

# Chapter 15

## Poverty and Crime in Young People From Children Protection Centers

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Young people who are in a situation of residential care are considered to be in a condition of multidimensional poverty. Research aims to achieve the following general objectives: first, to identify the level of delinquency of young people and its determining factors and, second, to propose strategies and programs. This research will follow a two-stage research process in which different research methods will be applied. Along with the main results, the authors point out that the most frequent crimes refer to these youngsters getting involved in gang fights; alcohol consumption; in attacking classmates, parents, and teachers; they steal money and or other objects from the collaborating family; they consume pornography and go out to discotheques, pubs, and nightclubs. In the educational field, although they are dedicated to their education, they obtain very low grades. They only participate moderately in sports activities and have very low participation in religious services; furthermore, the young men have a moderately high level of belief in the legal system.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

There are several reasons that justify this research, which can be understood within the criminological, social, academic and personal fields.

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From a criminological point of view, Álvarez-Vivar, Bustamante-Cárcamo, & Salazar-Muñoz (2017) show that in various longitudinal studies, it is observed that the majority of recidivist adult offenders begin their criminal career at the end of childhood, increases notably during adolescence and gradually ceases after the age of 20. It is, therefore, in the adolescent period that criminal behavior is enhanced.

From a social point of view, the problem of young people in a residential care situation is, to the same extent, that of their situation. These young people have lived situations of abandonment and suffering, they have difficulties maintaining social relationships, accepting norms and acquiring knowledge or managing emotions, among others. Of the more than 2,000 children who, in the Andalusian case, reside in Child Protection Centers, only a minority has the support of a Collaborating Family (a family that mainly hosts them on weekends and holidays), which is, in the majority of the cases, the only structured family reference that these young people have. These families constitute a restorative experience responding to the affective deficiencies suffered by most of this group, and which influence their emotional, cognitive and behavioral development.

On the other hand, the impact of the Collaborating Families on the child is vital, as it helps the young person to create a feeling of belonging to the family, improve their self-esteem, develop their identity and have suitable models of reference and imitation. We are, therefore, before a social problem (that of young residents in Child Protection Centers) and the solution that the Collaborating Family provides to that reality.

From an academic point of view, Agnew & Brezina (1997) point out that criminal behavior has been the subject of several studies in recent decades and urgently calls for approaches and theories that allow understanding the factors that influence criminal behavior, as well as the recidivism and abandonment of the same. In contrast, Campoy & Summers (2015), citing Wortley (2008), state that the situational factors of crime have received little attention in the criminological literature in the Spanish language.

The purpose of this research is to provide useful knowledge to improve the situation of young people living in Child Protection Centers. More specifically, this research aims at achieving the following general objectives: first, to identify the level of delinquency of young people and its determining factors; and secondly, to propose strategies and programs that allow young people and collaborating families to alleviate or eliminate the level of delinquency of these young people.

This research has a descriptive, explanatory and exploratory nature and is structured according to the following pillars: first, the literature on crime and its determining factors is reviewed; secondly, the data collection and analysis methods are described; third, the main results are discussed; and fourthly, the final considerations are presented, including the conclusions, the theoretical and empirical implications, the limitations and the future lines of research.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section deals with the theoretical framework that supports the research. In the criminological field, there are a large number of theories (the Social Control Theory or the Social Learning Theory, among others) that explain, in a limited way, crime in terms of the individual's social relations (Zhang, Day & Cao, 2012). In order to provide a concise theory about crime and delinquency, Agnew (2005) proposes the General Tension Theory (GST) that is chosen in this research for the following reasons: it surpasses the theoretical and empirical criticisms of their previous theories (Agnew, 1992); it organizes previous theories into an integrated whole (Zhang, Day & Cao, 2012); it is much broader than current theories

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