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## Analysis of Social Pathology in the Opinion of Community Inhabitants to Increase Threat Resilience in Communities at the Local Level

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** This article aims to present issues related to the influence of social pathologies, such as alcoholism, drug addiction, violence and aggression in the family, social alienation, and crime, on shaping resilience to threats in local communities.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The main research problem was presented in the form of the following question: How important is identifying and addressing social pathologies in shaping community resilience at the local level? A diagnostic poll method was used to solve the presented research problem, carried out using a survey technique, using survey questionnaire tool. The Statistica v.13.1 software package was used to develop the survey results.

**Findings:** It may be argued that wide-scale activities undertaken in local communities, such as: launching preventive actions, information campaigns, and cooperation with various institutions that deal with analyzed social pathologies, have a positive influence on shaping resilience to threats in the studied local communities.

**Practical Implications:** The empirical data obtained allowed us to establish a direct relationship between the occurrence of social pathologies and their impact on the formation of resilience to threats in local communities.

**Originality/Value:** The article presents the author's approach to cognition of social pathologies and an indication of their influence on the sense of shaping resilience to threats in local communities.

**Keywords:** Public co-management, social pathologies, resilience management in local communities, resilience to threats, local management, community safety at the local level.

**JEL Classification:** J60, J01, H55.

**Paper type:** Research article.

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## **1. Introduction**

All kinds of pejorative phenomena indicate the accumulation of undesirable, pathological behaviors that are a current and urgent problem in local communities. The appearance of social pathologies in the closest environment of a person has an undeniable impact on their functioning in it and on building and increasing the level of resilience in these local communities. For this reason, the authors of this study decided to analyze the selected social pathologies, such as alcoholism, drug abuse among youth, crime, social alienation, or broadly understood family pathologies, such as divorce and violence, as those that can significantly affect building or increasing resilience in local communities.

The subject of research in this article is pathologies occurring in communities at the local level. The study's main aim is to identify the importance of counteracting social pathologies in shaping resilience to threats in communities at the local level. Analyzing the problem situation and referring to the research objective, the main research problem was presented in the form of the following question: How important is identifying and addressing social pathologies in shaping community resilience at the local level? Solving the above-mentioned research problem requires addressing several specific problems:

1. What characterises social pathologies and what are their types?
2. How should resilience to threats be understood?
3. What problems are diagnosed by a community based on the example of a municipality?
4. What is the level of trust the members of the surveyed local community display towards each other?
5. What activities are carried out in the municipality to counteract social pathologies?

The authors of the article are aware that the analyzed pathologies constitute a specific fragment of the reality of local communities. Nevertheless, they considered them essential in the context of the undertaken considerations, and in this direction, the empirical data were collected and analyzed. From the point of view of the undertaken considerations, it should be emphasized how important it is to identify pathological phenomena and develop actions aimed at preventing their occurrence in communities at the local level.

## **2. Literature Review**

From the point of view of the undertaken considerations, it is essential to clarify the concept of social pathology at the beginning. Of course, in the source literature, one can find many definitions of this phenomenon that define it precisely. Thus, Bielecki (2005) describes the phenomenon in question as the science of suffering (pathos - suffering, logos - science). He says that social pathology is a type of behavior, a type

of institution, a kind of functioning of a social system, or a type of subculture, which remains in fundamental, irreconcilable contradiction with worldview values accepted in each community (Bielicki, 2005). Another definition is that these are phenomena of social behavior of individuals and groups and the functioning of social institutions that conflict with the values and principles accepted by a given society ([encyclopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/patologie-spoleczne](http://encyclopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/patologie-spoleczne)). At the same time, Malec (1986) defines social pathologies as the totality of incidents, deaths, damage to health and lowering of moral level, deterioration of well-being, and material losses caused by violation of praxeological, ethical, and legal rules and self-destructive behavior (Kozak, 2009). In the literature, we can observe a certain tendency to use interchangeably the concept of social dysfunctions or social disorganization understood as: a state of social imbalance characterized by the weakening of social ties, the system of social standards and values, and the disruption of social control mechanisms (Słownik PWN, 2021).

Podgórecki (1976), indicates that the phenomena of social pathology can be divided into group pathology, i.e., divorce, incest, organized crime, and pathologies of institutions, and individual pathology, i.e., suicide, homicide, alcoholism, drug addiction, or prostitution (Bielicki, 2005). Another division of types of pathological phenomena can also be applied, and we can distinguish, family dysfunctions, alcoholism, drug addiction, disorders in interpersonal relations, crime, labor pathology, pathology of population structures, pathology of living conditions of the population, pathology of environment or space (Kozak, 2009).

Thus, it can be argued that social pathologies are such a phenomenon that negatively affects both the individual and the community in which the individual functions. They affect the balance in each community and violate commonly accepted social standards (Nowak, 2008).

Alcoholism is counted among the phenomena of social pathology, and both from a clinical and psychological standpoint, it is treated exceptionally because it is a case of tolerated toxicomania (Nowak and Wysocka, 2001). It is a defective pattern of behavior, causing apparent psychological, physical, and social damage. The primary symptoms are loss of control over drinking and the inclusion of alcohol in the structure of the individual's needs (Albanski, 2010). The causes and determinants of alcoholism are still seen in factors of a very different nature, such as social factors - cultural, demographic, and individual - psychological and physiological. When discussing the phenomenon of alcoholism, it is impossible to forget about what affects the family in which alcohol is present, namely co-addiction. It is a phenomenon reflected in the disruption of essential marital and parental roles and functions of the family and disorganization. The occurrence of co-addiction is associated with other pathologies such as incestuous relationships or rape in marriage. Co-addiction, therefore, mainly affects the wives and the children; such behavior allows them to adapt to the situation, but on the other hand, blocks any remedial action (Nowak and Wysocka, 2001).

The next phenomenon was looked at as drug addiction. Drug addiction is psychotropic drugs, both narcotics and stimulants, and hallucinogens - altering the psyche, harmful to the individual and society. The Act of 29 July 2005 on counteracting drug addiction defines drug addiction as - permanent or periodical use for purposes other than medical use of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, substitutes, or new psychoactive substances, because of which depends on them may arise or has arisen (Act of 29 July 2005 on counteracting drug addiction). As stated by Nowak and Wysocka (2001), in a strict dictionary sense, drug addiction is an internal compulsion to use certain chemical substances to intoxicate oneself, having the characteristics of addiction.

The term crime in criminology is understood as a set of acts prohibited by law under the threat of punishment, which was committed in a given territorial unit and at a given time. Crime can be analyzed in terms of its extent, intensity, structure, and dynamics (Chmielewski and Woźniak, 2005). The types of crimes that can be dealt with are crimes against the person, crimes of violence, crimes against property, "victimless" crimes, and work-related crimes (Kozak, 2009). The literature also distinguishes between para-criminal behaviors that are not punishable by criminal law, such as running away from home, smoking, drinking alcohol, aversion to education, early sexual initiation, prostitution, swearing, indecent behavior, or sect membership (Bielicki, 2005).

Social alienation is another pathological phenomenon we must deal with in local communities. According to Kowalik (2017), it is also important to isolate oneself from other people, which results in an increasing number of "closed" housing estates. Closed housing estates divide the local community into different categories of people, which results in social stratification, consequently leading to the situation where people do not know their neighbors and the place where they will see each other from time to time is usually a housing estate hypermarket. The consequences of these changes are distrust, uncertainty, a materialization of social life - which can lead to the breakdown of ties with the local community and a complete transformation of the family model. It can be argued that this is a broader concept used by sociologists to describe the experiences of individuals or groups who feel disconnected from the values, standards, practices, and social relations of their community or society for a variety of social structural reasons including outside the economy. Individuals experiencing social alienation do not share the shared core values of society, are not well integrated into society, its groups, and institutions, and are socially isolated from the mainstream ([pl.peopleperproject.com/posts/10508-alienation-and-social-alienation-definitions](http://pl.peopleperproject.com/posts/10508-alienation-and-social-alienation-definitions)).

As far as family pathology is concerned, apart from social alienation, it also includes functioning in a criminal family, socially oppressive families, divorce, incomplete families, social orphanhood, broadly understood crimes against the family, violence in the family, families where alcohol and drugs are present, dysfunctional families, all kinds of uninhibited behavior, but also health impairments that result from care

neglect and lowered life aspirations (Kozak, 2009). Mainly researchers focus on the occurrence of violence and aggression in the family. Violence in the family can be defined as the perpetrator's actions that violate the victim's rights and cause her suffering. The following conditions determine family violence (Albanski, 2010):

- the perpetrator feels impunity and uses its advantage;
- the behaviour violates the rights and well-being of the victim; violence fulfils only the needs of the perpetrator.

Summarising this part of the considerations, it should be indicated that the above-discussed, selected social pathologies, such as alcoholism, drug addiction, crime, social alienation, and family pathology, can directly affect the formation of resilience to threats in communities at the local level. An essential element that should be emphasized is that resilience to hazards is influenced by knowledge of the discussed phenomena and taking preventive measures to reduce the adverse effects of their occurrence.

### **3. An Attempt to Define Resilience to Threats**

Significant interest in the issue of immunity is directly related to the dynamic development of civilization, climate change, social unrest, and uncertainty about the occurring threats. This concept plays a vital role in medicine, psychology, physics, or ecology. However, it is also applied in community safety management. In the literature, we can find definitions of the concept of resilience, which suggest that it is the ability of a community, potentially exposed to threats, to adapt by resisting or introducing changes to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of functioning (Dow, 1992). Resilience can also be understood as preparing for, fighting, adapting to changing conditions, and recovering quickly (Carpenter and Walker, 2001).

Viewing this concept in social terms, it is worth noting that it combines three elements: creating community with other members of society, improving functioning social practices, and using and learning from lessons learned (Paton and Johnston, 2001). A resilient community is aware of the threats it may face, prepared for their occurrence, and ready for the changes that will occur with adverse events. Increasing resilience to hazards in local communities refers directly to (Górska-Rożej, 2018):

- reducing the risk of disruptive events by expanding and modernising the economic resources of these communities;
- supporting community initiatives to improve safety;
- increasing public awareness of potential threats;
- equipping young people with properly structured educational programmes to shape knowledge, beliefs, build appropriate attitudes, and trigger empathy;
- universal access to social capital;
- dissemination of information, access to information;

- conducting training on potential threats;
- building a social culture.

In building resilience, it is necessary to consider the situation in which individuals, but also social groups find themselves, the cultural system adopted by society in each area, economic development, political situation, the natural environment in which a given community operates, as well as the available infrastructure, the technologies used, and the possibility of development. Public administration, particularly the competence of the officials in charge of a given area, is of great importance in building the resilience of the society (Górska-Rozej, 2020).

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The purpose of this article is to indicate the essence of counteracting social pathologies in shaping resilience to threats in communities at the local level. The main research problem was generated in the following question: How important is identifying and addressing social pathologies in shaping community resilience at the local level?

To solve the research problem presented in the article, a diagnostic poll method was used, carried out using a survey technique, using a survey questionnaire tool. In connection with the research, the general population included Nowa Iwiczna, located in the Lesznów municipality in the Mazovian Voivodeship. To develop the results of the study, the statistical package Statistica v.13.1 was used.

By the formula for the size of the research sample, the size of a representative sample was indicated, which, in the case of research, was 1351 people. The study was conducted personally by the authors of the article. 52.71% of women and 47.29% of men participated in the study. More than half of the respondents indicated working in the public sector, while 37.04% in the private sector. More than 6% are already retired, and 1.99% are studying at university/school. It is positive that nobody indicated that they are unemployed. Most of the respondents (66.95%) have higher education, the rest claim to have secondary education. The most numerous groups among the respondents were 31-40 (38.75% of the respondents) and 25-30 (35.9% of the respondents). In terms of numbers, the third-largest group was those aged 41-50 (20.51%). The least numerous groups were people of age, 18-24 (1.99%), 61-70 (1.71%) and 51-60 (1.14%).

Referring to the subject of the research, i.e., social pathologies, it was decided that their identification should begin with the diagnosis of problems faced by the surveyed local community, which in turn create the foundation for the emergence of these pathologies. Therefore, the article's authors asked the respondents to point out the most significant shortcomings of the municipality/area they live in. The following were identified above all:

- lack of social initiatives to improve the safety of municipality residents (87.46% of the respondents);
- increased number of foreigners (economic migrants, mainly from Ukraine, 80.63% of the respondents);
- thefts, burglaries (60% of the respondents).

By analyzing the literature on social pathologies, one can see a correlation between low levels of social pathologies and high levels of social capital among local communities. Robert Putnam emphasized that social capital is the characteristics of social organizations such as social networks or household arrangements and their associated values that create external consequences for the community (Putnam, 1995). He also added that social capital refers to the trust, social networks, or reciprocity that characterize social groups and thus increase their efficiency in action and build a sustainable foundation for interaction (Putnam, 1995).

Therefore, it can be argued that it is the interaction that is the essence of this capital, as it allows for its accumulation in a given community, and this very often results in the prospect of socio-economic development, increased civic activity, but also a reduction in the occurrence of phenomena of a pathological nature, and consequently an increase in resistance to threats (Bakker, Koning, and Tatenhove, 2019; Fallow, 2011).

**Table 1.** Level of trust as perceived by respondents

Statement	Percentages				
	1	2	3	4	5
People need to be trusted, good relationships with others depend on it	39.89	25.93	22.51	11.68	0
I trust my closest neighbours	1.14	78.63	10.26	9.97	0
You should not open too much to your closest neighbours	0	11.68	11.11	77.21	0
I never make friends with my neighbours	0	0	39.87	26.21	33.90
Good relationships with my closest family are a priority for me	90.03	9.97	0	0	0
The inhabitants of my town can be trusted	0	51.0	49.0	0	0

*Note:* 1 - definitely yes; 2 - rather yes; 3 - hard to say; 4 - rather not; 5 - definitely not

*Source:* Own study.

Therefore, the authors of the article decided to verify the level of trust of the municipality inhabitants towards each other, and based on the obtained survey results, they may claim that the level of trust is very high. 100% of the surveyed indicated that their priority is good relations with their closest family. Still, they also want to make friends among their neighbors (over 60% of them) because they trust their nearest neighbors (79.77% of the surveyed). More than 65% of the respondents assume that people need to be trusted because good interpersonal contacts and maintaining relationships, in general, depend on it. The results of the survey have been presented in Table 1.

Considering the issue of social capital, and thus cooperation in the context of social pathology, it is reasonable to point out that local social capital consists of, among others: a set of standards, values, and attitudes that shape social cooperation. Therefore, the authors of the article decided to ask the respondents what deals they consider the most important in building interpersonal relations that are an essential factor analyzed in terms of the intensity of occurrence of social pathology in a particular group. The research shows that such values include:

- respect (86.04% of the respondents);
- trust (62.39% of respondents);
- tolerance (61.82% of respondents).

Moving from the individual, group, or typically social aspect to the organizational part, it is worth pointing out that in shaping the resistance to threats in local communities, in terms of counteracting social pathologies, it is essential to promote or support social initiatives. Such activities are carried out to increase the safety of local communities in general, and the following examples may be indicated:

- initiative to eliminate crime (introduction of monitoring in places where most incidents of this nature were recorded or places where the community is afraid to stay/feels anxious);
- stop alcohol consumption initiative (implementation of prevention programs in schools);
- the domestic violence prevention initiative (publicising commercials that raise awareness and provide information about places where victims of violence can get help).

These activities help improve the communication of information, influence the balanced distribution of resources, and increase the ability to cooperate. Social support is an element that has a significant impact on shaping knowledge, beliefs, building appropriate attitudes, and activating empathy among the public, thus preventing the escalation of pathological behavior. In the opinion of the respondents, to improve the level of security of municipality residents, social programs/initiatives should be planned, discussed, and, in effect, promoted:

- 24-hour monitoring of the municipality (or places indicated as the most dangerous, 88.32% of the respondents);
- proper, full-scale lighting of the municipality (82.05% of the respondents);
- creation of a free time management proposal for youth by the municipality (79.77% of the respondents).

Social problems are an indispensable part of local communities' functioning, and several factors contribute to their emergence. The task of local authorities, local institutions, NGOs, and members of the local community themselves is to monitor

the social situation, diagnose social threats, prepare for their occurrence, and create strategies to counteract such events or limit their effects. The research results indicate that alcoholism (78.63% of the respondents) and crime (73.77% of the respondents) are the most significant social problems for the municipality's inhabitants. It is worth mentioning that family pathologies (e.g., family violence, 9.97% of the respondents) and social alienation (11.68% of the respondents) are the least frequent in the examined community. The results are presented in Table 2.

To eliminate existing social problems, a document called Strategy of Social Integration and Solving Social Problems was created in the municipality. It indicates that solving social problems, diagnosing, and eliminating social pathologies is a long-term and challenging process. This process relates to a strategic approach to the elements of social policy. The issues discussed in the document mentioned above are to be the basis for the implementation of necessary social interventions and aid programs that are to translate into improvement of the quality of life of the inhabitants, increase in the level of local security, and to shape of resistance to threats in the community. One of the pillars of activities aimed at eliminating social problems among the municipality residents is creating a system of counteracting addictions (mainly including children and youth)<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 2.** *Social problems of commune residents*

Social problem	Percentages	
	yes	no
Alcoholism	78.63	21.37
Drug addiction among youth	48.45	51.55
Crime	73.77	26.23
Social alienation	11.68	88.32
Family pathology (e.g., divorce, domestic violence)	9.97	90.03

*Source:* Own research results.

Research shows that the foundation for minimizing pathological phenomena in society is education, transfer of knowledge package that makes individuals aware of the monitoring, diagnosing, and reporting the described problems on their own. One of the valuable tools to combat social pathologies is prevention programs and social campaigns. In recent years, we can observe an increase in the involvement of many entities in social movements to prevent crimes. The creation of a social campaign addressed to the local community and aimed at preventing the spread of pathological phenomena should help to raise awareness, make people realize the nature and scale of the problem, persuade them to change their attitudes, and encourage them to act in a similar situation in real life. Due to the alcohol problem in the community, the Municipal Commission for Solving Alcohol Problems adopted the Commune Programme for Prevention and Solving of Alcohol Problems and Counteracting

<sup>3</sup>The objective is implemented by the Communal Commission for Solving Alcohol Problems, Plenipotentiary for Addictions and communal educational institutions.

Drug Addiction (lesznowola.eobip.pl), following the example of such countries as France, Belgium, or Germany. The aim of the "Programme" is long-term public education about the dangers of alcohol and psychoactive substance abuse addiction, providing help to addicted and needy people, and promoting the idea of a healthy lifestyle and leisure planning, especially for children and adolescents. The indicated "Programme" includes several tasks, which refer to (lesznowola):

- conducting educational and preventive activities for the local environment;
- public education;
- cooperation with institutions and associations carrying out activities in the field of solving addiction problems;
- increase of the availability of therapeutic assistance for alcohol addicts;
- providing assistance to families with alcohol abuse problems;
- controlling establishments selling alcoholic products.

It is worth mentioning that to counteract alcohol-related problems in the municipality, and Addiction Prevention Plenipotentiary was appointed, whose tasks include in particular (lesznowola.pl):

- implementing and conducting nationwide and regional prevention-education campaigns in the municipality in the field of prevention of solving alcohol problems and counteracting drug addiction;
- cooperation with institutions, non-governmental organisations and natural persons acting in the field of prevention and solving of alcohol and drug addiction problems;
- initiating and supporting local initiatives in prevention and solving addiction problems.

It is reasonable to point out that for the implementation of the tasks of the Municipal Programme for Prevention and Solving of Alcohol Problems and Counteracting Drug Addiction in 2008, the commune allocated PLN 293,500, whereas in 2021, almost four times more - PLN 950,000 (lesznowola). Referring to the above, it is worth mentioning that as many as 46% of the respondents instead highly rated the involvement of local authorities in solving social problems, while 40% of them marked the answer "difficult to say," which may also indicate a lack of knowledge about the activities undertaken by the municipal authorities in the discussed scope.

## **5. Conclusions**

This article aimed to answer the research problem formulated in the following question: How important is identifying and addressing social pathologies in shaping community resilience at the local level? The empirical data obtained and presented here allow us to answer the research problem posed.

First, based on the conducted research, it can be stated that the respondents recognize particular social pathologies that occur in their closest local environment. Alcoholism and crime in their broadest sense are a problem for them. Moreover, they indicated family violence and social alienation as phenomena that bother them to a similar degree. Secondly, recently, mainly responding to the needs of local communities, numerous prevention programs, and campaigns have been implemented, which to a large extent allow for identification and, first, attempt to prevent the occurrence of social pathologies. Thirdly, it may be argued that wide-scale activities undertaken in local communities, such as: launching preventive actions, information campaigns, and cooperation with various institutions that deal with analyzed social pathologies, have a positive influence on shaping resilience to threats in the studied local communities.

In conclusion, the article's authors are aware that the content presented in the report constitutes only a selected fragment of the researched reality. Still, the analysis may contribute to the sensitization of persons functioning in local communities to the problems of occurrence of social pathologies and their prevention and gaining immunity to threats associated with them.

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