

PARENTAL MIGRATION AS NEGLECT: THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF MISSING PARENTS ON THE BEHAVIOUR OF CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND IN MOLDOVA

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ABSTRACT:

IN THIS PAPER, WE CONCEPTUALIZE THE PHENOMENON OF CHILD NEGLECT IN A PARTICULAR CONTEXT OF PARENTAL MIGRATION AND EXAMINE WHAT ARE THE LINKS BETWEEN PARENTAL ABSENCE AND THE NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR OF THEIR CHILDREN. OUR ANALYSIS IS BASED MAINLY ON OUR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF MOLDOVAN ADOLESCENTS IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW WHOSE PARENTS WERE OR HAD BEEN IN MIGRATION. WE FOUND THAT IN THE APPRAISAL OF THE CAUSALITY OF THE MINORS' DELINQUENCY, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE FREQUENCY AND THE QUALITY OF MAINTAINED RELATIONS WITH MIGRANT PARENT(S) AND WITH THE CAREGIVER AT HOME ARE OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE.

KEY WORDS: PARENTAL MIGRATION, CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND, CHILD NEGLECT, JUVENILE DELINQUENCY, REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, the high figures of emigration from Moldova attracted the attention of international organizations, of civil society as well as of the domestic authorities on the situation of the children left behind. According to UNICEF², one in five Moldovan children has one or both biological parents working abroad. While many migrants stay in contact with their family members, in some cases children may lose the care, the emotional support, and the guidance of one or both parents.

The issue

While some authors highlight the positive impact of remittances sent to children in Moldova by their parents working abroad³, others emphasize the negative impact of parental

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²UNICEF Moldova, „Children of Moldova,” (2014), accessed Mars 2, 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/children.html>.

³Franziska Gassmann et al. „The impact of migration on children left behind in Moldova,” UNU-MERIT Working Paper Series 43 (2013); Matthias Luecke and Tobias Stöhr, The Effects of Migration in Moldova and Georgia on Children and Elderly Left Behind: Country Report: Moldova (EuropeAid Project: DCI-MIGR/210/229-604, 2013);

migration⁴. The negative impact refers to: the unpleasant emotional state as sadness, isolation, and insecurity; the deterioration of the academic performance because of the lack of parental support and encouragement; sometimes hidden health problems; a higher risk for drug abuse, dropping out of school, precocious sexual relationships, and socially undesirable behaviour; more vulnerability to become victims of crimes; troubled relationships with the peers because of envy of better living standard of migrants' children; loneliness, isolation and lack of attention, and in most extreme cases the consequences could be attempted suicide or criminal behaviour. Some authors suggest an increased risk of abnormal conduct problems, especially for boys⁵.

The present study

By observing the situation of the children left behind in Moldova our aim was to disclose in what ways the parental migration shapes children's behaviour. Does parents' attitude while away influence their children's conduct? In what cases the migration of the parent(s) can be associated with child neglect? Which of these children are most exposed to the risk of developing negative manners?

The role of the family, of the school, and of the community all weigh into the formation of the child's and adolescent's personality. The absence of a parent cannot generally be fully compensated by other persons, however an increased attention paid to these children can make a significant difference for their future. We assume that the lack of direct parental supervision can influence negatively a child's behaviour. Yet, this assertion must be nuanced and incorporate other factors that have an impact on children's conduct in combination with their parents' migration. Many variables related to the personality of the child, his or her age and sex, his or her relationship with the caregiver at home, but also the parent's attitude while away from the household must be considered in researching the influences on the behaviour of children left behind. It appears that parental migration associated with a severe neglect has a damaging influence on the child's well-being and can lead to a deterioration of his or her conduct, leading sometimes to delinquency.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the present study we draw on theories explaining what the neglect of a child means and when the juveniles are most at risk to develop a delinquent behaviour.

⁴ Diana Cheianu-Andrei et al., Specific needs of children and elderly left behind as a consequence of migration (2011), accessed Mars 12, 2016, <http://www.iom.md/specific-needs-children-and-elderly-left-behind-consequence-labour-migration>; Igor Dolea et al. Fenomenul delincvenței juvenile în Republica Moldova (IRP, Chisinau: 2011); Azzedine Salah „The impacts of migration on children in Moldova,” (2008) accessed February 22, 2016, [https://www.unicef.org/The_Impacts_of_Migration_on_Children_in_Moldova\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/The_Impacts_of_Migration_on_Children_in_Moldova(1).pdf); Michaella Vanore et al. „Left behind' but not left alone: Parental migration & the psychosocial health of children in Moldova,” Social Science & Medicine 132 (2015). DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.08.040, 252-260; Liza Yanovich „Children Left Behind: The Impact of Labor Migration in Moldova and Ukraine,” Migration Policy Institute (2015), accessed February 15, 2016, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/children-left-behind-impact-labor-migration-moldova-and-ukraine>.

⁵ Dolea et al. Fenomenul delincvenței juvenile; Valentin Prohntitchi, „Poverty of the Children of Moldovan Migrants,” (2007), accessed Mars 10, 2016, http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00006756/01/ExpertGrup2007_Poverty_of_the_Children_Left_Behind_by_Moldovan_Migrants.pdf; Vanore et al. „Left behind' but not left alone”.

Parental neglect

Reviewing the literature on the forms of neglect Miller-Perrin and Perrin⁶ identify several subtypes characterized by different kind of failure of the parents: health care neglect, personal hygiene neglect, nutritional neglect, neglect of household safety, neglect of house hold sanitation, inadequate shelter, abandonment, supervisory neglect, emotional neglect, fostering delinquency. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) provide a more developed definition of the neglect, which includes both isolated incidents, as well as a pattern of failure over time on the part of a parent or other family member to provide for the development and well-being of the child where the parent is in a position to do so. The areas of failure include: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter, and safe living conditions. It is not necessarily the poverty the cause of neglect, the parents of neglected child may equally be financially well-off⁷. Researchers at Harvard University's Centre on the Developing Child highlight the aspect of deprivation associated with the neglect which is "the absence of sufficient attention, responsiveness, and protection that are appropriate to the age and needs of a child"⁸. If 'occasional inattention' probably does not meet a threshold for a social services' child protection intervention, 'chronic under-stimulation' and 'severe neglect in the family context' requires an adapted intervention, usually as rapidly as possible. A developmental perspective challenges the understanding of the neglect according to the individual needs of the child and emphasizes its effects on the development of the child⁹. A severe neglect presents a greater risk of emotional, behavioural, and interpersonal relationship difficulties later in life¹⁰.

Adolescence and delinquency

Adolescence is a propitious period for deviance, yet it only leads some youngsters to delinquency¹¹. Family plays a considerable role in the emergence of the socially adapted behaviour but also of maladjusted behaviour¹². According to several authors it is precisely the

⁶ Cindy L. Miller-Perrin and Robin D. Perrin, *Child maltreatment: An introduction* (2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007).

⁷ World Health Organization and International Society for prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, *Preventing child maltreatment: a guide to taking action and generating evidence* (WHO Press, 2006).

⁸ Center on the Developing Child (CDC) Harvard University, „The Science of Neglect: The Persistent Absence of Responsive Care Disrupts the Developing Brain,” Working Paper 12 (2012),

⁹ Julie L. Crouch and Milner Joel S., „Effects of child neglect on children,” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 20(1993).

¹⁰ Ruth Gilbert et al. „Burden and consequences of child maltreatment in high-income countries,” *Lancet* 373(2009); Alexander Muela et al., „Definition, Incidence and Psychopathological Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect,” in *Child Abuse and Neglect – A Multidimensional Approach*, ed. Alexander Muela (Rijeka: InTech, 2012), 2-20; Marije Stoltenborgh et al. „The neglect of child neglect: a meta-analytic review of the prevalence of neglect,” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 48(2013). DOI: 10.1007/s00127-012-0549-y.

¹¹ Michel Born, *Jeunes déviants ou délinquants juvéniles?* (Bruxelles: P. Mardaga, 1987).

¹² Michel Born, *Psychologie de la délinquance* (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2005); Michel Born, *Pour qu'ils s'en sortent! Comment intervenir efficacement auprès de jeunes délinquants* (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2011); Michel Born and Dominique Helin, „La résilience de délinquance dans le contexte des relations familiales,” in *Relation familiale et résilience*, ed. Jean-Pierre Pourtois and Huguette Desmet (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), 197-213; Eliane Bouyssi re-Catusse and Jean-Philippe Raynaud, *Adolescents difficiles: penser et construire des partenariats*. (Toulouse:  ditions  res, 2012); Carol Hayden, *Children in trouble. The role of the families, schools and communities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Sebastian Roch , *La d linquance des jeunes. Les 13-19 ans racontent leurs d lits*. (Paris: Seuil, 2001).

lack of parental supervision that plays an important criminogenic factor for the adolescents¹³. ‘Supervision’ or ‘control’ means “awareness about the minors’ activities, their company, their school performances or their leisure activities”¹⁴. Fréchette and LeBlanc¹⁵ suggest that the peak in committing offences is situated in the middle of the adolescence. For many authors, age turns out to be one of the most efficient indicators to predict the ‘acceleration’ or the ‘deceleration’ of criminal behaviour in the subsequent lifestyle of the subjects¹⁶. Therefore low parental involvement at this age, weak family cohesion, and poor parent-child communication increase the risk for delinquency¹⁷.

Searching for factors predicting the abstention from engaging in delinquent behaviour, Johanson and Menard¹⁸ observed that “stronger bonds to parents” can be a positive influence. On the one hand, discipline practice applied by parents can be a strong positive predictor for desistance in young adulthood¹⁹. On the other, several studies demonstrate that exposure to neglectful parenting and inconsistent discipline can result in life-course persistent antisocial behaviour²⁰. Also, the weak monitoring and the lack of parent-child warmth can lead to the same effect²¹.

There is a quite poor research on the links between the migration of the parents and the negative behaviour of their children left behind. When the studies in Asia did not find relevant evidence that the family separation leads to an intensification of delinquency among children²²,

¹³ Catherine Blatier, *Les personnalités criminelles. Evaluation et prévention*. (Paris: Dunod, 2011); David Farrington, *Understanding and Preventing Youth Crime*. (York: York Publishing Services Ltd/ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1996); Marc Leblanc, „La délinquance des adolescent,” in *Traité des problèmes sociaux*, ed. Fernand Dumont et al. (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1994), 279-300; Rolf Loeber and Thomas J. Dishion, „Early Predictors of Male Delinquency: A Review,” *Psychological Bulletin* 94 (1983): 68-99; Rolf Loeber and Thomas J. Dishion, „Antisocial and delinquent youths: Methods for their early identification,” in *Prevention of delinquent behavior*, ed. John D. Burchard and Sara N. Burchard (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987); Rolf Loeber and Magda Stouthamer-Loeber, „Predictions,” in *Handbook of juvenile delinquency*, ed. Herbers C. Quay (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1987).

¹⁴ Catherine Blatier, *La délinquance des mineurs. L’enfant, le psychologue, le droit* (Grenoble: PUG, 2014).

¹⁵ Marcel Fréchette and Marc LeBlanc, *Délinquances et délinquants* (Gaëtan Morin éditeur, 1987).

¹⁶ David Farrington, „Childhood origins of teenage antisocial behaviour and adult social dysfunction,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 86(1993), 13-17; Fréchette and LeBlanc, *Délinquances et délinquants*; Joan McCord, „A Longitudinal Perspective on Patterns of Crime,” *Criminology* 19(1981); Marvin E. Wolfgang et al. *Delinquency in a Birth Cohort* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

¹⁷ Deborah Gorman-Smith et al., „The relation of family functioning to violence among inner-city minority youths,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 10(1996); Deborah Gorman-Smith et al., „Relation of family problems to patterns of delinquent involvement among urban youth,” *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 26(1998); Gerald R. Patterson et al., „A developmental perspective on antisocial behavior,” *American Psychologist* 44 (1989).

¹⁸ Matthew C. Johnson and Scott Menard, „A longitudinal study of delinquency abstention differences between life-course abstainers and offenders from adolescence into adulthood,” *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 10(2012): 278–291.

¹⁹ Sophie M. Aiyer et al. „Predicting desistance in a high-risk sample: examining the influence of individual and contextual factors,” *Journal of community psychology* 41(2013): 408–424

²⁰ Aiyer et al., „Predicting desistance”; David M. Bousha and Craig T. Twentyman, „Mother-child interaction style in abuse, neglect, and control groups: naturalistic observations in the home,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 93(1984); Terrie E. Moffitt and Avshalom Caspi, „Childhood predictors differentiate life-course persistent and adolescence-limited antisocial pathways, among males and females,” *Development & Psychopathology* 13(2001): 355–375.

²¹ Kenneth A. Dodge and Gregory S. Pettit, „A biopsychosocial model of the development of chronic conduct problems in adolescence,” *Developmental Psychology* 39(2003); Gerald R. Patterson et al., „Cascading Effects Following Intervention,” *Development and Psychopathology* 22(2010). DOI: 10.1017/S0954579410000568, 949–970.

²² Maruja Asis, „Imagining the Future of Migration and Families in Asia,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 9 (2000).

others noticed an increased incidence of psychological disturbance, juvenile delinquency, and social problems among the children of migrants²³, particularly when the mother migrated²⁴. Another analysis of the emotional health of children in transnational families found that Indonesian children with migrant fathers were slightly more likely to have an emotional problem than children with both parents at home, whereas Thai children with a father abroad were slightly more likely to have a conduct problem²⁵. Additional research has suggested that it is the combination of who has migrated and who takes on caregiving roles that shapes how children cope with parental migration. Children of migrants cared for by grandparents were found to be more likely to experience severe loneliness in China²⁶ and to feel emotional distress and show delinquent or high-risk behaviour in Moldova²⁷.

METHODS

For this study we used a qualitative analysis of data based on interviews with detainee adolescents that had experienced or were experiencing at the time of our survey their parent(s)' migration due to work (23 participants). Additionally, we analysed the data provided by the Moldovan probation system which conducted a survey by questioning supervised minors in the same situation (77 persons). This data helped us bring into focus the contour of the 'children left behind' phenomenon and gain an understanding of how this situation can induce behavioural problems to these children. We also tried to assess if the concept of 'parental neglect' can be used as a tool for anticipating the possible negative outcomes for children left behind. The intersection of qualitative data with available quantitative data on the number of children with migrant parents and on the juvenile delinquency in this country helped us estimate in which situations there is an increased risk of damaging conduct of the children left behind.

RESULTS

In January 2016, 19 out of the total of 28 young boys, detainees from specialized Penitentiary (No. 10-Goian), and 4 from the other Penitentiary (No. 13) were living or had lived an experience of parental migration. By semi-directed interviews we explored these minors' own perception of two main issues: their personal relations (with the migrant parent, with the caregiver at home, with peers and other important persons to them) and their living conditions after their parent(s)' departure. Our purpose was to understand how convicted children conceptualize the impact of labour migration on their situation. After asking several general questions on their age, their living area, the reason of their conviction, the country where the absent parent(s) was/were working, and the frequency of the contacts with him/ her, we focused on minors' reflections on the absence of the parent(s) in their everyday life and on what links (if any) they saw between this absence and their own damaging behaviour.

²³ Anna Luvia D'Emilio et al., „The Impact of International Migration: Children Left Behind in Selected Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean,” Working Papers (2007), accessed Mars 15, 2016, http://www.childmigration.net/UNICEF_2007.

²⁴ Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

²⁵ Elspeth Graham and Lucy P. Jordan, „Migrant parents and the psychological well-being of left-behind children in Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 73(2011).

²⁶ Zhaobao Jia and Wenhua Tian, „Loneliness of left-behind children: a cross-sectional survey in a sample of rural China,” *Child Care Health Develop* 36 (2010).

²⁷ Dolea et al. Fenomenul delincvenței juvenile; Prohničhi „Poverty of the Children of Moldovan Migrants”.

General statistics on young detainees left behind

The gathered statistic related to the provenience of the interviewed participants shows that the majority of them were from the rural area (78 %). The reason of the conviction was theft (in 8 cases) and/or robbery (3), sexual crimes (8), vandalism (1), or body injury (1). The age of the minor when he committed the crime varies between 13 and 16 years, and they either operated alone (13) or in groups of 2-3 persons (11). The absent parent was the mother in 9 cases, the father in 7 cases, and in the other 7 cases both parents. The age of the child at the moment of the parent's departure varies from few months to 4 years (10), 7-10 years (9), 14 years or more (4). In the majority of cases, the parent who did not migrate or the grandparent(s) were the caregivers, in some cases it was an older brother or sister, or a neighbour. The frequency of the contacts with the migrating parent(s) also varies, when some maintained a daily contact (5), some weekly or monthly (11), others did not maintain any contact with the left child (7). Almost in half of the cases the migrating parents did not return (7) or did it very rarely (3), and the others visited their children once a year.

Interviews with minors in detention

The participants to our survey had mixed feelings about their personal relations with their parents, with other caregivers, with peers, and with other persons. They appreciate the relations with their migrating parent(s) as 'normal' or 'good', or as 'bad' or 'difficult' mainly due to the aggressiveness of the father. Almost half of these children consider that the absent parent is responsible for their present situation and that the lack of interest, implication, affectivity or direct supervision is related to their negative behaviour.

Description of personal relations. The participants were asked to describe the role of the absent parent(s) in their life. The questions about the relations with the caregiver(s) at home often revealed difficulties with the father and/ or the grandparents. The youngsters sometimes mentioned negative environment and the lack of affectivity at home, bad influences of their peers or of other persons met in their life.

After my mother's depart abroad we maintained good relations. She was calling us [seven children of the family] once a month asking how we were doing. It is very difficult to live without her for all of us; it used to be different when she was home. Although I was very young when she left (3 years) I remember her being very nice to me. She has never come to visit us for the last 14 years. My father [at home] was very aggressive with us sometimes. And the grandmother wouldn't understand me. I think if mother were home maybe I would have not done what I did. Today she is not aware of me being in prison, I do not want to upset her (G., 17 years old, convicted for theft).

My mother is in Italy, my parents are divorced. When my mother leaves for work I stay with my older sisters. I was 12 years old when she left for the first time. She used to call us every day. I do not see any link between my mother's absence and my present situation. But growing with a father like mine hasn't been really easy. He doesn't care about me. [...] Those 'friends' had many times bad ideas, I was young and stupid listening to them (G., 18 years old, convicted for sexual violence).

My both parents went to work abroad, I was 9 years old when they left, first my step father, then my mother. My relationships with my parents are good; they call every day while abroad. I do not know who my biological father is. I stayed home with my older

sister and other two brothers. While both parents were abroad, a woman from our village was taking care of us. She was paid by our parents, but our relations with her were very bad, she used to take our food and money (A., 17 years, convicted for sexual violence).

You know, it was my father who convinced me to do this 'job' [theft] with him. But after that he disappeared leaving me alone to be responsible. How could I love him?! He's actually destroyed my life. Now I think he is hiding in Ukraine, I do not know if he works there, I doubt it (O., 17 years, convicted for theft).

In several cases minors brought more attention to the parents' divorce than to the migration of one of them. They underlined the father's aggressiveness towards them and their mother, assuming that it was better that he had migrated, and they would not have to face that aggressiveness anymore.

I was 3 or 4 years old when my father left for the first time for Russia to work, but I remember him being very violent with us [children and mother]. Today, me and my brother, we do not maintain any relation with him; it is better like this. Anyway, I think he is not interested in helping me and knowing how I am doing. Maybe if I had had a good father, I could have had a different situation today (O., 16 years old, convicted for theft).

I was 8 years old when my father left to find work abroad. Before his departure our relations were difficult. He used to beat us [three children] and currently we're not maintaining any relation with him. We stayed with our mother till she died, several years ago. Since that, I've lived with my older brother. The only relative interested in me today is my uncle; he calls me once a month. I think it is better that my father left (G., 17 years old, convicted for robbery).

I am quite attached to my mother, we have a good relationship. She's decided to go abroad and earn some money to help me while I am here. Our parents divorced when I was three years old. Maybe if my father had been more present in our life it would have been different today (I., 17 years old, convicted for sexual violence).

Sometimes the parent's migration turned into an abandonment of the child. Still, the minors do not see this attitude like a negative one all the time.

My mother left for Moscow when I was two and never came back. I have no brothers or sisters. I grew up with my grandparents and my father. Although my mother left me, which is a very bad thing, I tried to be good, to study and to behave well. My father is very ill and now I'm the one trying to help him, working to earn money for both of us. There is no connection between my situation and my mother's absence (E., 18 years old, convicted for rape).

My mother left for Israel when I was little. She never came back. In the first years she would call from time to time, but long ago she stopped keeping in touch with me. I think that my situation would have been different if she were with me. Even when she was informed about my situation she's never tried to contact me, she's never helped me, and never sent me money (N., 16 years old, convicted for robbery and kidnapping).

Both my parents are abroad. I was very little when my mother left for the first time (7-9 months). Then my father went to join her. I actually grew up with my grandmother. From time to time my father came to visit me, my mother never did, but I do not blame her, she is very busy working there (I., 18 years old, convicted for rape).

While some of participants see a link between the parent(s)' absence and their present situation, others do not establish such links.

My father has worked in Russia since I was 8-10 years old. I live with my mother and my grandparents. Although my father used to be aggressive with us I still maintained contact with him, he calls once a week. My father has no responsibility for my situation; there is no link between his departure and my behaviour (I., 17 years old, convicted for robbery).

My mother is abroad, I was 3 or 4 when she left for the first time. After a short time my father left too, and I remained with my aunt. My mother used to call me every day, but it was much better when they were home, with me. They have no responsibility for me being here, they've tried to be good parents all the time (P., 17 years, convicted for aggravated assault).

My father was already in Russia by the time I turned 6 years old. Then my mother left for Italy, I was 9. Although they are divorced now, I maintained contacts with both of them on Skype or by phone. My parents gave me too much liberty; they have no responsibility for my negative behaviour. I had too much money; I had all I've ever wanted. During their absence I was with my grandmother, but she didn't have much influence on me (I., 17 years old, convicted for hooliganism).

In most difficult situations children practically became orphans and did not have strong support in their life.

My parents used to work in Russia when I was little. Today I have no parents, they both passed away. I have an older brother and sister who take care of me (M., 17 years old, convicted for robbery).

I have lost my mother when I was little. When my father lost his work he went to Russia, I stayed with my grandmother for a while till she also passed away. I do not know where my father is today, we've lost connection (M., 17 years old, convicted for theft).

After my parents divorced, my mother left us with our father [two children]. I do not know where she is today. Then our father went to work in Ukraine. We maintained connection for a while but then he married another woman and was not interested in us anymore (M., 16 years, convicted for theft and murder).

Living conditions. In several cases the participants mentioned their 'good' or 'acceptable' living conditions. Others, most of the time, described their families' economic difficulties pushing parent(s) to migrate. However, sometimes, even after parent(s)'s departure abroad the situation did not change significantly, whether the migrant parent did not send remittances at all or the remittances were insufficient to cover the household needs.

Our mother [of seven children] sends us money from time to time (once a year) but it is never enough. My father does not work; he drinks a lot (G., 17 years old, convicted for theft).

It was difficult to live on our mother's salary. Our father [who's been working in Russia for years] has never sent any money, not even when we were little and he had legal obligation to provide for our raising (O., 16 years old, convicted for theft).

After my mother died it was quite difficult for us [two brothers] to live. We did not have enough money even for food. Our father [working in Russia] did not send any money (G., 17 years old, convicted for robbery).

We managed to have food but never enough money for other things. When you are young you also need to have good clothes, otherwise your peers can laugh and make fun of you (I. 17 years old, convicted for robbery).

When I had living parents we had a normal household. They used to work in Russia and send us money. After they passed away it has been very difficult for me. My older brother used to help me but after he had his family, I was on my own (M. 17 years old, convicted for robbery).

After my mother left for Israel we had no normal family. Father started drinking and we [two children] were on our own, trying to survive every day (N., 16 years old, convicted for robbery and kidnapping).

After my parents' divorce my father went to Ukraine. He's worked there but never sent me money, as he has now another family there. My mother drinks and doesn't work (M., 16 years, convicted for theft and murder).

Several participants described their 'good' or 'normal' living conditions due to their parents' working abroad or because their caregiver parent at home had a sufficient income.

Because my parents were working abroad we had enough money. I had everything I wanted and I was too spoiled (I., 17 years old, convicted for hooliganism).

Both my parents are mostly abroad. They send me money and call me from time to time. I don't have material problems (I., 18 years old, convicted for rape).

My parents are divorced. My mother works in Italy and I do not know where my father is. Mother sends us [me and my sister] enough money for a normal life (G. 18 years old, convicted for sexual violence).

The survey within Moldovan Probation System

According to Moldovan laws, an adolescent who committed for the first time a minor offence can be relieved from penal responsibility if authorities decide that his or her behaviour can be corrected by another remedy than penal sentence. In these cases, the juvenile is

monitored within probation system without being incarcerated. In early 2016, there were 153 juveniles under the monitoring of the Moldavian Probation System (MPS) across the country.

At our suggestion, the centralized Probation service from Moldova carried a survey on children submitted to probation and also left behind by their migrant parent(s). The assessment revealed a number of 77 minors in this situation, of different ages, from different regions of Moldova, living in most of the cases in very difficult conditions. Our purpose was to disclose their relations with parents, migrant or caregiver at home, and their family's living conditions. The analysis of the data provided by the MPS shows a variety of situations: from a severe parental neglect to positive relations with the migrant parent(s).

In most cases (50 cases), the child had an incomplete family because of the parents' separation or the death of one parent. Families are described by authorities as 'disorganized', 'split' or 'broken'. If a quarter of migrant parents are maintaining a regular contact with the left at home child, nearly another quarter of these children are totally abandoned by their parents. Therefore, there is quite a lot of vulnerability in the families of the children in conflict with the law, these families are rather incomplete, and very often there is a background of conflicts and disputes between parents or/ and parents and children. The minors described their relations with parents in positive, neutral or negative terms. For instance, some of them mentioned 'respectful', 'confident' or 'trustful' relations with parents. Others see these relations as 'normal', 'acceptable', 'superficial', 'weak', or 'cold', yet others emphasized the 'tension', 'hostility', 'difficulties' or even 'hate' between them and their parent(s).

In many cases the migrant parent(s) never returned or did so very rarely. The absence was very long, up to 10 years and even more. The contacts with the minor left behind was maintained by phone or internet 'every day', 'every week', 'once a month', 'sometimes during a year', or 'never'.

There is also a lot of material vulnerability in these children's households because of irregular wages of parent(s), deep poverty, and insecure housing.

The caregiver at home is mainly the grandparent(s), the mother when the father is abroad or the parents are divorced and the absent father does not maintain any contact with the child, the father when the mother is absent, another person (uncle, aunt, older brother or sister, a parent's concubine). In several cases the relation with the caregiver at home is tensioned. Often the leaving parent helps his child by sending him remittances without being concerned about his or her education. In many cases, when the caregivers are the grandparents, the relations with minors become difficult, they 'lose control' over the grandchildren and are not able to influence their behaviour.

In worst cases the situation of surveyed children is associated with school drop-out, vagabonding and begging, conduct problems and street living. Sometimes, the caregiver at home has health problems, alcoholism dependency, and/or is unemployed. There are many cases when the absent parent has been deprived of parental rights.

DISCUSSION

Summarizing the results of our investigation we see two crucial impacts on the development of the children left behind: one is produced by the attitude of the absent parent(s) and the other by the type of relationship with the caregiver at home. In many cases, the home caregiver is in charge with supervising and disciplining the child, while the absent parent(s) provide(s) only material help for him or her. In some extreme cases, when the parent(s) totally abandon(s) the child, the caregiver takes in charge the burdensome upbringing of the child. There are even more severe cases when the left behind child is also abandoned by the caregiver.

Minors' conceptualization of parents' absence due to migration

Exploring children's narratives on their parents' absence due to migration reveals different perception of the phenomenon. This perception is far from being unique and is mainly shaped by the attitude of the missing parent himself during the absence, but also before and, eventually, after his/ her return. It is also influenced by the attitude of the other parent and by the relationship between both parents. Consequently, children give different meanings to their parents' migration depending on the combination of above mentioned factors.

In many cases the aggressiveness of the parent prevails over his/ her other personality traits and induces a negative perception from the child. Sometimes, in such cases, the departure of the violent parent turns out to be the release from a problem and gains a positive meaning. Though, pushing the child to go further in discussions by telling how he/she expects his/ her parent to be, the child expresses the wish to have a 'normal', 'loving' and 'caring' parent.

As analysed data reveals, in many cases, the caregiver at home undertakes the education task while the migrant parent is the provider of the material needs. At the adolescence age, compared to the infantile age, children understand better these necessities and give rather a positive meaning to the parent's work migration, perceived as a 'bigger effort', even as a 'sacrifice' from the parent. Still, in many of our participant's cases, they have been left behind at a young age, therefore, the parent's migration is perceived more as abandonment and carelessness. Although some minors do not see any direct link between the parent(s)' absence in their everyday life and their antisocial behaviour, they consider that a more present parent could have had a positive impact on their situation.

Factors associated with negative behaviour of children left behind

According to the data of National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova (NBSM, 2016) the total number of juveniles that committed crimes in 2015 was 2706. The major part of the crimes was committed by boys (92.7%). The comparison of the convicted delinquency rates out of the total number of Moldovan children (192 out of 685 500 children = 0.03 %) with the number of convicted children among the children with migrating parents (0.07%) discloses a two times more increased risk of antisocial behaviour among the children left behind.

If the total number of children is 685500, and, according to the data of UNICEF (2014), every fifth child is left behind by at least one parent then the number of the left behind is 137100. At the time of our research, there were 93 minors convicted (in prison or monitored by probation offices) that had a migrating parent, which represents 0.07 % of the children left behind.

At the time of our survey, in Moldova there were three incarcerated girls in the specialized penitentiary for women, with a special section for minors. According to the data provided by the Direction of the penitentiaries none of these girls were affected by migration. As to the data provided by the direction of the MPS, among 77 analysed cases of surveyed children left behind only 3 were girls. This information shows that boys are exposed to a much greater risk of delinquency, in general, and also in the context of parental migration.

Proceeding from our present study, we assume that the risk of damaging behaviour of children left behind emerges in particular situations, associated mostly with deep neglect from their migrant parent(s) and/ or difficult relations with their caregivers at home. The absence of parents represents a risk factor for antisocial behaviour of minors mainly in combination with others factors like precarious socio-economic situation, conflictive family relations, and a poor quality of parental presence in the child's life. The teenagers violating the law in Moldova are in most of the cases victims of their socio-economic situation and of the specific parental neglect. Sometimes, their incapacity to use properly the remittances sent by their parents

working abroad lead them to a conflict with the law. Often, the generational gap when the adolescents are left with their old grandparent(s) can increase the risk of confrontational situations, driving them to violence.

The nature of offences

The most often committed crimes by surveyed minors are theft or robbery. They face material problems within their households and, in fact, their migrating parents do not necessarily bring them financial security. In many cases, the poverty of the family was too deep and the remittances from parents were too little to cover the necessities. Besides, the parents left their children without any support, neglecting them not only physically and psychologically but also materially. Indeed, there are studies that relate the material problems to the delinquency of the juveniles, showing a lower income *per capita* in their families²⁸.

The second most predominant crime committed by children and adolescents left behind have a sexual character. The impulsivity and the lack of emotional control frequently push the adolescents to the act²⁹. Smith and his colleagues³⁰ noticed that the family of sexual offenders “is less supportive and warm”. Based on clinical experience many sexual offenders are loners, spend significant amount of the time just hanging out, detached from meaningful relationships and without an emotional support group they can lean on when experiencing distress³¹. It is likely that juvenile sexual offending can be associated among other causes with the absence of the father or a father figure in the household, with poor parenting techniques, and with emotional neglect³².

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The case by case approach is necessary to measure the dimension of the neglect caused by parental migration. When most of the parents are maintaining strong connections with their child during their absence, some others are leaving for very long periods without trying to maintain contact with the child left behind. The parental migration can be considered a particular form of child neglect, and thus presents an elevated possibility for child deviant behaviour. It is not the parents’ migration in itself that determines the children delinquency. The neglect associated with a lack of supervision, affection and support, and the erratic discipline, all these in the context of the absence of the parent(s), can be predictors of an increased risk for delinquency of juveniles.

The theoretical framework of parental neglect, completed with some specific elements brought by the background of migration, can be applied to characterize the situation of the children left behind and to look for remedies to improve their condition. In searching for solutions to these complex situations the multilateral participation of key stakeholders (children, parents, State, and community) is crucial. There are many economic, social, and political challenges to overcome in order to achieve efficient results in protecting these children. It requires a permanent dialogue between all mentioned stakeholders.

²⁸ Born, Psychologie de la délinquance.

²⁹ Catherine Blatier, La délinquance des mineurs. L’enfant, le psychologue, le droit (Grenoble: PUG, 2014).

³⁰ Susan Smith et al., „Differences in self-report measures by adolescent sex offender risk group,” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 49(2005).

³¹ Philip D. Jaffé, „Child and adolescent sexual abusers – For a rehabilitative approach driven by scientific evidence,” in *Les jeunes auteurs d’actes d’ordre sexuel*, ed. Philip D. Jaffé and Jean Zermatten (Sion: IUKB & IDE, 2011).

³² Jaffé „Child and adolescent sexual abusers”.

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