

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Concept (ACE) in a Research Sample of Imprisoned Children of Addicted Parents

JUHÁSOVÁ, A.¹, PAVELOVÁ, L.², LULEI, M.³

- 1 | Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational and School Psychology, Nitra, Slovak Republic
- 2 | BUDÚCNOSŤ, n. o., Nitra, Slovak Republic
- 3 | General Directorate of the Prison and Court Guard Service, Bratislava, Slovak Republic

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INTRODUCTION: The ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) concept is based on the results of an American population-based cohort study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine in 1998. ACE is classified into three groups: abuse, neglect, and household challenges. The main goal of our work is the identification and description of factors affecting the psychosocial development of an individual in a family with a parent with a long-term addiction in relation to the development of a criminal career. **METHODS:** The main research method was represented by the life stories of the participants. As the participants were incarcerated, the records of their life stories were not collected directly, but via the educational staff of the correctional facility. Transcriptions of the dialogues were segmented and the individual parts sorted into the corresponding categories. Thus, for each area, a hierarchically organized system of categories was created, which captured the biggest problems in all of the areas under analysis. During this part of the

research, we worked with the ATLAS.ti program.

RESULTS: We identified: a) a high occurrence of the meaning categories Home environment and Neglect in the answers of the participants, predicting a significant relationship between home environment, neglect of children, and their risk behaviour in adolescence and adulthood, b) the highest occurrence of the Home environment meaning category of the ACE model covering the violence, addictive substance use, and divorce segments, c) the lowest occurrence of the Abuse of power toward a child ACE model meaning category, and d) the highest occurrence of abuse and neglect of the participants on the emotional level. The trajectories of the participants show risk behaviour in their adolescence continuing into adulthood.

CONCLUSIONS: Regarding the results of the research, we point out the need for resilience in the family and its resistance to stress-generating factors represented unequivocally by the meaning categories of the ACE model.

Keywords | Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) – Addicted Parents – Imprisoned Children – Child Abuse – Household Challenges – Neglect

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Corresponding author | Andrea Juhásová, PhD, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational and School Psychology, Tr. A. Hlinku 1, 949 01 Nitra, Slovak Republic

ajuhasova@ukf.sk

● 1 INTRODUCTION

Scientific and research activities focused on persons committing criminal offences vary. This variability is caused by many scientific disciplines being focused on the target group of offenders (such as criminology, psychology, sociology, social work, etc.), by the many phenomena they are concerned with (recidivism, mental health, social pathology, social exclusion, etc.) and, of course, by the many specific research problems they focus on (for example, the direct influence of low parental self-control during childhood on criminal behaviour and the trajectories of a criminal career in the period of adolescence; Meldrum, Young & Lehman, 2015). The importance of practice in the area of specialized interventions for offenders based on scientific evidence is superior to the exact separation of scientific disciplines. Thus, the interpenetration between one scientific discipline and another is inherent. The emphasis on links between scientific evidence and effective interventions for offenders also appeared because of scepticism (“nothing works”) in the 1970s in the USA (Martinson, 1974) and led to various scientific responses (Sarre, 2001; Cullen et al., 2009; De Wree et al., 2009), as well as leading to the application of an evidence-based criminal policy (Fox & Albertson, 2011; De Bondt, 2014).

The main goal of the study is the identification and description of factors affecting the psychosocial development of an individual in a family with a parent with a long-term addiction in relation to the development of a criminal career. The study covers a research gap in the area of scientific findings connected to the influence of neglect in childhood and the origin and formation of dependency in adolescence. In the paper, we focus on specific research goals in the area of the target group of offenders – the connections between the phenomenon of addiction and the concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)¹ by using the empirical material of unique narrative statements. The participants were male (incarcerated during the period of the data collection) adult children of addicted parents. Naturally, there are many scientific issues concerning the definition of research objectives and scientific hypotheses related to the connections of the phenomena. In the first phases of the research design, it was extremely difficult to filter out phenomena, and therefore various methodological approaches and operationalization methods were considered. Several phenomena and their crucial relations came to the forefront, such as the transgenerational transmission of violence, intimate partner violence, co-dependency, parental control, protective and risk factors in the family environment, delinquency, criminal trajectory, criminal career, etc.

Adult children of addicted parents may react to what they experienced in their primary families in different ways. The in-

teractions of risk and protective factors in the family create an environment in which a child finds their own place, explanations, and ways to survive. In adulthood, this forms a framework for functioning in everyday life. This fact is crucial in setting the strategy for tertiary crime prevention; moreover, it has a precious evidential value in relation to prison population characteristics and to the relations between identified ACE categories and the subsequent criminal trajectory. Another of the key impulses was the Compassion Prison Project (CPP) from California (USA), which is relevant, in addition to scientific and practical experience with incarcerated offenders and which also introduces basic characteristics of the prison population that show a direct relationship to identified ACE categories. CPP is based mostly on psychotraumatology and the ACE concept (children up to 18) and was one of the starting points for the research line of addictions. In a CPP project in the USA, in a maximum security prison in California, a simplified ACE questionnaire was used with 20 items (ten basic and ten additional). More than 70% of the observed incarcerated respondents (N = 235) scored 4 or higher on the ACE items (CPP, 2020). The prevalence of ACE scores in major populations and in specific target groups has been examined by many research studies (Merrick et al., 2018; Stein et al. 2017; Swedo et al., 2020).

1.1 Terminological aspects of the ACE concept and research studies

The ACE concept is based on the results of an American population-based cohort study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine in 1998 (for more information, see Felitti et al., 1998). ACE is classified into three groups: abuse, neglect, and household challenges. Each of the categories contains multiple subcategories identified in the lives of individuals up to the age of 18. In the main categories, there are many subcategories that are characteristic of families with an addicted member; furthermore, the subcategories under the main category of household challenges include substance abuse in the household and an incarcerated household member. Below, a definition of ACE is provided, together with descriptions of the individual categories and a graphic illustration of the influence of ACE on health (*Figure 1*; CDC, 2020).

CHILD ABUSE

- emotional abuse: a parent, step-parent, or adult living in your home swore at you, insulted you, put you down, or acted in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt,
- physical abuse: a parent, step-parent, or adult living in your home pushed, grabbed, slapped, threw something at you, or hit you hard enough that you had marks or were injured,
- sexual abuse: an adult, relative, family friend, or stranger who was at least five years older than you touched or fondled your body in a sexual way, made you touch his/her body in a sexual way, or attempted to have any type of sexual intercourse with you.

HOUSEHOLD CHALLENGES

- mother treated violently: your mother or stepmother was pushed, grabbed, slapped, had something thrown at her, kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, hit with something hard, repeat-

1 | In the early heuristic phase of the creation of the methodological design, the CAN syndrome (for example Jacobi et al., 2010; Bentz et al., 2021) was also taken into consideration. Afterwards the authors decided to prefer and use the ACE concept, which offers a closer connection between the observed phenomena of addictions and incarcerated male adults who are children of addicted parents. One of the specific indicated subcategories of ACE is substance abuse (as a subordinate category of the household environment; Felitti et al., 1998).

edly hit for over at least a few minutes, or ever threatened or hurt with a knife or gun by your father (or stepfather) or her boyfriend,

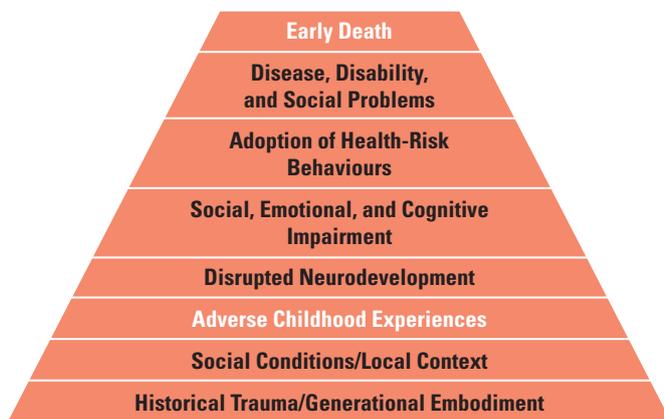
- substance abuse in the household: a household member was a problem drinker or alcoholic or a household member used street drugs,
- mental illness in the household: a household member was depressed or mentally ill or a household member attempted suicide,
- parental separation or divorce: your parents were separated or divorced,
- incarcerated household member: a household member went to prison.

NEGLECT

- emotional neglect: the opposite of a situation where someone in your family helped you feel important or special, you felt loved, people in your family looked out for each other and felt close to each other, and your family was a source of strength and support,
- physical neglect: the opposite of a situation where there was someone to take care of you, protect you, and take you to the doctor if you needed it. You didn't have enough to eat, your parents were too drunk or too high to take care of you, and you had to wear dirty clothes. (CDC, 2020).

The graphic illustration depicts the mechanism helping to identify the process and the influence of ACE on health in the lifespan from birth to early death (from the bottom upwards).

Figure 1 | Mechanism of ACE's influence on health in the life cycle



Source: CDC (2020). Adapted by authors.

The above-mentioned research study (Felitti et al., 1998) worked with a research sample of $N = 9508$ individuals, and the authors used logistic regression (the tool was calibrated in such a way that it contained a cumulative frequency of ACE subcategories in the variance 0–7). The research identified a statistically significant relation between the frequency of ACE categories and risk behaviours and observed diseases ($p < .001$), which was one of the key findings. The interviewees with four or more ACE categories showed a four-to-12-fold increase in health risks related to alcoholism, drug addictions, depression, and suicide attempts in comparison to the group of individuals with no indicated category.

A prospective cohort study (a population-based one) carried out in Brazil ($N = 3939$) and in the UK ($N = 5079$; Hammerton et al., 2019) focused on the relations between behavioural problems in childhood and criminal behaviour, emotional disorders, addictions, and unemployment in adulthood. The comparison of the two cohorts resulted in the following conclusions: children with problematic behaviour in Brazil are more likely to become addicted than children in the UK; on the other hand, children in the UK are more likely to become unemployed or behave criminally in adulthood. The authors underlined the importance of target-oriented preventive strategies and protective factors related to parents.

Research findings from the Netherlands are similar, concluding that adolescents experiencing more effective parenting (parental control, relationship between parents and children, etc.) are less likely to display characteristics of delinquent behaviour in the future. In 2016, Janssen et al. published a study focused on research on direct and indirect relations between parenting and delinquency in adolescence in the European Journal of Criminology. The longitudinal study examined two cohorts ($N = 615$) and focused on four basic mechanisms: self-control, delinquent attitudes, peer delinquency, and criminogenic settings (time spent in such settings). The time is often prolonged as a result of the lax approach of the law enforcement authorities. In relation to the category Mother treated violently, Hrozenská (2019) claims that violence against women is reported more often; however, criminal prosecution often ends in misdemeanour proceedings (imposing a fine), without criminal proceedings being taken against the aggressor. Simultaneously, the public attitude still reflects the wrong perception of the experience of women with violence (Malíková, 2019). The pathologization of the experience of women surviving violence or abuse is given by a misunderstanding of the dynamics of violence in close relations. This attitude may also influence the length of the stay in a high-risk family environment.

1.2 Aims

Main goal:

The identification and description of factors affecting the psychosocial development of an individual in a family with a parent with a long-term addiction in relation to the development of a criminal career.

Partial goals:

PG1: To describe the behavioural traits of addicted parents in the childhood of the participants.

PG2: To find out the opinions of the participants on what the addictions of their parents caused in their inner lives and behaviour in childhood.

PG3: To find out the opinions of the participants on what the addictions of their parents caused in their inner lives and behaviour in adulthood.

PG4: To describe the causality between the subjective meaning of events and the lives of the participants.

● 2 DESIGN AND METHODS

Qualitative research is used, based on the premise that individuals create their social reality themselves in the shape of meanings and interpretations (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

2.1 Design

The research – the pilot study – strives to record and describe these meanings and interpretations. As for qualitative methodology, we use a narrative approach and the method of content analysis. We worked with a closed dataset/sample, collecting, organizing, analysing, and interpreting data. In the approach, we used the interpretation scheme (see *Figure 1*) and a recursive way of data processing (from data to interpretations and back).

The ACE, or the frequency of the main concept categories in the target group of offenders, is scientifically recorded (mainly via quantitative research). The description of the semantic categories and, furthermore, their unique elements/expressions/contents in the research sample of imprisoned children of addicted parents in three developmental stages is a valuable contribution of the approach (its dominant qualitative “matter”). The graphic processing of “the journey” is essential; however, not just in relation to the expressions/contents of the parents, but also to the inner life and behaviour of the addicted parents’ children.

2.2 Sample

The selection of the sample may be characterized as the selection of “important persons”, or key persons from the perspective of the issue in question (Gavora, 2007) – children of addicted parents who were currently incarcerated. The selection criteria were an addicted parent – an alcoholic – in the primary family, and voluntary participation. The participants were males. The total number of participants was five. For ethical reasons, we do not state the exact location of the correctional facility in Slovakia.

2.3 Data collection

The life stories of the participants represented the main research method. As the participants were incarcerated, the records of their life stories were not collected directly, but via the educational staff of the correctional facility. We formulated four basic open-ended questions leading to the life stories of the participants being related; these also became our research questions.

Life story, a special branch of narrative research, enables the transformation of knowledge into speech, and modifies human experience to a form which would resemble semantic structures, which are human in general and not culture-specific (White, 1981).

2.4 Data analysis

The data was processed on the basis of subjective perceptions of life events and milestones via deductive content analysis. The codes used in the research were based on theoretical literature and discussions with experts. The analysis was performed by inserting content units into pre-processed semantic categories.

When examining the stories, we analysed their content via the Atlas software in the first place, conducting open coding and creating a system of semantic categories. ATLAS.ti is a powerful workbench for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data. The quotes of the participants represented units of the content analysis.

Semantic categories:

- the behaviour and inner life of the participants in childhood,
- the behaviour and inner life of the participants in adolescence,
- the behaviour and inner life of the participants in adulthood.

With the help of the Scapple software, we rewrote the data that was acquired into diagrams expressing the relations between individual categories and factors, where dashed lines stand for relations between the phenomena and arrows depict causality. At the same time, the process enabled the observation of the strategies of the participants for solving stress situations.

2.5 Ethics

The study was carried out following the ethical principles introduced by the American Psychological Association. The APVV project passed the evaluation process within the National Science Agency.

● 3 RESULTS

The research results are in line with the main goal of the paper, and from the perspective of content, they are identified through description of:

1. expressions/contents/elements of the behaviour of the addicted PARENT in the childhood of a participant,
2. expressions/contents/elements of the behaviour and inner lives of the imprisoned CHILDREN of addicted parents
 - a) in childhood,
 - b) in adolescence,
 - c) in adulthood.

The description was conducted:

- a) through graphic representations of development in the respective period, depicting the semantic categories ACE - PARENT - (expressions/contents/elements of the behaviour of the addicted PARENT in the childhood of a participant), CHILD - (expressions/contents/elements of the behaviour and inner lives of the imprisoned CHILDREN of addicted parents),

Figure 1 | Life story of participant 1 (processed in Scapple)

Interview 1

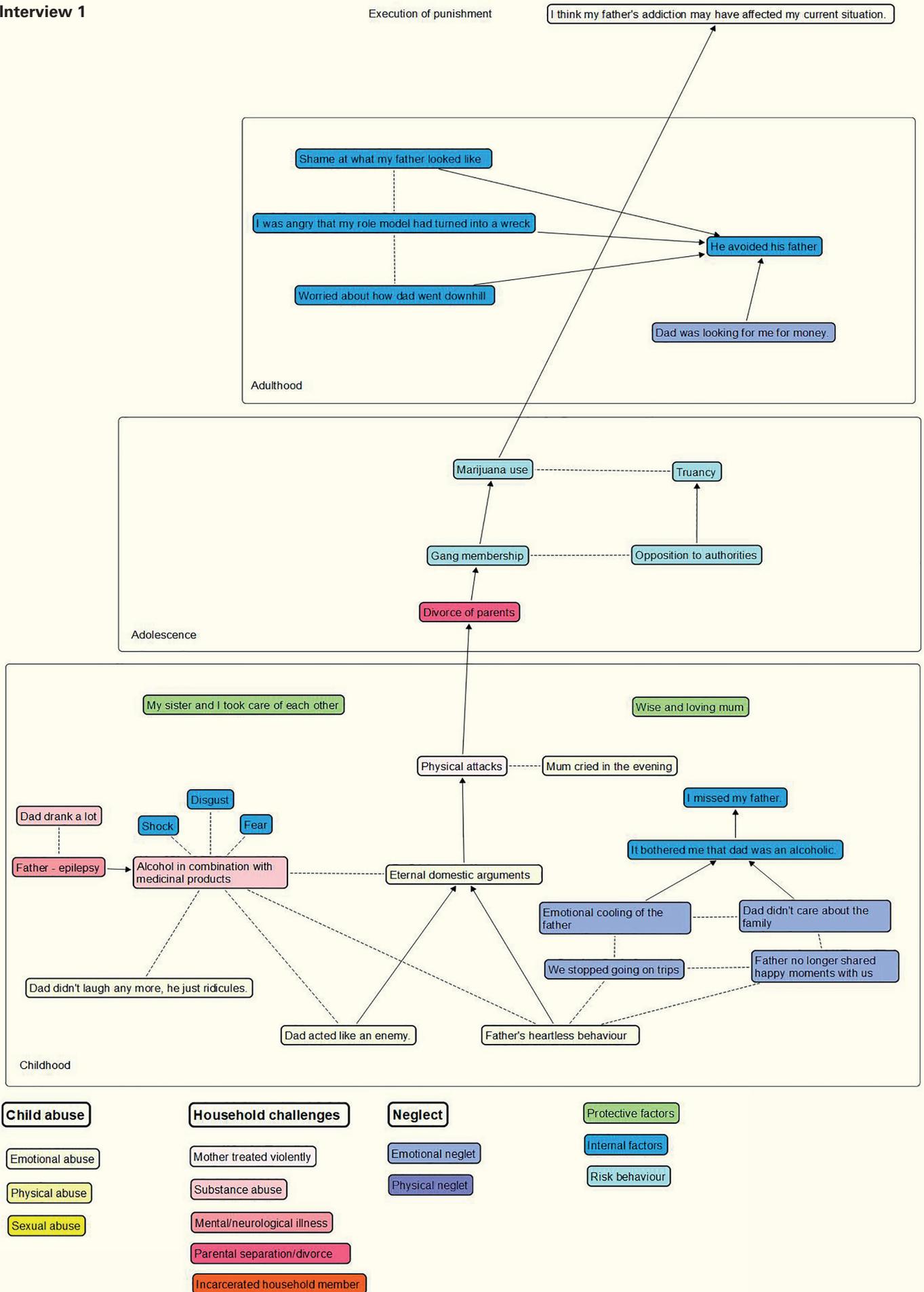


Table 1 | Participant 1, behaviour of the addicted parent according to ACE

Main semantic category (ACE)	Subcategories of the main category (ACE)	Example of transcription/segment
Abuse	Emotional abuse	"Father did not laugh any more, he just mocked me"
		"Father acted like an enemy"
		"My protector became someone else, a lethargic, ruthless egoist"
		"Sometimes he sought me out because of money or when he had a more difficult period"
Household challenges	Mother treated violently	"He became aggressive"
	Substance abuse in the household	"Father drank a lot" "Father came home drunk every week"
	Mental illness in the household	"My father suffered from epilepsy"
	Parental separation or divorce	"Mum said goodbye to him and they divorced" "During the week, he (father) was in Bratislava"
Neglect	Emotional neglect	"We stopped going on trips."
		"When he was drunk, he always acted like an enemy."
		"Father did not spend many happy moments with us, because during the week, he was in Bratislava, and over weekends, he was drunk."
	Physical neglect	"Father did not care for the family."

- b) in tabular form parent - child,
c) through an interpretation scheme (child + parent).

The description of the statement of participant 1 contains the main semantic categories of the ACE concept (child abuse, household challenges, neglect). It cumulates goals 1 and 2 in three stages of development (expressions/contents/elements of the behaviour of the addicted parent in the childhood of the participant, and expressions/contents/elements of the behaviour and inner lives of the imprisoned children of addicted parents). Simultaneously, it contains codes feeding given semantic categories. Example: semantic category "household challenges" – code "domestic quarrel", segment – "father acted like an enemy".

Within the results, only one diagram is published (*Figure 2* – Life story of participant; processed in Scapple) because of the scale of the contribution. The figure is illustrative; its goal is to let readers see the way in which the data was processed.

Participant 1:

I. Description of manifestations/contents/elements of behaviour in the addicted parent of the participant

The main ACE model meaning category Abuse of power toward a child is identified in the childhood and adulthood of the participant saturated by the emotional abuse segment.

The main ACE model meaning category Home environment is identified in the childhood and adolescence of the participant saturated by the violence toward partner, mental illnesses of father, and divorce segments.

The main ACE model meaning category Neglect is identified in the childhood of the participant, saturated by the emotional neglect segment.

The period in which most ACE model meaning categories are present is identified as childhood. The most frequent occurrences are emotional neglect and abuse.

II. Description of the manifestations/contents/elements of the behaviour and experience of imprisoned children of addicted parents

In the childhood and adulthood of the participants the inner factors identified are: missing father; shock, fear, disgust, shame, anger, pity, avoiding the father. In these developmental stages we do not identify risk behaviour. In the adolescent stage we identify risk behaviour: marijuana use, truancy, wrong crowd.

Participant 2:

I. Description of manifestations/contents/elements of behaviour in the addicted parent of the participant

The main ACE model meaning category Abuse of power toward a child is identified in the childhood of the participant saturated by the physical abuse and emotional abuse segments.

The main ACE model meaning category Home environment is identified in the childhood of the participant saturated by the violence toward partner, addiction, separation of parents and divorce segments.

Table 2 | Participant 2, behaviour of the addicted parent according to ACE

Main semantic category (ACE)	Subcategories of the main category (ACE)	Example of transcription/segment
Abuse	Emotional abuse	"He used to bang on the door and shout that this was his flat" "He used to shout various things which were not true" "Father always shouted that he would not leave, that this was his flat"
	Physical abuse	"We had to call the police to make father let us into the flat"
Household challenges	Mother treated violently	"Father shouted at mum" "He beat her"
	Substance abuse in the household	"We owned a pub which was slowly declining. Father just used to sit there and drink." "He used to come home drunk" "Father just sat in the pub and drank."
	Parental separation or divorce	"In the end, mother filed for divorce and kicked father out of the house"
Neglect	Emotional neglect	"Alcohol and evenings in the pub were more interesting for him than his own family"
	Physical neglect	"Later, we all moved in with granny into a one-bedroom flat, while father took up a large three-bedroom apartment in the same building."

Table 3 | Participant 3, behaviour of the addicted parent according to ACE

Main semantic category (ACE)	Subcategories of the main category (ACE)	Example of transcription/segment
Household challenges	Mother treated violently	"Fights started, father started to beat mother." "Father even often beat mother."
	Parental separation or divorce	"She (mother) packed her stuff and left with me and my sister, two-and-a-half years younger than me, to her mother."
Neglect	Emotional neglect	"Father slept drunk, I slept with my sister, and later, I sat alone, bored, closed in a studio" "It can be said I grew up without a father, I missed a fatherly upbringing."
	Physical neglect	"When they finally broke up, father visited us only on our birthdays, or at the end of the school year." "We used to have a full fridge and eat different things; later, we ate the same every day."

The main ACE model meaning category Neglect is identified in the adolescence and adulthood of the participant saturated by the emotional abuse and physical abuse segments.

Emotional and physical abuse seems to be exposed in this participant.

In all three developmental stages, we identify emotional abuse and neglect.

II. Description of the manifestations/contents/elements of the behaviour and experience of imprisoned children of addicted parents

In the childhood, adolescence, and adulthood of the participant we identify these inner factors: the absence of paternal authority, fear, fear of the authority of an adult, shame, anger, revolt. In this participant we do not identify risk behaviour in childhood.

In adolescence and adulthood we identify risk behaviour: did as he wished, did not use to be home, used drugs.

Participant 3:

I. Description of manifestations/contents/elements of behaviour in the addicted parent of the participant

The main ACE model meaning category Abuse of power toward a child is not identified in the participant.

The main ACE model meaning category Home environment is identified in the childhood of the participant saturated by the violence toward partner, addiction, and separation of parents and divorce segments.

The main ACE model meaning category Neglect is identified in the childhood, adolescence, and adulthood of the participant saturated by the emotional abuse and physical abuse segments.

In all three developmental stages, we identify physical abuse and emotional abuse.

Table 4 | Participant 4, behaviour of the addicted parent according to ACE

Main semantic category (ACE)	Subcategories of the main category (ACE)	Example of transcription/segment
Household challenges	Substance abuse in the household	"He came home from work late and drunk" "He used to come home drunk" "Father just sat in the pub and drank"
	Parental separation or divorce	"Right after my school-leaving examination, my mother filed for divorce." "After the divorce, father moved out, and I have not met him or communicated with him since then."
Neglect	Emotional neglect	"When he suddenly changed and started having problems with alcohol, he stopped taking care of me." "Father started drinking more and more regularly, and it started being of concern to me. It started bothering me that he preferred alcohol."

Table 5 | Participant 5, behaviour of the addicted parent according to ACE

Main semantic category (ACE)	Subcategories of the main category (ACE)	Example of transcription/segment
Abuse	Emotional abuse	"Pounding at the door at night"
	Physical abuse	"There were days when he was aggressive"
Household challenges	Mother treated violently	"I watched him shouting at mum and I watched their fights." "He intimidated mother, saying that he would take everything from her and throw us out"
	Substance abuse in the household	"Father's alcohol problem is really serious" "Always when he came back home, he smelled of alcohol and cigarettes so we could not stand him!"
	Parental separation or divorce	"The divorce period was the toughest one; there were big fights and mother threw father out." "After the divorce, the flat remained the property of my mother, and my father, whom I had perceived as a hero in my early childhood, turned into a miserable beggar, begging me and my mother for some change." "I used to meet my father more and more seldom after the divorce."
Neglect	Emotional neglect	"I started thinking about my father as someone who spoils everything"

II. Description of the manifestations/contents/elements of the behaviour and experience of imprisoned children of addicted parents

In the childhood and adulthood of the participant we identify these inner factors: sadness, fear, missing father, pity, bad economic situation, shame of the father, anger, shame of oneself.

In childhood we do not identify risk behaviour.

In the adolescent and adult periods we identify risk behaviour: truancy, early dropout from school, drug use, bad company.

Participant 4:

I. Description of manifestations/contents/elements of behaviour in the addicted parent of the participant

The main ACE model meaning category Abuse of power toward a child is not identified in the participant.

The main ACE model meaning category Home environment is identified in the childhood, adolescence, and adulthood of the participant saturated by the addiction, separation from grandparents, and divorce and separation of parents segments.

The main ACE model meaning category Neglect is identified in the adolescence and adulthood of the participant saturated by the emotional neglect segment.

In all three developmental stages, we identify the main ACE model meaning category Home Environment.

II. Description of the manifestations/contents/elements of the behaviour and experience of imprisoned children of addicted parents

In the childhood and adulthood of the participant we identify these inner factors: everything went downhill after leaving the grandparents, loss of authority of adult, shame, indifference, refusal to communicate.

In adolescence and adulthood we identify risk behaviour: did as he wished, did not use to be home.

Participant 5:

I. Description of manifestations/contents/elements of behaviour in the addicted parent of the participant

The main ACE model meaning category Abuse of power toward a child is identified in the adolescence of the participant saturated by the emotional and physical abuse segments.

The main ACE model meaning category Home environment is identified in the adolescence of the participant saturated by the violence toward partner and parental separation and divorce segments.

The main ACE model meaning category Neglect is identified in the adolescence and adulthood of the participant saturated by the emotional neglect segment

In the developmental stage of childhood we do not identify any of the three ACE model meaning categories.

II. Description of the manifestations/contents/elements of the behaviour and experience of imprisoned children of addicted parents

In the childhood of the participant we do not identify internal factors or risk behaviour.

In the adolescence and adulthood of the participant we identify these internal factors: disgust, interruption of contact with father; numbness, finding fault with the father, escape.

In adolescence and adulthood we identify risk behaviour: visiting pubs, unsuitable acquaintances, drugs, marijuana, crowd that acted out.

Tables 6, 7, and 8 describe the expressions of the addictions of the parents, the behaviour and inner lives of their children in different stages of development, and statements of the participants on relations between childhood with addicted parents and their current situation as convicted prisoners.

Table 6 | Expressions of behaviour of addicted parents

Expressions of behaviour	Match
Lack of interest in the family	5/5
Aggression	4/5
Selfishness	4/5
Low responsibility	3/5
Self-pity	3/5

The data from the table shows the full match of all participants in the area of the lack of interest of the addicted parent in their family. This is followed by the incidence of aggression and selfishness (4/5), and three of the five participants indicated the incidence of low responsibility and self-pity of addicted parents.

The data from the table describes the expressions of the behaviour and inner life of the children of addicted parents in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Table 7 | Behaviour and inner lives of children of addicted parents according to the stages of development

Categories	Codes		Match	Inner life	Match
	Behaviour				
Behaviour and inner life in childhood	Escape/alienation from father		3/5	Fear of father	4/5
	Experimentation with drugs		3/5	Fear for mother	4/5
	Confusion/failure to understand situations		2/5	Disappointment	4/5
				Longing for father to play a functional role	4/5
				Anger at father	4/5
				Sadness	3/5
				Anxiety	2/5
		Resistance to alcohol	1/5		
Behaviour and inner life in adolescence	Not respecting authority		3/5	Indifference	3/5
	Escapes from home		1/5	Sadness	2/5
	Truancy		1/5	Abomination	1/5
				Shame	1/5
				Disgust	1/5
				Fear	1/5
				Anger	1/5
Behaviour and inner life in adulthood	Striving to not resemble father		5/5	Shame	4/5
	Avoiding father			Anger	3/5
	Experimentation with drugs		3/5	Disappointment	3/5
			3/5	Sadness	2/5
				Pity	1/5

Table 8 | Statements of the participants on relations between childhood with addicted parents and their current situation as convicted prisoners.

Relations between childhood with addicted parents and the current situation as offenders	
Participant 1	YES
Participant 2	YES
Participant 3	YES
Participant 4	NO
Participant 5	YES

The table describes the statements of the participants on the relations between a childhood with addicted parents and their current situation as convicted and imprisoned.

● 4 DISCUSSION

Family relations and social relations in the context of addiction are perceived on several levels. On one hand, they may predict, and open space for, the emergence of addictions; on the other, they change significantly in the presence of addictions.

Experimentation with drugs is rooted in earlier stages of development, often even while of younger school age, when the first contacts are made mainly with legal drugs, such as alcohol and tobacco products. From the perspective of identification, the parental pattern is essential, as children tend to copy it, finding the behaviour natural.

In our research, we came across risk behaviour emerging in adolescence following a relatively harmonious childhood (interviews 4 and 5). It is worth mentioning that in both cases the alcohol addiction of the fathers started manifesting itself at the same time, resulting in dysfunctional family systems. In such cases, it is questionable whether the addiction was also present in the participants' childhood, though not mentioned by them. Our findings, as well as the findings of other authors (e.g. Verešová, 2004), point to the fact that the first experiences with illegal drugs emerge in adolescence, which is a highly sensitive period in terms of the effects of negative influences. Peer groups become more important, often leading to experimentation with illegal drugs (e.g. marijuana), induced by the desire to rebel against adults and their instructions and rules and the effort to be different, which was observed in our research, too (interviews 1, 4, and 5). Although protective factors in the lives of the participants (a loving family environment, relations with mother, sister, and grandparents, spending free time together) were also recorded, the scope and intensity of their occurrence could not reverse the development of antisocial behaviour. Hence, we came to the conclusion that if there is a significant disproportion between protective and risk factors in favour of the latter, the protective factors cannot guarantee the healthy psychosocial development of an individual.

Verešová and Ondrušková (1997) claim that regarding the prevalence of risks in adolescence, the emphasis should be put on the factor of inability to cope with risk situations and to make suitable decisions in different contexts and situations.

Young people try illegal drugs more and more often – at techno and house parties, disco parties, etc. The reasons behind experimentation with illegal drugs are e.g. failure to become independent, failure to build long-term emotional relationships, the inability to find a meaningful sense of life, unstable moral foundations (tending to antisocial behaviour), and also the influence of peer groups.

Most families and our society in general do not abide by clear rules (there are, rather, no rules) regarding substance abuse – especially when referring to alcohol. What happens in our families is decisive for the behaviour of children. In this respect, sociological theories of deviations stress the importance of the environment in which children are raised, and which influences their opinions, attitudes, and values. This relates mainly to the family, which is confirmed by many research studies. Boundaries, relations, and balance are violated in families with addicted parents. There are many risk factors in such an environment. According to Savignac (2004), factors such as unstable family income, a broken family, frequent moving (family mobility), mental disorders/illnesses of parents, substance addiction of parents, young or single mothers, the number of children in families and large families, single-parent families, and risky behaviours of parents in the past belong among the risk factors. Addicted parents fail in their roles and do not fulfil them in relation to their children or even to themselves. We agree with Kaščáková (2021), who states that according to a research survey comparing the occurrence of traumatisations in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Germany, the most widespread is emotional neglect. Roughly half of the people surveyed in all of the above-mentioned countries had experienced it. It was followed by physical neglect, emotional abuse, combined traumatisations, physical abuse, and lastly sexual abuse.

In their overview study, Čablová and Miovský (2013) identified the most frequent risk factors in upbringing as follows: the absence of emotional ties and poor relationships in the family, low social support, parental control, family conflicts, the absence of ties in the family and absence of parental care, an inconsistent approach, inefficient parenting, and the presence of a drug-addicted parent. The research study by Jandáč, Richterová and Štastná (2019) showed that higher parental control by the father is connected with lower prevalence of children drinking alcohol, and a warm approach on the part of the mother is a protective factor in the prevention of the emergence of addictions. Addicted parents fail in these approaches to children. In our research sample, there are categories confirming the findings. They go across semantic categories of the ACE concept and influence the health of the participants; health is perceived as both physical and mental. In this context, it is related mainly to emotional and physical neglect, and abuse, driven by addictions.

The category of divorce and the issue of codependency also play an important role in our research sample. Enzmann et al. (2010) rank negative life events in families, such as divorce or the death or serious illness of a parent, among the indirect indicators for the assessment of essential features of families which may be considered risky for the development of children or adolescents. The ACE semantic categories mother treated violently, addiction, and parental separation/divorce present in the home also drive codependency, i.e. enabling behaviour.

The orientation of the research issue towards the phenomenon of addiction offers many possibilities of its justification by theoretical concepts and already-confirmed scientific theories and paradigms. Even though we focused predominantly on the theoretical concept of ACE and its main categories and subcategories in our qualitative content analysis, there are many more options. These include, for instance, Farrington's risk factor prevention paradigm (RFPP; Farrington, 2000), the criminal career paradigm (for example by Piquero et al., 2003), or the RNR approach (risk – need – responsivity), including the central eight (C8) crucial criminogenic risk factors (Bonta & Andrews, 2007; Bonta & Wormith, 2013, etc.).

The risk factor prevention paradigm (Farrington, 2000) was implemented into criminology from the field of public health. In its essence, it is a practical, scientific (and political), and easy-to-understand school of thought, describing criminogenic risk factors in relation to various spheres (e.g. youth delinquency, criminal recidivism, etc.). There is never a single factor; it is always about the cumulation of scientifically observed (e.g. by the odds ratio) risk factors, described by their prognostic power or value in relation to observed phenomenon (for example the above-mentioned probability of criminal recidivism).

The option of using C8 and RFPP is clear and obvious on the basis of the research design, content, and interpretations, providing other dimensions deserving of scientific processing and research. The ACE concept and the occurrence of the main semantic categories and subcategories in relation to expressions/contents/elements of the behaviour of the addicted parent of a participant are one of the lines where RFPP and C8 could be interpreted in research. On the other hand, the inner life and behaviour of children of addicted parents (currently incarcerated) with transcription (using the narrative methodological approach) would not be qualitatively recorded by RFPP or C8. Therefore, we mainly used two lines: the ACE concept and transcription (the inner life and behaviour of the participants, not their addicted parents), which are unique in the design of the research from our perspective.

4.1 Limitations

One limitation of our research was the small research sample. Its size was influenced by the specific criteria used for its choice.

The execution of the research in a single facility is also perceived as a limitation. Given the specific environment and situation, it is difficult to enter more facilities.

Another limitation is considered to be the fact that we did not have the chance to have the results, especially the classing of the individual categories, validated by the participants themselves.

● 5 CONCLUSION

The research findings brought information on the occurrence of the main meaning categories of the ACE model in our participants.

We identified:

- a high occurrence of the meaning categories Home environment and Neglect in the answers of the participants, predicting a significant relationship between home environment, neglect of children, and their risk behaviour in adolescence and adulthood;
- the highest occurrence of the Home environment meaning category of the ACE model covering the violence, addictive substance use, and divorce segments;
- the lowest occurrence of the Abuse of power toward a child ACE model meaning category;
- the highest occurrence of abuse and neglect of participants on the emotional level.

The analysis of empirical data on the experience and behaviour of the participants did not show risk behaviour in childhood, whereas the trajectories of the participants show risk behaviour in adolescence with continuation in adulthood.

In the period of childhood, the respondents do not exhibit risk behaviour; even though this period is described as a serious, and mostly unresolved, problem. The risk development in these children is hidden and not supported by any intervention in childhood, while the situation remains bad into the following period. It would require a timely intervention into the home environment in solving the social-pathological phenomena in the family, not only the risk behaviour of the child.

In relation to that, we consider it important to point out the need for resilience in the family and its resistance to stress-inducing factors represented unequivocally by the meaning categories of the ACE model. This can be resolved via intervention in the family environment, brought about by, among others, sociotherapy.

According to Labáth (2019), sociotherapy is a relatively autonomous thought concept dominated by an environmental aspect, the place of an individual in a specific social and temporal context, and the potential of the client and the environment, which can be used effectively to benefit the given person or group – also a family.

We therefore suggest further investigation into the home environment and child neglect from the viewpoint of the ACE model to obtain the deeper knowledge that is necessary for effective intervention.

Authors' contributions:

AJ and ML designed the study and proposed the study design. The authors performed the qualitative analysis and participated in the interpretation of the data and preparation of the manuscript. AJ prepared the initial form of the manuscript. ML conducted the literature review and summary of related work.

LP supervised the statistical analysis and participated in the preparation of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the emergence of the article and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Declaration of interest:

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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