

# Children and Crime

**I**n the past, just as in the present, children have often been perpetrators of criminal acts. They were most commonly drawn into crime by adults, sometimes even family members. In most cases they entered the world of crime as a result of poverty, and parents, relatives and elder brothers and sisters would train younger family members and incite them to various criminal acts for the sake of material gain. Besides that, children often resorted to crime when they lost their parents at an early age, their parents having died young as a result of poor healthcare or having perished in one of the many wars that left

behind huge numbers of orphans.

The figures at our disposal on the 19th century demonstrate that child crime emerged as one of the many consequences of war, when children, left parentless and to their own devices, started to wander the streets and commit various criminal acts in order to survive. Another of the causes of juvenile delinquency was family violence; children were treated inhumanely and were degraded. Beaten and abused, they fled their homes and obtained enough for survival by illegal means. Fleeing their parents in villages, they reached the town suburbs, where they encountered more experienced felons,



*Fighting in the street, 1930*



Warrants for the arrest of juvenile delinquents published in the Belgrade Policijski glasnik ("Police Herald") in 1912 and 1913.

who, in turn, drew them into their own organizations and trained them further. Particular problems arose because the young offenders, while serving their first prison sentences, came into contact with hardened criminals who taught them how to commit graver criminal acts and enticed them into their underground networks. As a result, instead of having "learned their lesson", youngsters left jail even more deeply enmeshed in the criminal world. Looking at the reasons why youngsters became involved in the world of crime, it is evident that crime was a sphere where children were the victims of adults, that they were not committing

crimes because they were born "bad" or "innate criminals", but rather because formidable living conditions or adult abuse had drawn them into the world outside the law.

According to criminal laws from the second half of the 19th century, minors became legally accountable at the age of twelve, which meant that they could stand trial at that early age and then be sent to prison. Lesser offences were called misdemeanours, and these included the following: laziness, breaking one's given word, improper conduct in public places, lesser material damage due to inattention or minor deceptions or

**СЛУЖБЕНЕ ОБЈАВЕ**

**ПОТЕРЕ**

Сретен Димитријевић, осуђеник пожарничког казненог завода, чију слику износимо, побегао је.

Родом је из Пожаревца, стар 16 година, раста малог, очију угасито зелених, косе црне;

Има следеће особене знакове: на левој руци белегу од посекотине крива линија величине 1·5 см. на другој фаланги кажипрета, страна спољна; на десној руци на споју средњег и доњег прета белегу од посекотине, права линија, правца косог, величине 1 см. страна спољна; на средњем левом образу белегу од посекотине праве линије, правца косог, величине 1 см., и младеж величине пшеничног зрна за 3 изнад средине лепо илучне кости.

Делена управе пожарничког казненог завода Бр. 2802.

Жарко их уште властима које су познате издаде, с позном на означене бројеве или дочепа.

**ТРАЖИ СЕ**

Велисар, брат Николе, отумарао је 16 година, средњег раста, косе црне, левог уха...



theft. According to the law, those misdemeanours were punishable by fines, corporal punishment or, more rarely, imprisonment. Families most commonly forced their children to beg as children were expected to arouse greater pity on the part of passers-by and, thus, collect more money. Children were also trained to pick pockets in public places, as adults considered that children, being smaller and having tinier hands, were more dexterous. There were spheres of crime

in which children were more direct victims of adults; in the 19th and 20th centuries there existed trade in children, who were taken from their parents and sold as servants or future criminals to various bands in foreign countries. There was also child prostitution that was organized by experienced criminals and pimps, but a cloud of shame covered that domain. Little is known of it and research has not delved sufficiently into that subject.

Minors also took part in graver crimes such as the burglary of homes and shops, which was called grand larceny in the 19th century, punishable by two to 20 years' imprisonment. Besides various offences, minors most commonly took part in acts of arson, inflicting bodily harm in fights or attacks and various other kinds of wrongdoing. Police records also show murder committed by minors, but those crimes were most commonly unpremeditated. According to some figures, killings committed by minors accounted for as many as one third of the total number of killings. There are also records of cases of premeditated and cold-blooded murders purely for purposes of gain. Figures from the nineteenth century tell us that more such murders occurred in villages than in towns, while theft, pick pocketing and begging were urban forms of crime.

Although the first institutions for young offenders were founded towards the end of the 19th century, right up until the middle of the 20th century the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency was neglected by experts. As a result of that, such children were rejected by society, which had the effect of pushing them further into criminality.

The law was applicable to them and, up until the end of the 19th century, punishments were most commonly corporal, as it was considered that public beatings, besides inflicting physical pain, also had moral weight that could induce the culprit to mend his ways, as well as deterring others from illegal acts. Minors were also given prison sentences, which meant sharing quarters with around thirty others. Given the lack of basic hygiene facilities and bad food, the inmates often fell sick. The only privileges allowed to minors were that they could not be placed in fetters or executed. It was not until after the Second World War that special juvenile correctional institu-

tions started to deal with the problem of juvenile delinquency and social workers started to look into the problems of their education, employment and reintegration into society.

D.S.

## A Theft

On the 7th of this month, the Maribor (Marburg) salesman Schlesinger was serving two young girls while he was talking to Mrs. Tissa, the owner of the house in which his shop was situated. After the girls had chosen the goods they left the shop. With them they took a money letter with the amount of 316 florins, which was ready to be sent off. The salesman immediately called the police and the stolen money could be retrieved in the home of the two girls. The remaining 313 florins of the stolen money were hidden in the birch sweep.

*(From newspaper Slovenski narod, Slovenia, 11th May 1872)*

## Street Children, Contingent of Police

**SOS from the Ministry. The 10-12 year old children are becoming criminals and smugglers.**

Public Prosecutor: "There are adult criminals behind children"

Abandoned children are part of crime and contingent of Police! This is the last alarm going out of the central offices of the Ministry of Public Order. According to the officially confirmed data, the number of crimes among minors is growing during the last year. The data are painful: 10% of crimes are committed by minors. The crimes were against the life of the person. Special cases were met among this category of crime. So for e.g. a twelve year old boy wearing a cap to hide his face, was caught in Levan, Fier (South Western part of the country- translator) while he was threatening a driver to give

### Questions

- 4.1. What are the reasons why children commit crimes?
- 4.2. In what kinds of crimes do children most commonly participate?

## Recommendation

- Look for facts and figures about juvenile delinquency either in the past or the present and discuss that problem with your pupils.

him all the money he had in his pockets.

Though the gun he was carrying was much longer than his body, the driver was dead threatened.

In Patos ( Fier, the same region with the above, the translator) a quarrel among teenagers, hardly 14, ended in a real tragedy. One of the boys threw a bomb to his friends. Three were wounded and one remained paralyzed for the rest of the life.

Trying to identify the reasons why this phenomenon is growing, many prosecutors and specialists of Court Police mention the fact that most of teenagers involved in crime are abandoned children. They think that the factors that contribute to the engagement of this group of children in crime are mostly of economic character.

In some other cities like in Shkodra, Korca, Vlora, Durres, etc, groups of children were caught while breaking the houses of other people. Most of them were forced to do so by adults.

Even in the cases when it was proved that the children were forced to act like that, the prosecutors in most of the cases find it easier to end the process by justifying their attitude with the fact that they were minors. According to the Penal Code, item 129, people found guilty forcing children to act as criminals, can be sentenced up to five year in prison. One of the prosecutors in the Capital City justifies the low number of adults found guilty to force teenagers acting in a criminal way, by saying that it is very difficult to prove the involvement of adults in such acts.

At the same time, rehabilitation institutions for minors do not exist in our country, which makes it more difficult to isolate children in special educational institutions. Meanwhile, the number of parents that had been prosecuted for abandoning their children is low, too. This happens because some of these parents are criminals themselves,

and have been sentenced to prison for different crimes. Whereas, the other parent, who in most of the cases is the mother of the child, justifies her lack of attention and care with the fact that she does not have custody for the child.

” This is really very difficult, says one of the specialists of the Court Police. This is only one aspect, at a time when many minors, most of them teenagers, have become part of drug network. They are used by adults to distribute it.“

*REPUBLIKA, Albania, September 1, 2000*