Perception of a Croatian Juvenile Justice System - Professionals’ Perspective

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Introduction

- this study was conducted within the Committee for monitoring and improving the work of criminal proceedings and the execution of juvenile sanctions in the Croatian Ministry of Justice.
Most important laws/acts in juvenile justice system

1. Penal Code / Criminal Code
   - defines criminal offense, types of offences, types of sanctions etc.

2. Juvenile Courts Act
   - *lex specialis* for juvenile offenders

3. Criminal Procedure Act
   - defines criminal procedure for sanctioning

4. Law on Execution of Sanctions Imposed to Juvenile Offenders
   - defines execution of juvenile sanctions in more details
Four Basic Principles of Croatian Juvenile Justice System

- The principle of urgency
- The principle of gradual sanction
- The principle of timely handling
- The principle of changeability of sanctions

Aim of the study

- In general, the research provides an insight into the perception of judiciary and interdepartmental cooperation between professionals working within
  - Social Welfare Centers,
  - State Attorney’s Offices, and
  - Juvenile Courts.
Two main objectives of this presentation

1. to describe to what degree are the employees of Social Welfare Centers, State Attorney's Offices and Juvenile Courts satisfied with the main elements and principles of juvenile justice system in Croatia, mostly proscribed in the Juvenile Courts Act

2. to explore eventual differences in their perceptions/satisfaction.

Sample (N=309, from all 21 counties)

- Juvenile Courts: 82
- State Attorney's Offices: 98
- Social Welfare Centers: 129
### Instrument and procedure

- perception of our Juvenile Justice System
- satisfaction with legal definitions/possibilities
- satisfaction with the implementation of different legal elements (principles)
- satisfaction with implementation/execution of juvenile sanctions
- satisfaction with mutual cooperation

- The data were gathered during November and December 2015 via an online survey (LimeSurvey).
How satisfied are you with the implementation of these principles....

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<td>19.1</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>41.7</td>
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<td>Gradual sanctioning</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<td>Changeability of sanctions</td>
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<td>10.7</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
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1 = completely unsatisfied; 5 = completely satisfied

Differences in satisfaction regarding institution

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<tr>
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<th>SWC</th>
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Kruskal-Wallis U-test
Analysis of qualitative comments I.

**IF SATISFIED....**

- satisfaction depends on cooperation on the local level
- some local communities inform about good cooperation that contributes to ensuring all the legal principles in practice

Analysis of qualitative comments II.

**IF NOT SATISFIED....**

- **tendency to blame each other** - every institution blames other for delays
- not satisfied with the fact that **SWC don’t have specialized teams** for juvenile delinquency and behavioral disorders any more
- **contradictory findings** with regards to the urgency on more complicated legal cases:
  - they are handled urgently
  - they are left aside
- problems with **young adults** in urgency and timely handling
Analysis of qualitative comments III.

- **with regards to gradual sanctioning** - participants are mostly satisfied
  - if not, they are concerned with the “heavy cases/clients” where judges don’t respect their professional opinion for more strict sanction

- **with regards to changeability** of sanctions comments are focused on criticism to the juvenile courts:
  - they do not tend to apply this principle unless recidivism,
  - or vice-versa - they change sanctions based on behavior, and for recidivism they insist on new procedure
  - length of the process is counter-productive for this principle
  - problems with young adults

Counclusions

- research confirms many known facts from our professional collaboration with practice
- results indicate much stronger need for establishing local collaborations and principles/procedures of handling juvenile justice cases in communities (not all sanctions are possible)
- results indicate satisfaction with legal regulations, but good practice is a “human factor”
- state attorneys are mostly pressured by dead-lines and results, that could contribute to their least satisfaction with the system
- young adults are especially questionable group in situations where they have community sanctions and they do not conduct it properly - what are the possibilities?
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION 😊