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პროექტს ახორციელებს გიფ-თბილისი

CRIMINAL MENTALITY AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIETY

Research Report
Tbilisi, 2024

GCRT The Georgian Center for
Psychosocial and Medical
Rehabilitation of Torture Victims 



საქართველოს მეცნიერებათა აკადემიის
ინსტიტუტი სოციალური მეცნიერებებისა და მენეჯმენტის
ინსტიტუტი OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND MANAGEMENT

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Georgian Center for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

**The research was conducted by the “Institute of Social Studies and Analysis” (ISSA)
The head of the research group: Iago Kachkachishvili**

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Introduction

Regardless of the positive practices of juvenile delinquency prevention through juvenile justice reform and the introduction of diversion and mediation programmes in Georgia, the rate of criminal acts has increased across the country in recent years, which is an indication of the upward trend of offenses committed by adolescents, among which, group shoplifting, breaking into cars, violent acts, etc. are particularly common. This indicates that the protection of the rights and freedoms of adolescents (the right to education, creating decent living conditions for them, living in a non-violent environment, etc.) and the implementation of measures to prevent criminal acts lack efficacy. The development and introduction of the policy, comprehensive programmes and services that focus on child/adolescent development and their best interests remains a major challenge to this day, both at the central and municipal levels. In addition, crimes committed by adult members of society are also common. Therefore, it is important, on the one hand, to examine/analyze the root causes of crimes, the understanding of criminal mentality, the acceptance of criminal subcultures, risks related to criminal behavior, and on the other, to implement relevant measures on the basis of the results/findings.

For this very purpose, the research 'Study of Criminal Mentality and its Influence on Society' was conducted within the framework of the EU-supported project 'Civil Society for Resilient and Safer Communities (CiSSCo)' implemented by the foundation Global Initiative on Psychiatry – Tbilisi (GIP-Tbilisi) in partnership with the Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims.

The research was conducted by the non-governmental research organization - the Institute of Social Studies and Analysis – ISSA. The research set out to study the criminal mentality existing in the Georgian reality and its impact on society. It is a complex research encompassing both quantitative and qualitative research methods (triangulation approach).

Executive Summary

The population has a vague idea about what the criminal subculture is: respondents' answers to the test questions reveal that the share of those with the correct information about the criminal subculture is not larger than one-fifth. TV and social networks have been identified as the main sources of information on this topic.

The majority of the population rate the criminal situation in their environment positively; however, it should be noted that at least every fourth respondent (27%) reports high crime rates in their neighbourhood, and 16% point out that criminal acts have been on the rise in the last 2 years. Tbilisi residents are the most likely to report the increase in criminal cases. On the other hand, the current criminal situation does not make the majority feel unsafe in their environment. The opposite is reported only by a small proportion – 8%.

Against the backdrop of generally positive attitudes towards the police, one in four respondents (24%) laments that the police is not actively involved in measures aimed at eliminating and preventing criminal acts, which, according to them, is due to selective justice, unqualified police staff and the lack of human resources in the police.

Respondents (ranging between 30% and 40%) identify the crimes that occur with a certain frequency close to where they live: domestic violence, confrontations between adolescents, physical violence, hate crimes on the grounds of homophobia/transphobia, etc. These crimes are reported by Tbilisi residents most frequently.

It should be noted that about 30% of the population have personally witnessed at least one of the above crimes; however, a third of them have not reacted to it at all. The most common response citizens have to crimes is to either interfere and defuse the situation themselves or call the police (on 112).

For approximately every fifth respondent (19%), it is not prestigious to work in the police, whilst for 39%, it is. 40% do not want their family members to get employed by the police. The following have been identified as the main reasons behind this attitude: a) policing is a life-threatening job, and b) the police do not enjoy a high level of legitimacy in society.

According to the respondents, offenders are more likely to have the following socio-demographic characteristics among others: a) incomplete secondary education; b) teenage years; c) male gender; d) separation from biological parents; e) unemployment; f) poor economic conditions of the person/family. As for the factors triggering crime, the following have been identified: neglect/lack of parental supervisions, unstable psycho-emotional state of the person and being associated with people in conflict with the law. Experts (psychologists) involved in the research also believe that gender and age are in correlation with committing a crime: males and adolescents under 18 years of age are at a higher risk of committing a crime as compared to other groups.

According to the majority of the population (up to 60%), criminal subcultures/reality in the country affect the lifestyle of people (first of all, adolescents), the process of forming views and receiving

education, employment, habits, and cognition in general. In addition, about 30% of respondents believe that in the last 5 years, the desire to join criminal subcultures has increased among adolescents.

The survey suggests that a rather considerable portion of society displays loyalty towards criminal subcultures on the one hand, and on the other, distrust in law enforcement institutions (there is a correlation between these two factors): namely, 21% of respondents would approach the members of criminal subcultures to handle the cases of oppression/injustice infiltrated against them. Furthermore, according to 16%, they would not report such cases to the police. Almost one-fifth of the population think it is acceptable for people to contact members of the criminal underworld in the case of experiencing acts of oppression. The data suggest that the influence and acceptance of the criminal world is more pronounced in urban than rural settlements, as well as in west Georgia compared to the east.

Experts involved in the research also note that people seek alternative ways, namely, turn to representatives of the criminal subculture for help when law enforcement institutions (police, court, etc.) are disorganized and fail to provide effective solutions to their problems.

Within the framework of the research, an index variable of acceptance of criminal mentality was developed. As per the variable, every fifth respondent (21%) has an acceptance of criminal mentality, i.e., they would rather have criminal subcultures settle disputes.

Experts participating in the qualitative research emphasize that the desire to become associated with the authorities of the criminal subculture among adolescents begins when cooperation-based communication between children and their parents in the family ceases or weakens. This has a number of underlying factors: a) poor economic conditions of families, when parents' efforts mainly go towards satisfying the basic needs of their child(ren); b) authoritarian parenting when children, who are subjected to aggression, transfer the aggression onto others; c) parents being negative role models by having conflicts with each other and being addicted to alcohol and drugs; d) following the example of a family member who is a part of the criminal subculture and is incarcerated.

According to experts, the aspect of power also plays a key role among adolescents. During puberty, the desire to establish oneself in society and become a leader increases, and criminal activities present an opportunity for adolescents to gain power. The most common form is the so-called institution of 'Kochi' (which literally means a ram) in schools or neighbourhoods, which implies that the child is in an advanced position and acts as a behavioural pattern for other children. In addition, the desire to feel safe is also an important aspect – some children believe that being associated with criminal groups will make them less susceptible to oppression.

Experts have also identified push factors that encourage adolescents, such as positive stereotypes about criminal groups, frequent use of modern technologies and social networks, lack of appropriate infrastructure to spend time productively, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, systematic use of alcohol and drugs and insufficient trust in the rule of law and institutions.

Experts identify specific groups of adolescents who are at risk of committing crimes: a) children living and working on the street, b) adolescents with different mental health issues, and c) children

who were in state care and often moved from one care facility or foster family to another. These children do not receive any support from adults and try to make up for it by joining criminal groups.

According to experts, being a member of the criminal subculture is appealing for adolescents because these groups influence the current (including political) events in society. Also, members of the criminal subculture help certain people solve various problems in exchange for relevant remuneration. Moreover, members of the criminal world are associated with freedom and the fight against injustice. Therefore, adolescents get the idea that members of the criminal subculture do not work, they only act as fair 'judges' and create social and economic capital in this way.

In schools, a criminal mindset is manifested through psychological bullying (including cyberbullying, exclusion, verbal abuse), physical violence, extortion and theft by pupils. At school, bullies tend to be active and aggressive; they have difficulty managing emotions and have low academic performance.

According to the population, the influence of criminal subcultures on adolescents and the negative consequences of this influence is manifested in a) imitating members of criminal subcultures (clothing, vocabulary, behavior, values); b) psycho-emotional state inappropriate for the adolescent's development; c) active participation in criminal disputes. Family and friends play a key role in overcoming these influences. However, the positive role of the Church and state agencies (parliament, court, prosecutor's office), as well as that of psychologists and social workers, should also be mentioned.

Methodology

The main aim of the research is to study the criminal mentality that exists in the Georgian reality and the influence it has on society.

To achieve the aim of the research, the following objectives have been set out:

- Identify the level of public awareness of crime;
- Examine the social factors behind criminal acts, which push a person to commit a crime;
- Identify social groups more prone to crime and study their socio-economic-cultural characteristics;
- Examine the influence of criminal subcultures on society, especially on the youth;
- Study the reasons behind the dominance and influences of criminal subcultures in penitentiary facilities;
- Explore the attitudes of adolescents towards criminal subcultures and criminal acts.

To achieve the aim and objectives of the research, quantitative and qualitative research methods were used - face-to-face interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Quantitative Research

Within the quantitative research, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the population of all 11 regions of Georgia (except for the occupied territories). Persons aged 15 years and older were selected as respondents. 1908 respondents took part in the survey, which provided statistically representative data throughout Georgia within the margin of error of 2.2%. It should be noted that the quantitative data are representative in terms of age, gender, geographic location (East Georgia (except Tbilisi)/West Georgia), and type of settlement (Tbilisi/other cities/villages). Respondents fall into 5 age groups:

- 15-17 years of age (adolescents)
- 18-29 years of age (young people)
- 30-54 years of age
- 55-64 years of age
- 65+ years of age

Table #A shows the number of surveyed persons according to additional characteristics – age, gender, geographic location, and type of settlement (see Table #A).

Table #A

	Number of Respondents	Error (95% Confidence Level)
Age groups		
15-17	382	5.0%
18-29	388	5.0%
30-54	397	5.0%
55-64	381	5.0%
65+	360	5.0%
Gender		
Male	860	3.3%
Women	1048	3.1%
Geographic Location		
East Georgia (excluding Tbilisi)	642	3.9%
West Georgia	699	3.7%
Type of Settlement		
Tbilisi	567	4.1%
Other cities	534	4.3%
Village	807	3.4%
Total (Georgia)	1908	2.2%

Qualitative Research

In order to examine the criminal mentality and its impact on society in depth, focus group discussions and expert interviews were conducted as part of the qualitative research

Focus Groups

School teachers, school resource officers, school psychologists, social workers of the National Agency for Crime Prevention Execution of Non-custodial Sentences and Probation (hereinafter – the National Probation Agency), and experts of the non-governmental sector working in the field of juvenile justice were identified as respondents of the focus groups. A total of 11 focus group discussions were conducted. For detailed information, see Table #B.

Table #B

Target Groups	Number of Focus Groups by Target Locations			
	With the participation of all regions	Tbilisi	East Georgia	West Georgia
School teachers	-	1	1	1
School resource officers	-	1	1	1
School psychologists	-	1	1	1
Experts working in the field of juvenile justice	1	-	-	-
Social workers of the National Probation Agency	-	1	-	-
Total	1	4	3	3
A total of 11 focus groups				

Expert Interviews (KII)

The target groups of the planned expert interviews were police officers, prosecutors, judges, and child development psychologists. However, it was possible to conduct a total of 6 interviews within the framework of the research. Namely, 2 interviews were conducted with psychologists and 4 with judges.

Discussion plans/guides comprised of open-ended questions were developed for focus group discussions and expert interviews. The plans/guides contained common, as well as target-group-specific, questions. The final versions of the instrument were agreed upon with GCRT - the organization that had commissioned the research.

All focus group discussions and expert interviews were conducted remotely via the electronic platform ZOOM. The advantage of conducting focus groups in the online format was that it made it possible to bring target groups living in different areas (cities and villages) together, which, on its part, allowed for obtaining diverse information about the research topics. All focus group discussions/interviews were recorded only after obtaining verbal consent from the participants. The confidentiality of focus group participants is protected. Namely, the presented analytical report does not reveal any personally identifiable information (name, surname, specific addresses, etc.) of the respondents.

Focus groups and interviews were held between June and November 2023. Focus group discussions lasted for about 2 hours. Each group had 7-9 participants.

Data analysis: data obtained from focus groups and in-depth interviews were analyzed in several stages. In the first stage, recordings were deciphered and transcribed. The following stage included data coding/categorization. At the final stage, local and inclusive integration of structured content was carried out, based on which the analytical report was prepared.

Main Findings of the Research

Main Findings of Quantitative Research

Awareness of Criminal Subcultures

The research shows that knowledge about criminal subcultures is heterogeneous among the population. During the survey, only 14% of respondents chose the correct definition of the phenomenon of the criminal subculture ('Criminal subculture implies the recognition, acquisition of certain criminal values, and breaking the law is not essential') from the available options. The largest proportion of surveyed persons – 29% - note that one becomes a member of the criminal subculture only after committing a grave criminal offense; 23% believe that a person is identified as a member of the criminal subculture after committing any type of crime. Statistical analysis of the data by gender, type of settlement and geographic location reveals the same trends.

It should be noted that the share of those who have information about criminal subcultures is about one-fifth of respondents (19%), whilst 51% are uninformed about the matter. The share of informed individuals is larger a) among men (21%) as compared to women (16%), b) among respondents aged 55-64 (23%), 18-29 (19.7%) and 30-54 (19.2%) as compared to adolescents (12%) and those aged 65 and over (15%), c) in East Georgia (20%) than in West Georgia (16%).

TV and social networks have been identified as the dominant sources of information about criminal subcultures by each target group (at the gender, type of settlement, age, geographic location level). Adolescents seek information about criminal subcultures mostly on social networks (43%), whilst a large share of those aged 55-64 (48%) or 65 and older (50%) find TV to be the most convenient source of information. 41% of the rural population receive information from TV, followed by lower rates in Tbilisi (30%) and other cities (35%). The opposite trend is observed in the case of social networks: villages - 26%, Tbilisi - 28%, other cities - 35%.

Evaluation of Living Environment

27% of respondents assess the crime rate in their environment/neighbourhood as 'very high' or more or less high'. Statistical analysis by different demographic characteristics reveals the following trends: respondents who assess the crime rate as 'very high'/'more or less high': 1. are distributed across the age groups as follows: 15-17 - 22.4%; 18-29 - 32.3%; 30-54 - 29.8%; 55-64 - 24.7%; 65+ - 19.1%; 2. believe the crime rate is particularly high in Tbilisi (42%) compared to other cities (30%) and villages (15%); 3. think crime rate is higher in East (26%) than in West Georgia (16%).

Almost half of the respondents (48%) state that no changes have been observed in terms of the crime situation in their neighbourhood in the past 2 years, whilst 16% indicate the crime rate has increased. The increased level of crime is more strongly perceived ('increased a lot'/'increased more or less') by a) women (18%) than men (13%), b) Tbilisi residents (26%) than the inhabitants of other cities (15%) and villages (8%), c) inhabitants of East Georgia (15%) than West Georgia (7%).

Police Involvement in the Prevention/Elimination of Illegal Actions

According to 24% of the respondents, the police are not actively involved in eliminating and preventing illegal acts, whilst 65% believe the opposite to be true. The largest shares of those who note that the police are inactive/almost not involved in the activities aimed at public safety are found among respondents aged 30-54 (28%), respondents surveyed in Tbilisi (39%), and the population of East Georgia (20%). As per the largest share of respondents, such performance of the police is caused by the following reasons: lack of human resources (14.6%), unqualified police staff (14.5%), and selective justice in the country (15.4%). Similar trends are observed when processing the data in terms of the type of settlement and geographic location.

Those who believe the police are actively involved in measures aimed at preventing criminal acts argue that their opinion is based on frequent patrolling - 55% and timely response to expected/possible crimes - 20% on the part of the police. Data differentiated by each age category (ranging between 51% and 59%), type of settlement (Tbilisi - 52%; other cities - 51%; villages - 59%;) and geographic location (East - 59%; West - 52.9%;) reveal that frequent patrolling of the police is the basis of such attitude for each target group.

The Impact of the So-called 'Birjas' on Different Aspects of Adolescent/Adult Lives

According to the largest share of respondents, neighbourhood 'birjas' (a street meeting point) impact (impact a lot or impact more than not) the development/formation and change of habits of both adults and the underaged (51%), daily lifestyle of adolescents (50%), formation of unhealthy social network (friends/acquaintances) (50%), and formation of value system (49%). These influences are also recognized by groups differentiated according to various socio-demographic characteristics. In addition, women, those aged 30-54 years, Tbilisi residents, and the population of West Georgia are more likely to believe that 'birjas' have a strong influence on adults and adolescents as compared to other target groups. For example, a strong impact on the habits of adolescents is emphasized by 56% of female respondents, 58% of respondents aged 30-54, 66% of Tbilisi residents, and 52% of the population of West Georgia.

The Frequency of Criminal Actions in the Living Environment/Neighbourhood/Village

According to at least or about every other respondent, criminal acts are never or almost never committed in their living environment. Among those crimes that occur at a certain frequency (every day, several times a week, several times a month, or several times quarterly), respondents identify domestic violence (40%), aggression against LGBT persons (39.1%), confrontations between adolescents (34.1%), drug use (30.3%) and physical violence (30.3%).

Processing the data by different demographic indicators reveals that observable cases of crimes are more common in Tbilisi than in other cities and villages. For example, 16% of Tbilisi residents report daily use of drugs as opposed to 3.2% of residents of other cities and 4% of villagers. Furthermore, about 15% of Tbilisi residents indicate the daily occurrence of such crimes as intentional infliction of serious harm to health (i.e., bodily injuries), aggression against LGBT persons, hooliganism, etc., whilst the same is reported by up to 4% of the inhabitants of other cities and villages. Interestingly enough, according to the respondents, cases of drug possession (69%), use (67%), and sale (72%) have 'never/almost never' occurred in the villages.

Examining the data by geographic location suggests that the above-mentioned crimes are more likely to be committed several times a day, week, month and quarterly in East Georgia as compared to West Georgia.

28% of the surveyed population have witnessed at least one type of criminal act in their living environment, with the most common being physical violence, drug use, theft/robbery, and physical altercations between adolescents. In Tbilisi, cases of physical altercations and physical violence among adolescents/adults predominate, whilst in other urban settlements, theft/robbery and hooliganism prevail. Every third respondent who has witnessed a crime did not respond to the act in any way, 24% tried to intervene and defuse the situation themselves, and 18% called 112, which is an optimal solution for female witnesses in such situations. As for male witnesses to crimes, 40% of them intervene in the situation in an effort to defuse the tension. The highest rate of no response to criminal activities is observed in Tbilisi (44%). A little more than a quarter of respondents surveyed in other cities (29%) and villages (26%) fall into the latter category.

Evaluation of Police Prestige

Working in the police is seen as 'very disreputable' or 'not prestigious' by almost one-fifth of respondents (19%), whilst 39% express the opposite view. Male respondents (24%), respondents representing the middle generation (aged between 30-54) (23%), young people (20%), and Tbilisi residents (33%) are more likely to regard a police job as having no prestige. In addition, 40% of the population of Georgia disapprove of their family member getting employed by the police. Men, residents of Tbilisi and other urban settlements are particularly opposed to the idea of their family members finding a job in the police. For 27% of respondents, their disapproval stems from the fact that policing is a life-threatening job, whilst for 23%, the reason behind their opinion is the skeptical attitudes towards the police that exist in society.

Study results suggest that in case a police officer exceeds the limits of his/her authority, 19% of respondents will contact the General Inspection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and 18% will call the police again. This trend is maintained in terms of the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

The majority of respondents feel safe in their living environment/neighbourhood. The proportion of those who feel the opposite is 8%. Persons aged between 30 and 54 are the least likely to feel insecure, whilst those aged 65 and older are the most likely. In addition, feelings of insecurity are more prevalent among the residents of the capital city (11%) and other urban (9%) settlements than among the rural population (4%).

Characteristics of Committing Criminal Acts

Based on the research results, persons with incomplete secondary education (26%), those aged between 13 and 19 years (22%), males (59%), parentless (20%), and unemployed persons (54%) are more likely to commit crimes. Furthermore, according to respondents, poor economic conditions of both the individual (46%) and the family (46%) increase the risk of committing a crime. These opinions predominate in terms of the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. For example, 55% of women and 65% of men believe that males are more likely to commit offenses. At least half or most of the respondents in every age group regard unemployed people to be more prone to committing crimes than those having any type of employment.

In addition to the above, as per the respondents, factors that trigger criminal behavior are as follows: parental neglect/lack of parental supervision - 16%, psycho-emotional state of the person (13%), and being associated with peers in conflict with the law (13%). The above factors prevail in every age group.

The majority of research participants state that adolescents and adults are equally involved in such crimes as theft/robbery (56%), criminal disputes (53%), intentional infliction of serious bodily injuries (55%), and physical violence (59%). As for such criminal acts as aggravated robbery, drug use and sale, murder, and sexual crimes, respondents associate them more with adults than adolescents.

Assessment of the Influence of Criminal Subcultures

According to the majority of respondents (an average of 58%), criminal subcultures/reality in the country can have an impact on the lifestyle, formation of views, education, employment, behavioral habits, cognition of people, especially adolescents. The population of West Georgia is relatively more likely to emphasize the influence of criminal subcultures on the above aspects. Processing the data in terms of the type of settlement reveals that residents of the capital city, compared to those living in other cities or villages, are relatively more likely to believe that criminal subcultures have a higher degree of influence on employment (Tbilisi - 63%; other cities - 53%, village - 54%) and value system (Tbilisi - 65%, other cities - 56%, village - 56%). In addition, it should be noted that teenagers aged between 15 and 17, compared to other age groups, are more likely to point out that the criminal reality does not affect different aspects of life (receiving education, forming social networks, joining criminal groups, criminal behavior). However, the general trend, which suggests that the criminal reality does have an impact, is maintained in the group of adolescents, too.

29% of respondents believe that **the desire to join criminal subcultures has increased among adolescents in the past 5 years**. The general trend is maintained when examining the issue in terms of geographic area (East Georgia (except Tbilisi) (24%), West Georgia (28%)), as well as the type of settlement (Tbilisi (35%), other cities (26%), villages (27%)).

According to respondents, adolescents' desire to join criminal subcultures is greatly influenced by the environment they live in. Neglect by parents (70%), violent parenting (68%), acceptance of criminal subculture in the family (70%) and having a criminal authority in the social circle (66%) are the factors related to the primary social group that can lead to adolescent's desire to become a member of a criminal subculture and determine his/her behavior. On the other hand, the role of the following possible benefits of being associated with a criminal subculture is also considerable in this regard: power (65%), security guarantees (61%), privileges (64%), prestige (63%). Analyzing the data in terms of socio-demographic characteristics shows that the main trends are maintained without any major differences.

Assessing specific situations reveals that the majority of respondents practice good civic sense. Nevertheless, the share of those who would act differently in these situations is also considerable. For example, an average of 65% would **a) notify the school administration about the conflict between adolescents, b) report a potential criminal case in the neighbourhood to the police**; on average, a tenth of respondents would not act this way. The proportion of those who, **in the case of a suspected inclination of an adolescent towards joining a criminal subculture, would speak**

with him/her or his/her family is more than 60%. However, it should be noted that an average of one-tenth of respondents would refrain from doing so. Residents of the capital city are more likely to have an inappropriate response to the above issues. For example, 17% of Tbilisi residents would not report a potential criminal case in the neighbourhood to the police, and 13% would neither talk to the adolescent nor his/her parents in the case of the adolescent's suspected inclination to join a criminal subculture. The most significant difference in this regard is observed between genders – men are more likely to offer inadequate assessments; namely, 12% of them would not notify the school administration about the conflict between adolescents (the same is reported by 3% of women), one-fifth (20%) would not report a potential criminal case in the neighbourhood to the police (the same is reported by 8% of women).

The survey result, which suggests that **16% of respondents would not contact the police if they were oppressed**, indicates significant flaws of anti-criminogenic cognition in society; **furthermore, 21% of the sample would approach the members of the criminal subculture for help in such situations.** Although the core portion of respondents would not resort to these actions, the portion who would (almost 40% in total) is large enough to indicate possible distrust in the police on the one hand, and considerable influence of criminal subcultures on the other. This is also substantiated by the fact that **almost every fifth respondent finds it acceptable if a person turns to the members of criminal groups in the case of oppression.** Furthermore, data suggest that criminal authorities are more accepted in West Georgia - a quarter of respondents surveyed there would contact the members of criminal groups if oppressed (the same is reported by 14% of respondents surveyed in East Georgia (except Tbilisi)); based on the same indicator, acceptance and influence of criminal subcultures are more prominent in urban settlements than in villages – in urban settlements (including Tbilisi), an average of one-fifth of respondents find it acceptable if a person approaches members of criminal subcultures when oppressed (the rate is down to 14% in villages). Analyzing the issue in terms of age reveals that 21% of respondents aged 30-54 think it is acceptable to approach members of criminal subcultures in case of oppression, with this being the highest rate among all of the age groups: 15-17 - 15%, 18-29 - 16%, 55-64 - 16%, 65 and older - 12%.

The following views of respondents highlight that criminal subcultures have influence and prestige in the country: **a) disputes are settled in favour of a person associated with the criminal subculture (23%), b) it is necessary to involve criminal groups in disputes (17%), c) the final decision in the dispute should be made by the 'thief in law' (18%).** Respondents in West Georgia are more likely to agree with these opinions. Furthermore, respondents aged between 30 and 54 years are the most likely to approve of the involvement of criminal authorities in disputes (21%); however, the proportion of those who share this view is more than one-tenth in other age groups, too: 15-17 - 13%, 18-29 - 14%, 55-64 - 16%, 65 or older - 12%.

According to the **index variable** of acceptance of criminal mentality, every fifth respondent (21%) has a criminal mentality, i.e., they prefer to have criminal subcultures settle the disputes. The majority of respondents (66%) express distrust towards the latter and opt for legal ways of settling disputes – they prefer the police. Acceptance of criminal mentality is contextually variable for about every tenth respondent (13%).

In addition, 25% of respondents report that they live in a criminal environment where crimes are committed every day, frequently, sometimes, or rarely. Consequently, 3/4 (75%) of respondents assess their environment/neighbourhood/village as peaceful in terms of the criminal situation.

The regression analysis suggests that the criminal mentality is more likely to be accepted by

- Inhabitants of West Georgia
- Those who would turn to the criminal world in case a police officer exceeds the limits of his/her authority
- Those who do not think there is a criminal environment in their neighbourhood/place of residence
- Those who would not approve of their family member joining the police

On the other hand, the degree of acceptance of criminal mentality/subcultures is low in rural settlements.

Research results suggest that **if respondents are aware of domestic violence and violence against women happening in their neighbourhood**, they would respond to the situation in two different ways: call 112 (53% on average) and defuse the situation themselves (26% on average). It should be noted that an average of 4% would not react to such situations at all. Examining the issue by gender reveals that the share of those who would contact the police has decreased among men as compared to women (domestic violence - 38% of men and 62% of women; violence against women - 41% of men and 65% of women). Contacting the police is a prevailing response among respondents aged 15-17 years (60% on average) and 18-29 years (62% on average).

Respondents identify the following as the main reasons behind their preference not to notify the police in the above situations (domestic violence and violence against women): **a) I do not think it is necessary to involve the police in such cases; they will defuse the situation themselves; b) I think that it is none of my business; c) the victim herself/himself does not want the police to intervene.**

In addition, it should be noted that an average of 5% of respondents would not call 112 in such situations because of their lack of trust in the police. They note that they will first try to defuse the situation themselves, and should they fail in their efforts, they will then call 112.

The same attitudes are observed when it comes to **violence in one's own family should it occur** - almost equal shares of respondents would call 112 (43%) or try to defuse the situation themselves (43%). It is concerning that 13 respondents would not have any reaction – they would neither inform the police nor try to solve the problem or ask neighbours for help. While the majority of women (56%) would call 112 in the case of violence in their families, most of the men (57%) would try to deal with the situation themselves. Therefore, male respondents find it less acceptable to resolve their family problems outside their homes, especially with the involvement of the police. Refraining from getting the police involved is usually due to the belief that domestic violence is not an issue for law enforcement officers to resolve, such situations will be resolved on their own (55%).

When discussing the negative impact of criminal subcultures on adolescents in terms of general and additional aspects, three dominant categories emerge: a) imitating members of criminal subcultures by copying their outfits, vocabulary, behavior, values (18%); b) having a psycho-emotional state inappropriate for the adolescent's development (16%); c) active participation in criminal disputes (15%).

Most of the respondents identify that primary and secondary social groups, family (95%) and friends (93%) play a significant role in reducing the impact of criminal subcultures on adolescents.

Overall, state agencies (parliament, court, prosecutor's office) also play a positive role; however, a quarter of respondents, on average, believe their involvement to be ineffective and insignificant. The same attitude is observed towards the penitentiary facility as a mechanism to reduce the influence of criminal subcultures (17%). Survey results suggest that according to respondents, the Church (75%) plays a more important role in reducing the influence than does the police (68%). Moreover, one-tenth of surveyed individuals do not consider the police as an institution that can reduce the influence (12%). Besides, in terms of reducing the influence of criminal subcultures on adolescents, psychologists are regarded as more effective actors (74%) than social workers (62%). Similar trends are observed while examining the issue in terms of additional aspects – state agencies (parliament, court, prosecutor's office) are considered the least significant.

According to the research results, **in the case of confrontations between individuals/groups, 4% of respondents approve of approaching criminal authorities to resolve the conflict, whilst 10% are equally in favour of getting law enforcement officers or members of the criminal subculture to intervene in such situations.** The share of those who assess both parties as equally important in conflict resolution is three times more among respondents in West Georgia (17.2%) as compared to those surveyed in East Georgia (5.1%). In addition, for more than 5% of respondents in West Georgia, contacting criminal authorities is more important (East Georgia (except Tbilisi) - 1.1%). Although analyzing the issue in terms of the type of settlement suggests that contacting law enforcement agencies in the case of conflict is the most favoured option (Tbilisi - 59.8%, other cities - 49.6%, village - 52.4%), it should be noted that involving criminal authorities in such situations is favoured by a larger share in Tbilisi (6.7%) than in other **types of settlements** (other cities - 3.4%, village - 3.5%). The regression analysis suggests that those are more likely to emphasize the influence of the criminal mentality (i.e., they approve of approaching criminal authorities in the case of conflicts) in the country who

- Believe that policing is not prestigious in Georgia;
- Believe that there is a criminal environment (different types of crimes are committed) in their neighbourhood/place of residence;
- Would not approve of their family members joining the police;
- Believe that the desire to join criminal subcultures has increased among adolescents in the past five years.

As for socio-demographic characteristics, the below groups are more likely to emphasize the influence of the criminal mentality:

- Residents of urban settlements other than Tbilisi
- Men

Assessment of the Influence of Criminal Subcultures in the Penitentiary Facility

According to the majority of respondents, **neither they nor any of their family members have served a sentence in a penitentiary facility (95%).** Those who have state that criminal subcultures exert considerable influence on both inmates (**60%**) and the prison administration (**38%**).

A quarter of respondents (24%) **find it difficult to identify the motives behind inmates' desire to join criminal subcultures in a penitentiary facility**; however, the following motives prevail among the identified categories: prestige associated with being a member of the criminal subculture (19%), being protected from other inmates (16%), prevention of oppression and exclusion by members of the criminal subculture (14%), desire to dominate other inmates (12%).

As for the **factors that give rise to the influence of criminal subcultures in penitentiary facilities**, one-third of respondents cannot identify them. However, the following factors predominate (more than 10%) among the identified categories: establishing order in penitentiary facilities through criminal subcultures (18%), patronage of influential criminal subcultures outside the penitentiary facility (14%), prison administration's fear of criminal subcultures (12%). Examining the issue in terms of other aspects has not yielded any major differences.

The majority of respondents emphasize the importance of the prison administration (55%), the Special Penitentiary Service under the Ministry of Justice (53%), and the Public Defender's Office in reducing the influence of criminal groups in penitentiary facilities. The role of the non-governmental sector (48%) and resocialization-rehabilitation services (50%) are also assessed positively. However, it should be noted that every fifth of respondents cannot identify the role and importance of these institutions, whilst 15% have a neutral position on the matter. Examining the issue in terms of the type of settlement reveals that the non-governmental sector (Tbilisi - 10%, other cities - 9%, villages - 12%) and resocialization-rehabilitation services (Tbilisi - 11%, other cities - 7%, villages - 6%) are regarded as less significant actors in reducing the influence of groups in penitentiary facilities.

Main Findings of Qualitative Research

Criminal Act and its Causes

Focus group respondents/participants... identify factors related to economic situation, socio-psychological state, demographics, and social background as causes of criminal acts. Virtually all experts are unanimous in identifying the poor economic conditions of the family as a root cause. Parents' efforts and energy mainly go towards satisfying the basic needs (food, clothing) of their child(ren), which leaves little room for the necessary communication between children and their parents. As a result, children start to look for other authority figures, who, in many cases, are persons associated with criminal subcultures.

Poverty is a significant risk factor; however, easy access to various benefits also carries the risk for children as these children are used to getting everything easily, and any interruption in this regard creates a gap in their consciousness, which they try to fill by taking the criminal path.

Having power is very important for adolescents: those with a criminal mentality (aged between 15 and 18 or older) often force children (up to 14 years of age) to commit various petty crimes, which the latter agree to because they are afraid of being bullied, humiliated or rejected.

Further to the above, experts also note that those children who receive an authoritarian style of parenting and are often subjected to aggression tend to transfer this aggression onto others. It should also be noted that parents fail to help their children develop a strong value system. This is a risk factor, as children without a strong value system usually find themselves easily influenced by criminal groups.

Some participants of focus groups mention the so-called institution of 'Kochi' in schools, which implies that the child is in an advanced position compared to others and acts as a behavioural pattern for other children. Part of the respondents note that children try to become a 'kochi' because it enables them to influence others and ensures security to some extent.

Focus group participants also identify complicated family dynamics as a factor that facilitates criminal behavior: constant conflicts between parents (including physical confrontation) and parents' addiction to alcohol or various narcotic substances. Parents in such families act as negative role models to their children. It has also been emphasized that if a member of the family (father, brother, uncle, etc.) belongs to a criminal subculture and is incarcerated, this may trigger a child's interest in taking the criminal path.

Experts also consider the following as push factors: existing positive stereotypes about criminal groups, frequent use of modern technologies and social networks, lack of appropriate infrastructure to spend time productively, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, regular use of alcohol and drugs and insufficient trust in the rule of law and institutions.

Focus group participants state that the risk of committing a crime increases, especially when the above factors combine and produce a synergic effect.

Groups at Risk of Committing a Crime

According to stakeholders participating in focus group discussions, gender and age are correlated with committing a crime: boys/men are more likely to commit a crime than girls/women. As for the age category, minors under the age of 18 are identified as a group who often perform tasks given by others. Recently, the number of crimes committed by children under the age of 14 has increased. Research participants believe that specific groups are also at a high risk of committing a crime:

- a) Homeless children living on the streets who try to survive by begging;
- b) Adolescents with various mental health issues;
- c) Children who were in state care (foster care, small-group homes) and often moved from one care facility or foster family to another. These children do not have a feeling of belonging to other people and do not receive support from adults; therefore, they try to compensate for this deprivation by joining criminal groups.

Experts believe that adolescents' attraction to joining criminal subcultures has various underlying factors: a) adolescents see that the group influences current events (even political) in society; b) members of the criminal subculture help certain people solve various problems in exchange for appropriate remuneration. Therefore, adolescents get the idea that members of the criminal subculture do not work but act as 'judges' and earn a lot of money this way.

Psychologists (child development psychologist, school psychologist) point out that the desire to establish oneself in society/among those around them and to gain power/leadership increases in adolescents during puberty. Criminal activities present an opportunity for adolescents to gain power. Security is also an important factor – some children believe that by being associated with criminal groups, they will be less likely to be bullied/harassed.

According to psychologists participating in the research, some adolescents associate members of criminal groups with freedom and fight against injustice. Different historical or fictional characters (Arsena Marabdeli, Kako Kachaghi, Robin Hood, Khareba and Gogia) who opposed the political regime of the time contribute to creating such perceptions.

Experts believe that the government's policies/style of governance might be the driver behind the allegiance to criminal subcultures. When the key institutions (e.g., police, court, etc.) in the country are disorganized and fail to resolve people's problems effectively, citizens seek alternative ways, such as approaching members of criminal subcultures for help. What is more, when state agencies are incapable of resolving problems on the one hand and are highly repressive towards the representatives of criminal subcultures (those capable of resolving problems) on the other, it is expected for the population to develop sympathy towards this group.

According to experts, the criminal subculture may also become appealing with its representational (visual, verbal, etc.) distinctiveness (way of dressing, way of talking, acquaintances gained through being a 'birjaviki' (someone who hangs out at a street meeting point), etc.).

The above suggests that criminal subcultures create role models for adolescents. The fascination with the criminal world in adolescence leads to surrounding oneself with people who have a criminal mentality in adulthood. This surrounding comes into conflict with other groups of society, given

that the former is associated with crime, prison, and other deviations. This makes it very hard for the person with a criminal background to break out of the 'vicious' circle/surrounding, which, on its part, is an indication that there is a need for targeted services.

Criminal Subculture as a Trend

In recent years, according to some of the participants of the focus groups, fewer and fewer young people have been interested in joining criminal subcultures. For example, school teachers and resource officers note that criminal activity is becoming less appealing for children. Nowadays, the majority of adolescents have different interests and means to satisfy them (e.g., computer games, sports, etc.), and these interests are no longer related to the criminal world as much as they used to be. Respondents also identify the role of the state in fighting criminal circles and the strict laws against the members of criminal subcultures.

Conversely, the rest of the participants believe that interest in criminal activities among adolescents has increased in recent years. This is due to the decrease in trust in state institutions. It has also been emphasized that, in recent years, the ruling political power and criminal subcultures have been cooperating to a certain extent. The most obvious manifestation of the cooperation is the active involvement of members of the criminal underworld (the so-called *dzveli bitchebi*) in the election-related processes. Besides, it has become a common occurrence for influential criminal authorities outside Georgia to use members of criminal subcultures as their local 'agents' for personal purposes. These 'agents' are given certain tasks and are regarded as allies by the former group. They choose vulnerable children (homeless, drug users, etc.) as their agents. The most common offense committed by adolescents is theft/hooliganism. Well-organised criminal groups are behind these adolescents who are given instructions and involved in various criminal activities by the former.

Adolescents try to establish themselves in criminal subcultures by abiding by the rules of these groups, with the most common practice being committing crimes in groups.

The criminal subculture exerts different degrees of influence on adolescents and is mostly manifested through such indicators as vocabulary, way of dressing, etc. In recent years, the following manifestations of criminal thinking have become common among adolescents: cyberbullying and growing interest in right-wing radical groups who target ethnic minorities and members of the queer community.

Respondents note that compared to the 1990s, the influence of the criminal subculture has significantly decreased; however, comparing the situations of recent years reveals that interest in the criminal world has increased among adolescents.

Employees of the Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions and social workers of the National Probation Agency emphasize positive changes and note that adolescents today are motivated to receive education and find employment to generate income that can increase their independence.

Experience of Experts Working in the Field of Juvenile Justice

Experts working in the field of juvenile justice state that they have provided different services to persons in conflict with the law. However, these services are usually tied to certain projects and also have an age limit. According to one of the respondents, there is a severe shortage of effective services for children under the age of 14 in the country. There is a Juvenile Referral Centre, which provides services to children involved in illegal activities; however, according to respondents, the work of the centre is not very effective. Their services mainly offer legal consultations. In terms of social services, the non-governmental sector implements a programme to support homeless children. However, this programme is not long-term and provides assistance to its beneficiaries only within 24-hour.

Experts point out that there has been a lack of efficient legal aid in recent years, considering that it is becoming increasingly difficult to convince service recipients to take legally right steps that will help mitigate their punishment. This is due to the beneficiaries having no trust in state institutions. They feel that they will not receive fair treatment. Consequently, it becomes difficult to persuade the person in conflict with the law to cooperate with the investigation. It is also worth noting that persons who commit criminal acts find it unacceptable to cooperate with law enforcement agencies, which, on its part, further aggravates the situation.

Social workers of the National Probation Agency note that they have undergone special training in the following areas of juvenile justice: a) legislative regulations and nuances; b) understanding hidden meanings behind the actions of adolescents; c) information about the development and emotional characteristics of adolescents; d) techniques of gaining the trust of young offenders. Services provided by the social workers of the National Probation Agency are diverse and include a) rehabilitation services, b) art therapy, c) short-term enrollment opportunities in general university courses, d) voluntary opportunities, e) visits to different factories or manufacturing facilities to learn about the work environment there; f) visits to museums; g) cinema and theatre visits; h) photography courses.

According to social workers, the services they provide are usually effective but need further improvement. The main drawback is that there is no targeted differentiation of these services based on the needs of beneficiaries, i.e., available resources are not being adapted to the needs of adolescents.

Social workers say it is difficult to organize group meetings with probationers within the framework of the rehabilitation programme because it is not easy to bring them together, which, on its part, has different causes: economic issues, transportation problems, etc. Therefore, social workers often have to provide individual services instead.

Judges were also trained in juvenile justice. The training contained modules on legislation and psychology. All judges have taken the special two-day course in juvenile justice. According to them, the training is short and cannot, thus, equip judges with appropriate knowledge and skills. In addition, there is no prior selection process of judges. This is important inasmuch as interaction with adolescents requires certain communication skills that not every judge has. After the completion of the training, participants are not tested and surveyed, meaning that it is unknown what knowledge they gained from attending the training.

Manifestation and Prevention of the Criminal Subculture in Schools

Adolescents with a criminal mentality gain authority and respect by instilling fear in other students at school. They are characterized by audacity and rudeness, and their behavior often involves disregard of the established norms.

According to school psychologists, teachers and resource officers, a criminal mentality is more commonly found among students in middle school (grades 7-9) and less among those in higher grades. In higher grades, students are more likely to have specific aspirations and plans. In addition, the latter have a better understanding of the negative consequences of criminal actions. Criminal thinking in school children is manifested in the following actions: psychological bullying (including cyberbullying, exclusion, verbal abuse), physical violence, as well as extortion (mainly from younger students by their older counterparts), and theft.

Bullies at school tend to be active, aggressive, find it hard to manage emotions and have poor academic performance. Oppressed students are, on the other hand, isolated, excluded, have no friends and are shy. However, according to psychologists, oppressors and the oppressed have one common characteristic – low self-esteem.

When teachers see criminal inclinations in students, firstly, they notify the head teacher of the class about it. After collecting information, the head teacher notifies the parent and the director. The latter takes the necessary action and, with the involvement of the parent, refers the student to the social worker and/or psychologist. Sometimes, it is necessary to get the resource officer involved, too. During referral, it is essential to act with caution so as not to violate the student's confidentiality and affect the educational process.

Delinquency prevention measures in schools include face-to-face meetings with students and friendly talks in the school environment, as well as conducting seminars about the negative consequences of criminal actions.

According to psychologists and resource officers, the awareness of parents/caregivers of a criminal mentality should be raised. They should also be provided with more information about the psychology of the child.

Representatives of the Office of Resource Officers note that they do not exercise their right to refer the child to a psychologist without parental consent because parents tend to feel negative about this practice, which, on its part, delays the involvement of a psychologist in the process.

Criminal Subculture in the Penitentiary System

According to respondents, adolescents with a criminal mentality find it appealing to end up in a penitentiary facility. Some of them believe that they cannot find justice without deviant behavior and cannot become full-fledged members of the criminal subculture without going to prison. Experts working in the field of juvenile justice state that the influence of criminal subcultures in penitentiary facilities (including juvenile detention centers) is on the rise. The closed institution and the social and economic vulnerability of convicts and their families all contribute to maintaining the criminal subculture.

Any convicted adolescent, regardless of whether or not he/she shares the criminal mentality, is expected to recognise the rules established by criminal authorities. The prison administration, as a rule, chooses not to get involved, which further facilitates the dominance of the criminal mentality and the increase in the incidence of criminal acts.

Special Training in Juvenile Justice

Evaluation of the Justice System and the Current Legal Framework

Respondents (especially the judges, social workers of the National Probation Agency, and experts) positively assess the existing legislation, namely, the Juvenile Justice Code adopted in 2016, which is regarded as a progressive law by research participants.

Nonetheless, respondents also identify the gaps that need to be addressed. Namely, judges do not have access to information about the conditions of children in penitentiary facilities, which is unacceptable. Furthermore, experts who provide legal services to minors note that the main problem is distrust in the justice system among adolescents, frequent change of social workers, and lack of experience in dealing with children on the part of the involved actors (judges, prosecutors, etc.).

Experts approve of the existence of the child needs assessment system in the probation system. However, the system covers only 10-12 municipalities, meaning that children in other municipalities remain beyond attention. Experts also emphasize the shortage of specialists in the regions, such as social workers and psychologists. Therefore, adolescents are left with incomplete or, in some cases, no psycho-social, rehabilitation and educational services.

As for the rights situation of children during court hearings, respondents note that it is a cause of stress for victims when they are interrogated as witnesses. Therefore, a system where children can testify in a comfortable environment should be created. According to judges, the involvement of the legal representative of children deprived of parental care is usually formal, and thus, this issue needs to be addressed.

Interviews conducted with judges reveal the need to review the sanctions laid out in the Juvenile Justice Code. According to respondents, current sanctions lack efficacy, and it is advisable if they focus more on the root of the crime. Judges have a positive opinion about the active use of house arrest after the adoption of the Juvenile Justice Code. Judges state that preventive programmes that will help adolescents continue life without obstacles after serving a sentence should be launched, namely, programmes that will help them receive education and find employment.

Recommendations

Prevention of a criminal mentality in children/adolescents requires a complex approach/intervention aimed at overcoming antisocial behavior. A holistic approach to the prevention of criminal mentality is necessary – mitigating (eliminating, at best) the impact of individual, familial, and societal factors that may promote antisocial behavior in children. In a broad sense, cooperation between different institutions - family, school, community and service providers is the key to creating a positive environment for children.

Below are some recommendations that will help facilitate the positive child/adolescent development and prevent the aggravation of criminal tendencies:

1. Early intervention: it is necessary to identify behavioural problems in adolescents and address them as much as possible at an early stage. Early intervention programmes are capable of identifying and helping children/adolescents at risk of criminal inclinations and influences. More specifically, it is requisite to

- Train the primary healthcare providers (family doctors) to identify the signs of violence against children and in families; strengthen the referral system;
- Train the staff of preschool facilities (kindergartens) to identify the signs of violence against children and in families; strengthen the referral system;
- Train the staff of preschool facilities (kindergartens) on identifying the early signs of oppositional and antisocial behavior, on communication with the child and the family to ensure timely intervention;
- Create educational programmes aimed at developing social and emotional skills at the basic education level; train teachers;
- Involve local self-governments in early intervention programmes for crime prevention – improve community (neighbourhood) infrastructure (sports fields, libraries, playgrounds); organize community activities (sporting, cultural, and educational activities for children and adolescents of different ages).

2. Positive parenting: it is imperative to encourage positive parenting practices, which implies the creation of a family environment based on love, support and communication. A strong bond between parents and children can have a significant impact on the behavior and decisions of children. Considering that family situations and interactions significantly impact the formation of criminal experiences in children, it is necessary to focus on improving relationships between children and adults in the family. More specifically, interventions should be implemented in the following areas:

- Replacing authoritarian parenting with the cooperation- and respect-based model of upbringing in the families;
- Parents should have more time for communication with their children (adolescents);
- Families should instill in their children that good things in life require effort and merit and cannot be obtained easily through criminal actions.

3. Education and awareness: it is recommended to implement educational programmes at the school and community levels to raise awareness of the consequences of criminal actions among

children/adolescents; strengthen teaching of the legal system, ethical values and the importance of empathy.

4. Mental health support: ensure access to mental health services and counseling for children with emotional and other cognitive challenges. Addressing mental health problems at an early stage can prevent the escalation of criminal behavior in children.

5. Community participation: it is recommended to help children/adolescents develop a sense of belonging to the community and participation (integration) in the community. This implies involving children in extracurricular activities, sports, and community events so that they can develop a sense of responsibility and belonging to their community.

6. Positive role models: it is advisable to offer children/adolescents positive role models with the use of different methods (including situational games). Such models will become their companions and inspiration. Different actors who play an integral part in the adolescent's life may serve as such role models: family members, teachers, friends, community leaders, and other persons with positive values.

7. Peer influence management: children/adolescents should be taught how to deal with peer pressure and make responsible choices. Accordingly, it is necessary to hold open communication with children/adolescents to help them develop adequate perceptions about friendship and realize that friendship is built on healthy self-esteem and understanding between peers rather than dominance/obedience.

8. Conflict resolution skills: children/adolescents should be taught effective ways to resolve a conflict so that it does not escalate into violence or criminal behavior. Therefore, it is necessary to support adolescents in realizing that communication, empathy, and negotiation are tools for settling disagreements.

9. Media literacy: children/adolescents should be taught media literacy to enable them to realize and critically evaluate the influence of different media products – video games, movies and social media content – on behavior and attitudes.

10. Legal education: it is imperative to provide children/adolescents with education on the legal system and the consequences of criminal acts. This type of knowledge may prove to be a deterrent to getting involved in criminal practices.

11. Restorative justice programmes: it is advisable to implement the so-called restorative justice programmes, which will aim to repair the harms, encourage accountability and develop sympathy among children/adolescents involved in conflicts. In Georgia, several institutions are responsible for implementing restorative justice: National Agency for Crime Prevention, Execution of Non-custodial Sentences and Probation, Institute of Community Officers, etc. The Institute of Community Officers is a form of Community Policing that is responsible for promoting positive relations between law enforcement officers and society/citizens to create a safer environment. The above institutions should be strengthened with additional preventive functions and programmes.