who address this problem, which is relevant for Ukrainian society. Therefore, the strategy of combating juvenile delinquency should be based on the principles of partnership, cooperation, tolerance and legal awareness.

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