FAMILY VICTIMIZATION AND YOUTH DELINQUENCY THROUGH THE NARRATIVES OF EX OFFENDERS

Elli Anitsi[1]

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to explore the connection between victimization and delinquency, through the eyes of ex-offenders. The research material includes life stories interviews with 23 ex-prisoners, recruited from two organizations in the field of re-entry services. The thematic analysis focuses on their experiences of family victimization and delinquency, during childhood and adolescence. The material is collected in the context of the research project "The phenomenon of recidivism in Greece: Research data and guidelines for crime policy and social reintegration", conducted in 2018 with the scientific supervision of Professor Christina Zarafonitou. The analysis highlights four main themes about the connection between family victimization and delinquency. The themes represent four different types of reaction or of coping to the victimization experienced in the family, which are delinquent in content: (a) The first theme is centered around a sense of symbolic flight from a troubled family situation. In this context participants attribute initial crime involvement during adolescence to the use of drugs and the imperative need to find money to buy drugs. In this way drugs are a path to crime. (b) The second theme is centered around behaviors

[1] PhD in Criminology, Panteion University, el.anitsi@panteion.gr ORCID ID https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5785-9762

of compensation. Antisocial behaviors are portrayed as an effort to exhibit power over others, mostly peers, classmates, and other children from the neighbourhood, reflecting a way to gain some kind of control over their environment. (c) The third theme is created from descriptions that are centered around the interpretation of the abusive experience as deserving, indicating of the adoption of a "true delinquent" identity. (d) The fourth theme is built from descriptions that depict delinquency as a reaction to the deprived life conditions, in a familial context were parents or caregivers were physically or emotionally absent.

Key words: victimization, youth delinquency, abuse, neglect, flight, compensation, deprivation.

I.   Introduction

The Greek official statistics indicate an increasing trend in the participation of minors in the recorded criminality (Courakis, 2013, p.304). In 1973 minors accounted for 2,9% (n=5.948), of all the "known" offenders in the Greek authorities, while the equivalent percentage in 2010 was 4,9% (n=12.435) (Pitsela, 2013, p.579-580). During the last years, an increased involvement of minors is evident in violent crimes. In 2014, 6,2% of the total of recorded offenders for violent crimes against persons (bodily injuries, intentional homicides, rapes, and robberies), consisted of minors, while in 2022 the involvement of minors increased in 8,7% in the same category (Statistical Yearbooks of the Hellenic Police, 2014; 2022). Besides the trends exhibited by quantitative data, which may reflect the effect of the increased willingness of the victims to report the crimes and changes in the Greek authorities (Zarafonitou, 2023a; Pitsela, 2013), delinquency of minors is presenting qualitative differences, which are also a source of concern. Youth delinquency in Greece is characterized by extreme use of violence, the increased use of modern technology, the increased participation of girls and the involvement in crime groups (Zarafonitou, 2023b).

Clearly youth delinquency is a complex multifactorial phenomenon (Farsedakis, 2005; Zarafonitou, 2023a; Courakis, 2013). In the investigation of the factors that contribute to this phenomenon, a plethora of studies has focused on the effects of negative behaviors exhibited by the parents (Hoffmann, 2015). Among the strongest parenting related predictors of delinquency are childrearing skills, parental style, monitoring, maltreatment, parental stress, quality of the relationship and parent's antisocial behavior (ibid, p.165). The victimization experiences in the family and especially maltreatment has received a lot of attention in the last three decades (Ireland, Smith & Walter, 2015). The research findings indicate that victimization within the family increases the risk of engaging in antisocial behaviors and the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile (Widom & Maxfield, 2001; Stewart, Dennison & Waterson,2002; Smith, Ireland, and Thornberry, 2005).

According to the general definition provided by WHO (1999, p.15) "*Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.*" In this framework, physical abuse involves acts that cause physical or potential physical harm. Emotional abuse refers to failure to provide a developmentally appropriate and supportive environment for the child, while negligent treatment concerns the failure to provide for the development of the child in all spheres. Sexual abuse refers to the involvement of the child in sexual activities, that the child does not fully comprehend and is unable to provide consent and exploitation to the use of the child in work for the benefit of other (ibid).

Drawing form the categorization on child victimization created by Finkelhor and Dzuiba-Leatherman 1994, p.173; See also Finkelhor & Hashima 2001, p. 50) victimization of child within the family can take three forms, depending on the severity and commonality of the incidents: (a) the pandemic victimizations, which involves the majority of the incidents and may include physical punishment by the parents and victimization by the siblings (b) the acute victimizations that are less frequent, but more severe than the previous category and include physical abuse, neglect and family

abduction and (c) the extraordinary victimizations, that occur in a small percentage of children and include homicide and child abuse homicide.

The phenomenon of child victimization has a large dark figure. The term "The Child Maltreatment Funnel", is usually used in the literature to represent the problems in the estimation of child victimization, reflecting the gap between the actual cases and the officially recorded incidents (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2012; Zarafonitou, 2023). Regarding the phenomenology of child victimization in our country, Greece has no Registry for Reporting and Epidemiological Surveillance, which would act as a centrally coordinated mechanism for data collection (Plakantonaki, 2022). The "Smile of the child", a voluntary non-profit association, which runs the "1056 National Child Protection Hotline" records an increase in the reports for serious cases of abuse in the last years and a 17% increase in the first six months of 2023 (Hamogelo tou Paidiou, 2023). A study conducted in Balkan countries and Greece in a representative sample of children aged 11, 13 and 16 years old, indicated that 83.16% of the Greek students reported having experienced at least one psychologically violent act during their lifetime and 76,37% of the students reported at least one physically violent act during their lifetime (BECAN, 2013, p.17). Another study that analyzed child maltreatment cases from the Laboratory of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology of Aristotle University in Northen Greece, concerning the period 2005-2015 revealed that in most recorded cases, the perpetrator was one of the parents, with the father appearing more often (Antoniadou, 2017). The Greek research indicates that the familial context in which victimization incidents are recorded, is characterized by low socio-economic status, parents' unemployment, many children, apparent family problems, parents' mental health illness and / or substance abuse, parents' own adverse life experiences and bad quality of relationship between spouses (Mimarakis et. al. 2022; Georgousopoulou, 2017; Agathonos-Georgopoulou & Browne, 1997).

In Greece, the victimization of minors within the family is punished by the Law 3500/2006 "For combating domestic violence" which was established on 24 October 2006 (Law 3500/2006). According to the law's provisions any type of violence, including exploitation, sexual, psychological, and physical violence, is punishable. Moreover, as stated to Article 17(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CPC) the

victim of family violence does not need to make a complaint for the procedure to be applied.[2] Based on the provisions of Article 4, physical violence as a means of correction is prohibited, which indicates that the prohibition of corporal punishment in the family context, is rather recent in our country. Efforts to combat child victimization within the family were reinforced with the recent induction of the National Action Plan for the prevention and treatment of child sexual exploitation and abuse. The National Action Plan for the prevention and treatment of child sexual exploitation and abuse, provides the establishment of Juvenile Protection Offices in five major cities of the country and the creation of a protocol for the coordination of all organizations and services involved in tackling the phenomenon (National Action Plan for the prevention and treatment of child sexual exploitation, 2022-2027).

II.   Theoretical approaches on the connection between family victimization and juvenile delinquency

In the research bibliography, the hypotheses about the effects of family violence to delinquency have been approached by the terms "cycle of violence" and "intergenerational transmission of violence", focusing either on the consequences of abuse in exercising the parental role, or on the relationship between abuse and neglect and delinquent and criminal behavior (Widom, 1989, p.160). Drawing upon the Social Learning Theory, cycle of violence supports that observing significant others in engaging in violence contributes to the creation of a system of beliefs that justify the use of violence. Through exposure to violence, children are taught that it is acceptable to use violence to control their environment and achieve their goals (Ireland & Smith, 2009). Similarly, in coercion theory, antisocial behavior is reinforced in the context of dysfunctional exchanges between children and parents/caregivers that originate in early childhood. Violent reactions, in the forms of verbal abuse and corporal punishment, used by parents establish a communication pattern in the family, that is adopted by the child and generated in other social interactions (Patterson & Dishion, 1985). Likewise,

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[2] Regarding the offences of the Articles 6,7,9 & 10.

as supported by developmental approaches and the social information processing perspectives, children that are exposed to violence develop "aggressive social-cognitive processing patterns", viewing the world as a threatening place, misinterpreting the behaviors of others as hostile or considering aggression as the best alternative to resolve problems (Ireland, Smith & Walter, 2015, p.584; Dodge & Crick, 1990).

According to strain theories, victimization experiences lead to a range of negative emotional reactions, which create pressure for corrective action (Agnew, 2011). Delinquency represents a way to reduce or escape strain, retaliate or relief the person from the negative feelings. Acting with an illegal manner is a possible response when a series of other factors are present including poor and delinquent coping skills, low social support and low social control, association to delinquent peers and beliefs favorable to delinquency, as well as exposure to favorable situations. In the same context, from a trauma perspective, delinquency reflects a way to survive the traumatic experience of victimization (Ford et. al, 2006). Traumatic experiences by trusted persons may cause serious damage to the child's self-respect and sense of control, entrapping the child in a chronic state of helplessness. In this respect, delinquency comes as a reactive or defensive attempt of the traumatized person to regain the ability to feel in control.

In the framework of social control theory, experiencing abuse and neglect in the family inhibits the formation of strong bonds with the significant others. Because of early experiences of maltreatment, the person fails to develop strong bonds to conventional others and commit to conventional norms, which serve as controls to the behavior (Watts, 2017). According to Interactional Theory, the influence of the parents varies depending on the developmental stage of the child (Thornberry & Krohn, 2019). As parental roles and the home environment play a crucial role in early childhood, early involvement in antisocial behavior is more likely to derive as a consequence of the interactions between a family context experiencing severe structural adversity and negative developmental traits. Children who exhibit early onset in childhood are also more likely to have experienced less effective parenting styles and maltreatment (ibid, p.250). From the perspective of the institutional dysfunction theory (Courakis, 2013, p. 183) delinquency derives from parallel malfunctions in the main agents of socialization.

According to Courakis (2013) family interactions in the Greek urban context lack essential communication representing a new form of neglect, in which children are strangling to respond in a heavy schedule of school and extra-curricular activities, that leads to dependency and immaturity.

III.   The study

Objective

The objective of this paper is to explore how ex-offenders make sense of the connection between victimization and delinquency. The research material derives from life stories interviews with 23 ex-prisoners, who were recruited from two organizations that provide re-entry services. The thematic analysis focuses on their experiences of victimization and delinquency, during childhood and adolescence. The research material is collected from the study *"The phenomenon of recidivism of former prisoners in Greece: Empirical data and guidelines for crime policy and social reintegration"*, which was carried out from January to September of 2018, with the scientific supervision of Professor Christina Zarafonitou.[3] The goal of the study was the investigation of recidivism and the process of social integration, through the life stories of ex-offenders. The current paper is an attempt to analyze the material in the context of a new research question, regarding the connection between family victimization and delinquency during childhood and adolescence.

Methods

The present analysis is based on life stories interviews with 23 ex-prisoners.[4] All interviewees had experienced family victimization and been involved in delinquency

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[3] The research project was funded by the Hellenic Petroleum Group. The research team included Dr Eleni Kontopoulou, Dr Kostas Panagos, Martha Lepmbesi PhD c. and the author.

[4] The study included the conduction of 40 interviews with ex-prisoners. The current analysis focuses on the life stories of the 23 participants who spoke about experiences of victimization and delinquency involvement during childhood and adolescence. For an analytical presentation of the research see Zarafonitou et. al, 2019.

during childhood and adolescence. The 23 participants consisted of 18 men and 5 women, aged 24 - 65. Most of them were natives, due to the central role of language in storytelling. The participants were sentenced and imprisoned for homicide, robbery, theft, illegal carrying of a weapon, possession of a weapon, bodily injury, debts to the State, fraud, organized crime group, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and forgery. More than half of the participants reported a history of recidivism.[5]

Life stories interviews is an opened type of interview that allows participants to narrate their experiences, recalling memories and events that they consider crucial in their life course (Tsolis, 2006). It is a method, which differs from other types of self – presentation like self-description as it incorporates a form of reviving the experience, by the participant. Self-narratives do not represent perfect factual representations, but a way in which the interviewee makes sense of its path to crime involvement, prison, and life after incarceration. As noted by Maruna & Matravers (2007, p.431) *"self-narrative is seen to be an imaginative rendering, a sort of mythmaking through which the past is reconstructed, edited and embellished in order to create a coherent plot and themes."*

The present circumstances in the lives of the interviewees play a significant role in the way they reconstruct their past. In the current study participants were recruited from Epanodos PIE, the national organization for reentry services and Onisimos an NGO also active in the field. All participants received social reintegration services which means that a process of reflection about crime involvement was already taking place in the context of re-entry counseling. Both organizations have informed their beneficiaries on the research project, and they participated voluntarily.

The interviews were carried out in the facilities of the organizations. The researchers have prepared a list of themes, that should have been covered by the end of the interview (e.g. "Where were you born?", "Would you like to talk about your family environment? "Would you like to discuss about school and friends during that period?"). By arriving at the interview, the participants were informed about the scope and purposes of the research and were asked to sign a consent form. They provided their consent separately in case they agreed to the recording of the interview. Most interviews were recorded.

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[5] To be categorized as recidivist an offender had to be convicted one time (with or without prison sentence) and reoffend after the initial conviction. See Zarafonitou et. al, 2019.

The interview followed a chronological path. At the beginning of the interview participants were encouraged to begin their narration from their childhood and mention any topics or experiences, they felt were worthy of mentioning. Each interview lasted from two to two and a half hours. The qualitative analysis of the material was conducted through the method of thematic analysis, focusing on the content of the narratives (Tsiolis, 2018; Isari & Pourkos, 2015; Patton, 2002). After repeated readings, aiming to the familiarization with the research material, the initial codes were created from passages of the text, in which common meaning was identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The codes were used to construct the thematic categories, which were reviewed and reconstructed in the process of the analysis.

Findings

i.   Victimization experiences during childhood and adolescence

The analysis that follows attempts to display the victimization experiences in the context of the family, that participants report about their childhood and adolescence. The most common themes that emerged from the respondents' narratives consist of: (a) physical abuse, (b) exploitation (c) neglect due to lack of attention and affection by the parents or due to constant changes in the care takers and (d) the witnessing of violence between the parents.

(a) Physical abuse

Abuse was a central theme for some participants. As they describe, abuse was not limited to the domestic context; but it also took place within institutions or committed by foster parents.

> *At the institution the physical abuse continued. Even in the church, we were forced to go by beating us.*

The abusive parent is usually the father, who is addicted to alcohol or gambling or is using violence to punish the child. Indicative are the following testimonials provided by some participants:

My mother was a good person, we better not discuss about my father, he used to hit us. He used to drink a lot of alcohol. He was beating my mother also. Most of my brothers and sisters were quiet and obedient .... Even so he was also violent towards them. My father used to say if you don't get beaten you cannot become a human being.

My father used to come (to our home) once every two months to see us. Most of the times he was becoming violent.

My father was a worker and very angry because of his work. He used to take it out on us (the children).

My father was a very violent man, mainly with us (his family) but also with everyone else around him.

A participant reports having difficulties attending school because of the abusive behavior of the father:

Attending school was difficult, due to the abuse from the father and afterwards due to work.

(b) Exploitation

Two women report being victims of exploitation during childhood. In one case the participant describes that her family forced her to leave her home to marry someone with the exchange of money.

My mother sold me to my husband…When his family came into our home and offered us money for me, my father refused, but my mother insisted, and I had to leave with him.

When I arrived to …some people felt sorry for me, and they taught me how to still from somebody's pocket. After a while they beat me to go and still.

(c) Neglect

Some participants are describing that one or both parents had an indifferent, distant, or rejecting attitude towards them and that their relationships with their parents lacked affection. According to a woman participant:

My father was a difficult person, he was distant, usually away from home, with other women. Not really interested about us. I remember that when I dropped out of school my mother was so disappointed, but my father was cruel. He said to me "go find a job", I am not going to support a lazy person.

Another man reports being abandoned by the father who was suffering from depression and was addicted to gambling:

My father was not capable of raising me and he left. In the beginning I blamed him, like every child would have done. Then someone must understand that not all people have the same strength and that he stayed at home, for three years, he had depression […] My father was a professional gambler.

Neglect for some participants was due to lack of a steady home and constant changes between care takers or foster homes. As three participants explain:

They used to give us to caretakers from the orphanage, most of them were bad. I can only remember one good old lady that loved us.

My mother was sick, so we had to change places every five months, or we were given to foster homes.

My mother and father had died. I was 9 years old, I lived with my grandmother until the age of 10, as far as I can remember. Afterwards I lived in the neighborhood. In the neighborhood here and there…

For two women participants neglect was a consequence of the drug addiction of the mother. Both women also abused drugs during adolescence.

My mother was 16 years old when I was born […] I hated her because she was a heroin addict, borrowing money and lying to everyone. I grew up

with my grandmother, I was embarrassed seeing my mother outside on the street.

My mother was unfortunately a drug addict, she wasn't present in my life.

In some cases, neglect was connected to deprived families, due to poverty, the imprisonment, or the abandonment of the father.

I was born and raised in cities of [...] Then my father was incarcerated. My grandfather and grandmother left me in the orphanage. I escaped the orphanage after four months and left the country.

We struggled financially. My parents separated when I was 12 years old, and my father was not helping at all. He left the house and we never saw him again [...] I had to leave school to take care of my younger sister, so my mother could work.

(d) The witnessing of violence between the parents is also a central theme in the stories provided by the participants. More precisely, participants refer to male spousal violence in their families. The narrations include psychical abuse and intimidation of the mother by the father. The participants' descriptions about the witnessing of violence between the parents are indicative:

I used to live in a house where my father was violent to my mother. When you see your father hit your mother[...] I will tell you an incident where my mother couldn't take it anymore and she wanted to kill herself.

My parents were inadequate due to the violence by my father and my mother not being at home [...] This is what the police said when they came to our home after a report [...] Violence was towards the mother.

I used to live in a house where my father was violent to my mother. At the age of 16, were they separated I left home, due to the fights.

A participant is not describing psychical violence between the parents but a cold, relationship:

What made our relationship difficult is that there was a cold relationship between them. They weren't two people that fell in love and got married. My mother was afraid of my father, and I don' t know why. There were no violent incidents in the family, there was a silent violence. He was a strict person, he was obsessive, he has seen things in Athens, which for the small society, that he was raised were unthinkable, immoral... I think my father has projected all those things to my mother.

ii. From victimization to delinquency

(a) Drug abuse as a symbolic flight from a troubled family situation

The themes most prevalent to the analysis regarding delinquency refer to involvement due to drug abuse. The drug use is described as a way to handle difficulties, "to forget problems", "to feel well", "to cope with feelings", or as "curiosity", and "a reaction to the situations". Some participants mention drug use in the context of peer pressure. Regarding the types of drugs used, interviewees mention heroin, hashish, gas, pills, sedatives, "syrups" and amphetamines. Most participants describe a rapid transition from use to the abuse of drugs. The reported age of onset is 13 to 17 years of age.

I was sniffing gas from the age of thirteen, with friends from the neighbourhood. We did it out of curiosity […]. We used to forget when sniffing. It affected the way we view things, positively, or negatively each time...

I enjoyed getting high. I wasn't thinking of my problems, I was smiling […]. Your brain gets dependent on it. You think that if you use drugs, you will feel better.

I started using hashish because I hanged out with those kids […] everybody did it, why not me?

Some of them used drugs, cannabis, pills, and heroin […] I started using too. I really wanted it […] I thought of it as revolution, it was forbitten and this attracted me.

We began with pills, then syrups and then in the age of sixteen, seventeen and a half I tried heroin, which was my future disaster.

This is when I started using heroin. I couldn't find hashish. The one who brought me hash brought me heroin and said, "if you want, take it."

I was in high school, with all the friends from the neighbourhood. We were going to the toilets to get high with gas, hashish…

I then fell in love with one of these kids and joined the group and started using hash. I must have been 14.

(b) Drugs as a path to crime

Some participants describe that their involvement to delinquency was due to drug abuse. Crime is portrayed as a way to satisfy an imperative need, a way to find the money to buy drugs. As a participant mentions "*The first time I committed a crime was due to my drug addiction*". Regarding the crimes committed, ex-offenders describe they were involved in robberies and thefts, that are characterized as serious or less serious. Most of the times crimes were committed with friends, that also abused drugs. A woman describes starting prostitution to get drugs.

My first robbery was in a lady wearing a gold chain necklace. I am embarrassed to say this, but I wasn't well because of withdrawal symptoms and other things.

We used to find someone of an older age and asked him to give as money, we were around ten people. This is not theft, but the way we asked for the money, turned it into theft. We knew we were scaring them. They were scared that we would take all their money, so eventually they were giving us some. When you do that to fifteen to twenty people you make money. You could have made a lot of money this way.

I had met a group from Agios Pavlos with some other friends, and all those nights we stayed up late and went back and forth. We did all sorts of stupid things to make money. Thefts and not only... We entered a clothing store,

and the alarm went off. There was a police patrol car around the corner, and we tried to run [...]. I was sentenced to probation, because of no other recorded crimes in my criminal record. The first court was at the age of 16 for theft.

When you start using, you are a delinquent character. You need money, you don't have money, but you must do something to buy hashish.

I was 14 years old and a friend of mine who died of heroin told me "Lets still a kiosk, to make some money".

They were not serious offences; all were committed during drug abuse.

When I was young, I started working as prostitute to buy heroin [...] I used to still everyone in the house, my mother, my stepfather...

Drug dealing is also mentioned by some participants along with other crimes:

Every neighbourhood has a "group" as we call it, but when I started using heroin, I couldn't stay in one place (...) we were involved with some people in Omonia who were dealing pills, akineton, special K.

I ended up dealing to get my drugs, I was arrested too many times.

(c) Antisocial behaviors as a way to exhibit power, to regain control over the environment, a way to compensate

Some participants report antisocial behavior within the school setting or the neighborhood, which is connected to vandalisms, causing of troubles and aggressive behaviors towards other students. Antisocial behaviors are portrayed as an effort to exhibit power over others, mostly peers, classmates, other children from the neighbourhood, reflecting a way to gain some kind of control over their environment.

In high school things got out of control, we caused damages and staff like that. We did everything, bullied other children. At the time when we were strong if somebody opposed us, we bullied them.

In Lyceum, I lost control […] I caused trouble and beat up others.

It was us and nobody else in the street. Childhood stories that did not end well.

(d) Abuse as punishment of a "difficult" child

In some cases, the interviewees make excuses about the abusive behavior of their parents or caregivers, which they attribute to their "difficult" behavior. In this context participants present themselves as someone who was "aggressive", who had a natural inclination towards delinquency.

When I was a child, I was very difficult, definitely. How do you stop a child getting involved in difficult situations? You can't. You're going to misbehave. The result was that they beat me all the time. Then you understand and say, "That's not the right way."

I think that from a young age I tended to go towards what was forbidden... I wanted to see what forbidden means, what comes out of it.... I had a tendency to break things...Supposing that life is a game, and I were asked to take a stand, to say who I am with, I would be with the thief, under no circumstances with the policeman.

Okay, I've always had an aggressive attitude towards cops. Now that I think about it, I don't know where to attribute this aggression... my father, before his first wife died in Athens, before that, he was a policeman, he was in the city police in ....

(e) Delinquency as a reaction to deprived life conditions

In some cases, delinquency and most specifically thefts are described as a reaction to the deprived life conditions, in a context were family or caregivers were physically or emotionally absent.

I left school and I started working at a very young age... Then I started working at night. I met some people form the gym who were involved in crime.

We were a group from the neighborhood. At nights we used to open cars and steal things from them.

I was all alone. I went to another town, and I started stealing, living in the street.

In high school I didn't have any money to buy clothes, I started thinking of money more intensely. Then I started stealing.

IV.   Discussion

Delinquency during childhood and adolescence is clearly a complex multifactorial phenomenon. The analysis from the qualitative research conducted via life stories interviews with ex -prisoners highlights that most participants that reported involvement in delinquent behaviors during childhood and adolescence shared experiences of victimization. The relationship between victimization and delinquency is supported by a plethora of research findings.

Abuse during childhood occurs frequently as a risk factor for the early onset of crime involvement (Wasserman et. al., 2003). In a comparison of children that had been abused and neglected with a control group Widom (1989) concluded that children, which suffered abuse and neglect presented a higher rate of arrests during adolescence. As concerns the age, in which the abusive experiences takes place, according to the study of Smith and Thornberry (1995), a strong association is presented between abuse before the age 12 and consequent self-reported and officially recorded delinquent activity. Physical abuse and neglect during adolescence also significantly increases the danger of involvement in deviant behaviors during the adolescent and post adolescent period (Smith, Ireland, and Thornberry, 2005).

Neglect was another central theme that derived in the narratives of ex-offenders. Neglect in the context of family function, refers to a family pattern in which the parents spend insufficient time in positive interactions with their children (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). In this frame, parents may ignore or evaluate antisocial

behaviors, like involvement in fights, bullying towards classmates and petty thefts as incidents of low importance. They may also be informed by the police about the involvement in serious incidents. The limited time that the parents spend with their children and the ignorance of antisocial behaviors may hinder parents' abilities to effectively supervise their children (ibid).

Lack of parental skills which leads to maltreatment and neglect is also found in the base of adolescent offending (Wasserman et. al., 2003; Farsedakis, 2005). Insufficient ties between parents and children are linked to later violent criminality (Hawkins et. al.,2000). The conflict in the family is also connected with neglect and antisocial behavior in adolescence and adulthood (Zarafonitou, 2004; Bradford, Vaughn & Barber, 2008).

Furthermore, the witnessing of family violence was prevalent in many narratives of ex-offenders who described involvement in delinquent behaviors. The witnessing of violence between parents is an extremely stressful event and a risk factor for various psychosocial problems that include alcohol use, drug use and addiction, domestic violence, and criminal behavior outside the family context (Straus 1991; Adams, 2006). According to the processes that intervene in the relationship between witnessing of parental violence and delinquency, Straus (1991, p.6) notes: (a) the modeling of coercion and violence, (b) the absence or the significantly reduced opportunities of a child being raised in such an environment, to observe and be trained in negotiation skills and social adequacy, (c) the agony, fear and helplessness which a child feels while witnessing violence between the parents, that may be equivalent to post traumatic stress disorder, (d) the dulled affect from the repeated exposure to violence and cruelty against loved persons, (e) the impaired ability of parents experiencing violence from their partner in nurturing their child.

Erel and Burman (1995) locate three theoretical assumptions, that are common in the literature, about the connection between spousal relationships and the relationships between parents and children, the spillover hypothesis, the compensatory hypothesis, and the compartmentalization hypothesis. According to the spillover hypothesis the negative interactions between the parents is transferred to the parent and child interaction, affecting the quality of the relationship.

Witnessing family violence is connected to increased possibility for behavioral problems, while in the case of cooccurrence between witnessing of violence in the family and child abuse, children's' adjustment is seriously affected (Wasserman et. al., 2003). Family violence, disturbed relationships between parents, an alcoholic parent or caregiver, were found to be the most common forms of malfunctioning in prisoners who report involvement in the criminal justice system during childhood and adolescence (Kontopoulou, 2014). A meta-analysis conducted by Buehler et. al. (1997) in 68 studies confirms the connection between interparental violence and juvenile antisocial behavior. Other research findings suggest the connection between witnessing violence among the parents, more specifically the fathers' violent behavior and delinquency (Kashani & Allan, 1998; Farrington, Loeber & Ttofi, 2012).

While speaking about their childhood most participants mention multiple victimization experiences (Finkelhor, Ormrod & Turner, 2007). The review of Pires and Almeida (2023) highlights the connection between the experience of multiple types of victimization and the likelihood of adopting delinquent behaviors and developing psychological problems. As noted by the authors poly-victimization bears a high psychological impact for the victims that may lead to delinquent behavior. Moreover, the experience of multiple victimization experiences, taking place in many contexts of the life of the adolescent, is more strongly associated to delinquency, than single victimization episodes (ibid).

The analysis highlights four main themes about the connection between victimization and delinquency during childhood and adolescence. The themes represent four different types of reaction or of coping to the victimization experienced in the family, which are delinquent in content.

(a) The first theme is centered around a sense of symbolic flight from a troubled family situation. Through the participants' descriptions the need "to forget problems", "to feel well", or "to cope with feelings" is expressed. Drug use is also attributed to "curiosity". For others "doing something forbidden, was attractive" or drug abuse was "a reaction to the situations". The role of influences and pressure from peers is at sometimes highlighted. In most cases parental neglect, both by lack of affection and lack of effective supervision is evident. According to the narratives of ex-offenders the familial

context is described as aggressive, unsafe, or indifferent. In some cases, addictions to alcohol and drugs were also evident in parents. In this context participants attribute initial crime involvement during adolescence to the use of drugs and the imperative need to find money to buy drugs. In this way drugs are a path to crime. Crimes perpetrated usually include drug dealing, robberies, and street robberies.

(b) The second theme is centered around behaviors of compensation. Antisocial behaviors are described as an effort to exhibit power over others, mostly peers, classmates and other children from the neighborhood, reflecting a way to gain some kind of control over their environment. Antisocial behaviors usually take place within the school setting, or the neighborhood, involving vandalisms, causing of troubles and aggressive behaviors and bullying towards other students.

(c) The third theme is created from descriptions that are centered around the interpretation of the abusive experience as deserving, indicating of the adoption of a "true delinquent" identity. Participants make excuses about the abusive behavior of their parents or caregivers, which they attribute to their "difficult" behavior. They present themselves as someone who was "aggressive", attracted from "the forbidden", someone who identified "with thieves, rather than policemen". The descriptions depict the ideas of the ex-offenders of having a natural inclination towards delinquency, which is built on their interpretations of the abuse as deserving.

(d) The fourth theme is built from descriptions that depict delinquency as a reaction to the deprived life conditions, in a familial context were parents or caregivers were physically or emotionally absent. Delinquent behaviors usually involve thefts, while deprived life conditions are also described as a reason to quit school and start working at a very young age.

Through the four themes delinquency derives as a dysfunctional adaptation to a continuous sense of threat and abandonment rooted in the familial context. As is also indicated by the findings of the current research the family is isolated, lacking social support, while it is also not receiving any essential help from the relevant services (Zarafonitou et al, 2019). The themes demonstrate the need for effective and targeted interventions to the populations at risk, that entail the coordination of the organizations

entrusted to provide help and the designing of programs appropriate to the needs of the Greek reality, as well as the strengthening of the community participation. Towards this direction, the fulfillment of the long-standing request for the establishment of Local Councils for Crime Prevention in each municipality (Pitsela & Karagiannidis, 2022; Zarafonitou 2004) coordinated by the reestablished Central Council for Crime Prevention (Farsedakis, 2019; Zarafonitou 2019) is a necessary step.

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