

Cultural Values in Relation to Judicial Intervention and Support Strategies for Youth Violating Social Norms: A Comparative Study of Professional and Lay Samples

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Abstract

This dissertation examines intervention measures applied to children and adolescents exhibiting behavioral difficulties, with particular emphasis on the role of cultural values and educational orientations. The aim of the study was to investigate the extent to which decisions regarding responses to violations of moral and legal norms differ between experts (judges and court specialists) and non-experts (parents and students), as well as to assess the role of value systems in this process.

Responding to challenging behaviors in youth is a topic of interest across multiple disciplines—including pedagogy, social rehabilitation, developmental and forensic psychology, and legal studies—and plays a key role in parenting practices. Its interdisciplinary nature reflects the complexity of the phenomenon and the need to integrate scientific perspectives with everyday family experience. Responses to youth in crisis are shaped not only by legal regulations concerning minors but are also rooted in value systems and broader worldviews.

The theoretical part of the dissertation discusses legal frameworks governing intervention in family life and models of dealing with minors in Poland and selected countries. Various approaches are presented—ranging from the welfare model to legal and restorative justice models—along with their implications for judicial practice. Legal provisions regulating parental conduct and state intervention are known primarily to specialists and decision-makers, whereas general parenting practices are largely shaped by social norms grounded in shared

values. Social and cultural changes influence family functioning, socialization processes, and the performance of parental roles. Cultural differences may lead to divergent evaluations of the same behaviors—for example, lying—depending on the underlying value system. Consequently, variability in parental beliefs across cultural contexts may result in different strategies of both support and intervention in response to norm violations. The study also analyzes the phenomenon of youth demoralization and social maladjustment, taking into account individual, family, and socio-cultural determinants. Particular attention is devoted to Shalom Schwartz's theory of values and Christian Welzel's concept of emancipatory values as interpretative frameworks.

The empirical study was conducted among 1,146 participants (parents, students, judges, and court specialists) who made decisions regarding hypothetical problem situations involving minors. The study employed the original Remedial Measures Questionnaire, as well as standardized instruments: Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) and selected components of C. Welzel's Unified Emancipatory Scale. The questionnaire included three case studies, one of which was presented in four parts. The protagonists were adolescents whose behaviors violated commonly accepted norms. The scenarios were based on professional practice within the Advisory Team of Court Specialists. After reviewing each description (seven in total), participants were asked to indicate which judicial responses they considered appropriate—these were derived from the Act on the Support and Rehabilitation of Minors of June 9, 2022, and the Family and Guardianship Code (e.g., probation supervision, therapy, placement in a correctional facility, restriction of parental authority).

The results indicate two primary response orientations: supportive and interventionist. Across all groups, supportive measures were preferred, while more restrictive measures were selected in cases involving more severe problems. Significant differences were observed between experts and non-experts, with the latter more frequently opting for harsher responses.

The analyses confirmed a significant relationship between value systems and decision-making. Conservative values related to security and conformity were associated with a preference for control-oriented and interventionist measures, whereas prosocial values (particularly universalism) were linked to supportive approaches. Emancipatory orientations functioned as a mediator between values and educational orientations.

The findings suggest that decision-making regarding intervention in family life is not only legal and diagnostic but also axiological in nature. Assessments of situations and interpretations of the "best interests of the child"—and thus the selection of intervention measures—are shaped not only by professional knowledge and experience but also by

individual value systems. The results highlight the importance of reflexivity in professional practice and the need to consider differences in worldviews when making decisions concerning children and families. They also underscore the need for further research on the axiological determinants of such decisions, particularly in the context of diagnostic and judicial practice.

Helene Selbo