

PREVENTION OF RISK BEHAVIOUR IN PUPILS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PEDAGOGUES

Kamil Janiš

Bělík, V., & Hoferková, S. (2018). *Prevence rizikového chování žáků z pohledu pedagogů* [Prevention of Risk Behaviour in Pupils from the Perspective of Pedagogues]. Hradec Králové: Gaudeamus.

Every day, we hear about various criminal cases in the media and, children (under 15 years) and adolescents (15–18 years) have their share in the statistics, of course. Although overall statistics point to a rising trend, according to Tab. 2: (*Development of the number of prosecuted and investigated persons in the Czech Republic with a focus on the number and proportion of offenders – children and adolescents*; p. 22), decline can be seen in recent times. This data could make it seem that prevention is sufficient. However, everyday encounters with reality point to fact that this is not true (since only detected actions are recorded), and therefore it is necessary to keep primary prevention activities in the environments of schools and educational institutions permanent. The authors compare this fact with the findings of other authors. The finding (p. 23) that “*The prevalence of child and youth delinquency is decreasing, especially in property crime ... On the other hand, there is a significant increase in the proportion of delinquent girls – the data show a gradual reduction of differences in delinquency in boys and girls over time. Delinquency slightly increases with age.*”

The contents of the monograph are divided into four chapters:

1. Current Prevalence of Risk Behaviour Among Children and the Youth;
2. Theoretical Definition of Risk Behaviour in the Context of the Czech Education System;
3. Primary-School Teachers' View on Risk Behaviour and Its Prevention;
4. Conclusions and Recommendations for Educational Work.

The first chapter of the monograph, **Current Prevalence of Risk Behaviour Among Children and the Youth**, consists of two relatively independent sub-chapters, the first of which deal with redefining the concept of “risk behaviour” and the second of which is devoted to risk behaviour in current Czech research.

From a multitude of different research results on selected manifestations of risk behaviour, one is worth paying special attention to, i.e. 1.2.4. *Risk Behaviour in Cyberspace* (p. 24–27). The presented results, especially findings of the adopted research (Kopecký et al. *Risk Behaviour Forms in Czech and Slovak Children on the Internet*. Olomouc: Palacky University of Olomouc, 2015) point out one interesting trend, namely, “*that children show risk behaviour despite the fact that their awareness in this area is relatively satisfactory.*” (p. 22). The presents conclusions can be applied to other risk behaviour.

This issue is closely related to the possible risks of sexting which is spreading among children, but also among the youth, on an unprecedented scale, and one can logically assume that it will expand even among adults in the near future. This is to some extent confirmed by the authors, as they report: *"Sexting appears to be dangerous risk behaviour. Czech and Slovak children – more often girls – place intimate photos or videos of themselves on the internet (about 10 %). Also, nearly three-quarters of respondents are aware of the risks of sexting."* (p. 26). The possibilities of abuse are apparent at first glance. In addition, it is not possible to decipher the age, gender or nationality of the person who is part of the communication early on. In this regard, it is indeed a very complex, complicated and dangerous phenomenon that carries many risks.

The authors do not drown in a multitude of research presented or among their conclusions. They aim to generalize the lessons learned, particularly in relation to the school environment. In this regard, they arrive at several conclusions:

- A marked decrease in the incidence of risk behaviour among Czech youth which may be one of the likely consequences of the positive impact of the implementation of preventive programs. Children and adolescents are beginning to prefer interest in healthy lifestyle and effective use of leisure time (p. 33).
- Risks are not found in the actual *"world out there"* but in the virtual one (p. 33).
- *"Balancing of experience between the sexes"* (p. 34). As the authors state: *"Generally, boys exhibit more aggressive behaviour against other persons or property. In contrast, these manifestations take the form of auto-aggression, such as self-harm and eating disorders, in girls"* (p. 34). From the above findings, it can subsequently be concluded that primary prevention programs must respect gender differences in their individualized form (p. 34).

The second chapter monograph, ***Theoretical Definition of Risk Behaviour in the Context of the Czech Education System***, includes a total of seven sub-chapters.

In this chapter, the authors point to the fact that prevention requires the use of a multidisciplinary approach. It might be worth considering to also include legal disciplines in the entire spectrum, as they define certain limits which may not be crossed. The next section devotes deeper attention to the legislative side of the matter (sub-chapter 2.2 *Legislative and Strategic Documents Related to the Prevention of Risk Behaviour in Children and the Youth*, p. 39).

It mentions a very interesting and stimulating idea which refers to the experience of other countries in creating the new field of preventology (p. 37). It would certainly be appropriate to state an approximate outline of its contents. Maybe the authors are contemplating a possible implementation, which would be only commendable. Similarly, a more detailed elaboration of the two approaches to coordination of prevention, horizontal and vertical, would be worth considering (p. 43–44).

One of the most inspiring outputs of the authors is their concept of an act on prevention, which *"however, should establish some (albeit – as it often happens in our conditions –*

undervalued) quota of workers who are to tackle these issues professionally as part of their full-time employment" (p. 46).

The third chapter of the monograph, **Primary-School Teachers' View of Risk Behaviour and Its Prevention**, is dedicated (as per the title) to the view the implementers themselves have on prevention. Various studies are mainly concerned with the impact of prevention activities, the frequency of individual risk behaviour instances, etc.

The first sub-chapter focuses on school counselling workplaces (p. 64–65). The following sub-chapter has a very interesting content *"The Views of Teachers on the Incidence of Risk Behaviour and Its Prevention"* (p. 66). In Tab. no. 9 *"Risk behaviour among primary school pupils from the perspective of teachers – frequent phenomena"* (p. 67), both expected and unexpected phenomena are listed, as pedagogues rank among the most common ones the following: – aggressive behaviour, including bullying, cyber-bullying and self-harm, as well as addictive behaviour, including Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) and last but not least, truancy and lazy lifestyle (p. 67). In the other category, then, appear: smoking in girls, negativism, lack of motivation, hatefulness, cheating and lying (p. 67). The above data concern risk behaviour instances which pedagogues encounter the most at school. In this context, their view of the most serious manifestations of risk behaviour is noteworthy (Tab. no. 10, p. 69), as in addition to the above manifestations, *"risk phenomena associated with social networks and excessive use of IT and PCs, including games,"* stand out significantly (p. 69).

Risk behaviour is closely related to prevention. Based on investigations, two trends are surfacing, the first of which concerns the increase of phenomena, the second of which concerns the interest of schools in finding solutions and prevention. Conversely, alarming phenomena include disinterest among parents of children and poor parental communication with school (p. 73).

The fourth chapter of the monograph **Conclusions and Recommendations for Educational Work**, presents summary findings which include primarily:

- Supporting efforts to promote the position of social pedagogue into the Act on Educational Staff.
- Strengthening the position of school counselling departments.
- Charting trends related to risk behaviour prevention issues.
- Improving higher education of teachers, including lifelong-learning centres in the area of prevention.
- Implementing research focused on the application of the prevention.

Conclusions and recommendations stated are considerably more numerous (p. 115–117) and represent interesting suggestions for further scientific work.

Overall, the presented monograph is another contribution to a better understanding of the school environment in relation to the prevention of risk behaviour in children and the youth. The authors have been dealing with these issues in the long term and they have the ability to present their views in clear language, which is not always the case.

One can fully concur with the authors when they state: *"The teacher enters their input into the school environment which is a very complicated one from the perspective of risk behaviour."* One finds nothing but full agreement with this observation. Therefore, it is exactly this complexity, this "first" encounter of children with risk behaviour manifestations, this lack of preparedness for the reality at hand, but also the lack of professional preparedness on the part of the pedagogues, etc., that can and often becomes determining for the children's further development.

Both interested professionals and the general public may benefit from the fact that the text is accompanied by a whole range of comprehensible diagrams which will undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding of the issue, not only by pedagogues and other professionals, but also by the parents themselves and, finally, by students of prevention-oriented study programs.

One can fully agree with the view of both authors, defined in the annotation (back cover of the publication): *"This scientific monograph introduces into the current research in the issue of risk behaviour in children and the youth. In particular, we focus on the results of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children: A WHO Cross-National Study (HBSC), but also on issues of current research in cyber-threats to children and the youth, and other studies. The book further defines the issues of risk behaviour prevention with special attention to children and adolescents in the school environment."*

Although the title of the publication refers to "the perspective of pedagogues", the text itself is mostly focused on primary schools. One can therefore expect that further natural continuation of the monograph will be a similar material focused on secondary school environment. It is an environment that is, indeed, in many respects different from what preventive approaches to pupils at the primary school level are designed for.

Author

doc. PhDr. PaedDr. Kamil Janiš, CSc.

Faculty of Public Policies in Opava, Silesian University in Opava

Institute of Pedagogical and Psychological Sciences

Bezručovo nám. 885/14, 746 01 Opava, Czech Republic

doc.kamil.janis@fvp.slu.cz