

The Image of Judges and Courts Perceived by Children

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A view on law, legislation, law-enforcement institutions and officers formed in childhood may affect personal views and behavior in adulthood. Development of such an image is important aspect of legal socialization process as it may be crucial for law compliance, interaction with law enforcement officers and trust in legal system, etc. The present study was focused at filling the gap in the studies revealing perceived image of judges and courts formed in childhood. 110 boys and 112 girls, aged 7 – 10, participated in the study. To evaluate the image of judges and courts Draw-A-Judge-Test followed by semi-structured interview was used. The results revealed that 7–10-year-olds have a more or less realistic mental picture of judges and their working place. No gender or age differences were revealed comparing both: realism and character of judge image in drawings. Realism of the drawings was related to the source of information about courts and judges. The analysis of verbal responses showed that younger children possess more positive environmental image of a court, while older children have less positive social image of a judge.

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A growing body of research [e.g. 7; 33; 39; 46] indicates that the image can be understood as a mental picture of officers, institution or organization. This mental picture reflects the features of an institution or organization (e.g. services provided, behavior with clients, institution achievements, etc.), covering also beliefs, knowledge, emotional experiences and values connected with it. Image may be CC BY-NC

created on the basis of both direct (e.g. interaction with the representatives of a institution or organization) and indirect experience (e.g. mass media materials, advertisements, popular culture products, other people's personal judgements, etc.) [1; 19; 32; 33].

Literature analysis [see 20; 33; 39] allows us to determine three major aspects of the image of judges / courts: a) image of the environment (e.g. condition of court buildings, outward appearance of judges, availability of information about courts); b) image of services (e.g. quality of services provided by courts, duration of litigation, the manner of interaction with the litigants); c) social image (e.g. prestige related to the profession of a judge, respect shown to judges by people, judges' reputation and competence).

Although inquiries into the image of law-enforcement officers and institutions are not too numerous, they have started in 1960s [e.g. 23; 34]. Some authors state that the image of courts, lawyers and police officers is positive within society [1; 14], other argue that this image is negative [15; 35]. However, in spite of such different image evaluations, it has been asserted that improvement of the image of law-enforcement officers and institutions is a vital priority task [9; 15; 18; 23].

Beyond any doubt, the formation of the image of law-enforcement officers and institutions starts in childhood, when legal socialization of the personality begins. The following two major factors may be singled out in this process [2; 11; 12; 17; 22; 29; 40; 41; 44]: a) personality's direct encounter with the law, legislation, law-enforcement institutions or their representatives (e.g. when a child is a victim or a witness); b) personality's indirect experience which is acquired through interaction with family members, friends, acquaintances, and mass media. Both factors are crucial for image formation and shaping during later stages of development.

Accumulated findings suggest that a view on law, legislation, law-enforcement institutions and officers formed in childhood and / or adolescence may affect personal views and behavior (e.g. law compliance, interaction with law-enforcement officers) in adulthood [4; 11; 16; 30; 40; 41; 42; 45]. In other words, each preceding stage of legal socialization affects subsequent stages of personality development. On the other hand, while legal socialization is an important aspect of personality development, determining the law compliance and support given to the representatives of legal authorities [11; 40; 41; 42], it has still missed due attention throughout the stages of development preceding adulthood. For example, we succeeded in finding only a few studies about image of law-enforcement officers developed by children [e.g. 4; 8]. However, we can see the growing interest in other images, possessed by children: image of a father, mother and God [3; 10; 36], image of a scientist [6; 26], image of the enemy [24; 25], image of an intelligent person [31], or a political leader [13].

Despite the salience of the image of law-enforcement officers and institutions, studies of it are still largely missing. The gap in the studies revealing the image of judges and courts, as well as unclear features of it perceived in childhood prompted us to carry out the present research. It is aimed at revealing the image of judges / courts perceived by 7-10-year-olds. The present study answers following questions: a) what is the character of the image (its separate aspects) of judges / courts perceived by 7-10-year-olds? and b) is the image of judges / courts perceived by 7-10-year-olds related to their experience and socio-demographic characteristics?

Methodology

Participants and evaluation methods

222 participants (110 boys and 112 girls) – 7-10-year old students took part in the study. Participants had to submit an informed consent signed by their parents. The informed consent involved the purpose of the study, test duration and information about parents' education and profession.

Draw – A – Judge – Test technique

The image of judges and courts perceived by 7-10-year-olds was evaluated using a modified version of DAST (Draw – A – Scientist – Test) [6] widely used to evaluate children's perception of various professions. Numerous authors have employed a combination of drawing and interviewing techniques for the research of the image of law-enforcement officers and other people perceived by children [4; 8; 38; 47]. To evaluate 7-10-year-old children's perception of the image of judges and courts a modified DAST was followed by a semi-structured interview. The participants were asked to draw a judge at his/her working place. After this task was completed, the children were asked several questions: a) socio-demographic (e.g. child's age, had a child or his/her parents participated in a trial); b) about the drawing (e.g. "What do we see in your drawing?", "Is the judge a man or a woman?"); c) about the image of surrounding (e.g. "How does the court building look?"); d) about services provided (e.g. "How do judges treat people during court hearings?"); e) about social image (e.g. "Would you like to be a judge when you grow up (why)?").

Research procedure

Each participant was invited to a room where he/she was offered six color pencils (red, yellow, blue, green, brown, black), a standard writing pencil, an eraser, a pencil sharpener, and an A4 sheet of paper. The instruction given to the participants was: "Could you please draw a judge at the court (in a courtroom), which is in the judge's working place". Time allotted for drawing was not limited. When the drawing was completed, the participant was interviewed using questions from a semi-structured questionnaire prepared in advance. The research was carried out individually; the duration of testing per child was 30-40 min.

Data analysis procedure

Prior to the data analysis, 40 drawings and verbal responses were rated by four independent raters. Intraclass correlation coefficients fluctuated from 0.84 to 0.94. Upon finding that the internal consistency among the raters was sufficiently high, each of them was provided with approximately 45 drawings and verbal responses for evaluation.

Analysis of drawings

Drawings were rated on the basis of two aspects – realism and character of the image of depicted judge. Realism of drawings was evaluated according five indicators: a) participants in the trial process; b) judge's gavel and other attributes; c) judge's rostrum; d) judge wearing special clothes; e) state symbols. Realism score was represented by the total number of indicators presented in the drawings (one or no realism indicators were categorized as non-true-to-life drawings, two to three realism indicators – as medium true-to-life ones, and drawings containing four to five realism indicators – as true-to-life ones).

Character of the image of depicted judge was rated on a 3-point scale (-1 – negative, 0 – neutral, +1 – positive). The following three aspects of the judge image were rated: a) facial expression (negative, neutral, positive); b) prevailing colors (dark, neutral, light); c) the character of environment (domestic, neutral, solemn). Mean of these ratings represented the depicted judge image character score. According to the scores, the character of the image was categorized as neutral, positive or negative.

Analysis of verbal responses

Verbal responses were rated on a 3-point scale (-1 – negative, 0 – neutral, and +1 – positive aspect of image). Different aspects of the image (environmental image, provided service image and the social image) scores were computed by extracting the means of verbal responses' ratings. Primary data analysis showed that data is not normally distributed, so non-parametric tests were applied for statistical analysis.

Findings

More than a two thirds of participants (70.7%, $n = 157$) produced a drawing of a male judge, while 29.3 % ($n = 65$) – of a female judge. Boys compared to girls drew a male judge statistically significantly more often ($\chi^2 = 23.8$, $p < 0,001$).

Realism of drawings

Analysis of the realism of drawings showed that 7–10-year-olds have formed a more or less true to life picture of courts and judges ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.35$). It was found that more than a half ($n = 118$; 53.2 %) of 7–10-year-olds have formed a more or less accurate picture of judges and courts. Almost one fourth of participants ($n = 51$; 22.9 %) produced non-true-to-life drawings; another one fourth ($n = 53$; 23.9%) – true-to-life ones.

The most frequently depicted indicators of realism included judge's rostrum, present in 159 (71.6%) drawings, and secondary attributes, such as gavel or judge's files, depicted in 139 drawings (62.6%), as well as trial participants, depicted in 108 cases (48.6%) and the judge dress, present in 101 drawings (45.5%). The least common indicators were the symbols of state and solemnity, depicted only in 44 drawings (19.8%).

Realism of drawings and gender / age

We tested whether girls and boys imagined judges and courts in a similar way. Statistical data analysis (Mann-Whitney test applied) showed that drawings made by girls and boys did not differ from the point of view of realism ($U = 5994.5$, $p = 0.72$). Thus, it is possible to argue that boys and girls imagine judges and courts realistically to an equal degree.

Analysis of the realism of drawings produced by children of different age shows that the quality of realism also does not differ ($\chi^2 = 6.39$, $p = 0.09$, Kruskal-Wallis test applied). However, the following tendency can be observed: the least true-to-life drawings were made by 7-year-olds; realism of drawings by 8 and 9-year-olds is a little higher; the most true-to-life drawings were produced by 10-year-olds.

Realism of drawings and different sources of information / family members' participation in courts

It was found that the basic source of participants' information about judges and courts was television (TV news, movies and animation films, e.g. The Simpsons): 60.8% ($n = 135$) of participants learned about judges and courts from this source of information. Other children learned about judges and courts from their relatives (usually parents) (16.7%, $n = 37$), and also from other sources (22.5%, $n = 50$). The children who learned about judges from their family members (compared to the children who learned about courts from television) produce less true-to-life drawings ($U = 1744$, $p = 0.01$, Mann-Whitney test applied).

The data revealed that 24.8% ($n = 55$) of children's relatives had participated in court sessions, 46.8% ($n = 104$) – had never participated, and 28.4% ($n = 63$) of children did not know whether their family members had ever participated in a court session. The realism of judge / court image did not differ between the groups of children whose relatives had or had not participated in a court session ($U = 2605.5$, $p = 0.64$, Mann-Whitney test applied).

Character of the judge image in drawings

Our findings show that almost two thirds ($n = 137$; 61.7%) of participants produced drawings in which the judge image was positive; a third ($n = 72$; 32.4%) – in which the judge image was neutral, and only several participants ($n = 13$; 5.9%) made drawings in which the judge image was negative.

Character of the image of judge and gender / age

Comparison of the character of the image of judge in drawings made by girls and boys did not reveal any statistically significant differences ($U = 5640$, $p = 0.25$, Mann-Whitney test applied). Thus, it is possible to argue that the character of the image of judge drawn by girls and boys is similar.

No statistically significant differences between character of the image of judge produced by different age groups were found ($\chi^2 = 4.29$, $p = 0.23$). However, the following tendency can be observed: 7-year-olds produced more drawings containing a negative image of judges (in comparison with 8, 9 and 10-year-olds). Presumably, this tendency accounts for insufficiently-developed drawing skills which are common among the children of this age (compared to older children).

Character of the image of judge and different sources of information / family members' participation in courts

No statistically significant differences were found comparing the character of the image of the judge produced by children who learned about judges from different sources of information ($U = 2329$, $p = 0.51$, Mann-Whitney test applied). However, the following tendency is evident: children who learned about courts from their relatives depicted in their drawings a judge with a positive image more often.

Comparison of the character of the image of judge in the drawings of children whose parents participated in court hearings with the drawings produced by children whose relatives did not have such experience did not reveal any statistically significant differences ($U = 2631$, $p = 0.71$, Mann-Whitney test applied).

Analysis of verbal responses of participants

Verbal responses enabled us to evaluate three different aspects of the image: environmental image ($M = 0.52$, $SD = 0.44$), image of services provided by courts ($M = 0.01$; $SD = 0.64$) and social image of the judge ($M = 0.25$, $SD = 0.47$). To find out the distribution of frequency of the responses, the ratings of different aspects of image were categorized as negative, neutral or positive ones.

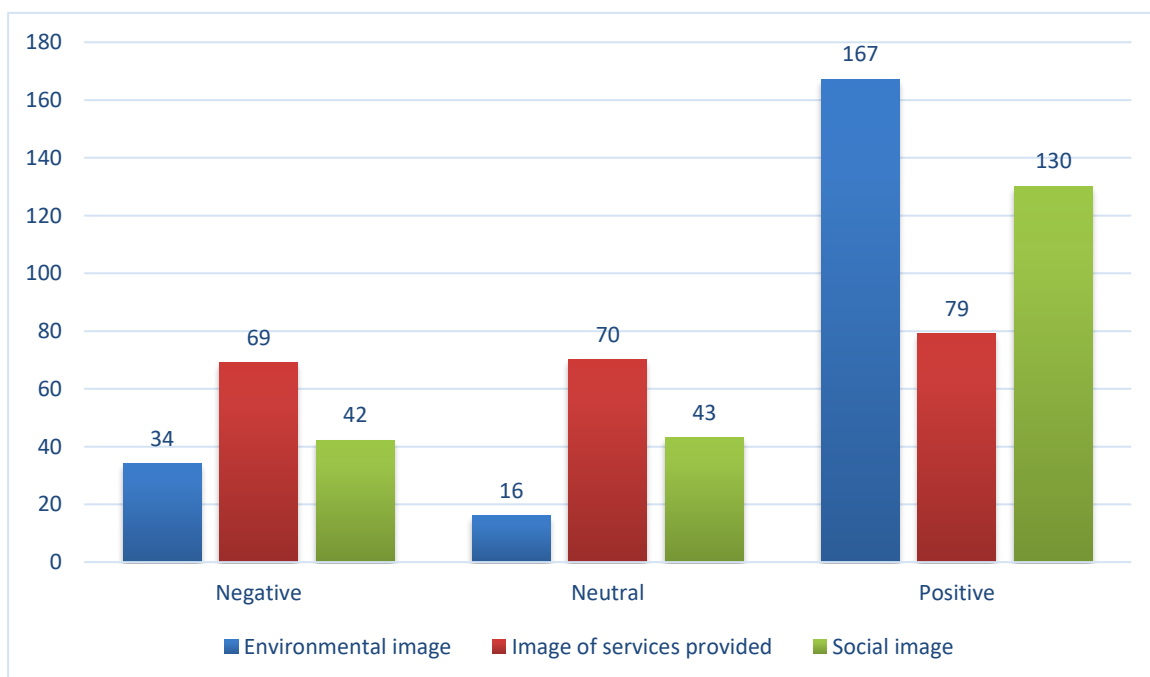


Fig. 1. Character of the verbal image of judges and courts

Children were asked whether they would like to become judges in future. Three quarters ($n = 167$ (75.2%)) of children would not wish to be judges, however the idea of becoming a judge was appealing to one fifth ($n = 47$ (21.2%)) of participants (8 participants could not answer this question). The attractiveness of this profession reflects such responses: *“Judges earn a lot of money, that is a good job“*; *“I’d work honestly in order to eliminate offence in this country“*, *“I’d help people find justice“*.

Asked why they would not like to become judges, participants provided various reasons. For example, a high rate (60%) of children explained that in future they’d prefer some other profession (e.g. *“I want to be a singer“*). However 40% of children gave reasons connected with some negative characteristics of work performed by judges (e.g. *“A very hard work, one must study a lot“*, *“Though I like to sort out difficulties and problems encountered by other people, I do not want to have anything in common with the police“*). Moreover, some children see the profession of a judge as especially dangerous (e.g. *“To tell the truth, judges are threatened by danger even more than any person who has got into the hands of a murderer“*).

Image of the judge / court and gender / age

The results show that 7–10-year-old boys and girls have similar perceptions of environmental, social and image of provided services (accordingly $U = 5571$, $p = 0.484$; $U = 5619.5$, $p = 0.725$; $U = 5188.5$, $p = 0.097$; in all cases Mann-Whitney test applied).

No statistically significant difference of the environmental image perceived by children differing in terms of age were found ($\chi^2 = 4.54$, $p = 0.21$). However, the most favorable evaluations of the environmental image were produced by 10-year-olds (e.g. *“the court building is high, big and beautiful“*, *“the court building looks like a church“*, *“the court room is full of light, it is spacious“*).

No statistically significant difference of the image of services provided perceived by children differing in terms of age was found ($\chi^2 = 5.45$, $p = 0.14$). However, we can notice, that 7-year-olds have formed the most positive image of services provided by judges and courts (this image becomes less positive with the age).

The data analysis revealed statistically significant differences of the social image between different age children ($\chi^2 = 21.52$, $p < 0.01$). The youngest children (7-year-olds) gave the most favorable evaluations to the social image of judges, but 10-year-olds – the relatively least favorable ones. So, we can conclude that the social image becomes less favorable with the children’s age.

Image of the judge / court and different sources of information / family members’ participation in courts

We did not find the differences of the environmental or the service image evaluations between children who learned about judges and courts from different sources of information (accordingly $U = 2185.5$, $p = 0.525$; $U = 2289$, $p = 0.823$; in both cases Mann-Whitney test applied). However, children who obtained information about judges and courts from their relatives (compared to the children who used television as the source of information) rated social image more favorably ($U = 1363.5$, $p < 0.01$; Mann-Whitney test applied).

Children, whose relatives had participated in a court hearing and the children whose relatives lacked such experience evaluated different aspects of the judge / court image in a similar way: environmental image ($U = 2490.5$, $p = 0.415$), image of services provided ($U = 2589.5$, $p = 0.594$), social image ($U = 2595.5$, $p = 0.765$; in all cases Mann-Whitney test applied).

Discussion

The present research showed that 7–10-year-olds have a more or less realistic mental picture of judges and their working place – hardly one fourth of participants produced drawings in which the identification of a judge posed a complicated task, whereas three fourths of children made drawings depicting the judge in his / her working place more or less accurately. These findings indicate that 7–10-year-olds are sufficiently aware of what the judge and his/her working place looks like (e.g. that the judge wears special clothes, or uses a gavel during court hearings, or that trial participants are present in the court room).

7–10-year-olds more often depicted judges having a positive or a neutral image. Huge rate of drawings reflecting a positive image of judge gives a reason to believe that 7–10-year-olds have formed a positive opinion of judges. These findings also may be related to the overall proneness to positive emotions and stories of young children [5].

Verbal responses showed a similar tendency for children to evaluate the image of judges / courts in the above way. It was found that 7–10-year-olds had quite often formed a positive environmental and social image of judges' / courts' (more than a half of participants asked to describe these aspects of the image gave positive responses). However, the character of the image of services provided was different – the rate of appraising it by children as negative, neutral or positive was almost equal. These results are partially consistent with Caldeira [4] findings that children mostly have neutral image of the Supreme Court. Positive perceptions of judges and courts may also be related with the growing body of TV series and animation, portraying a judge who makes fair decisions and represents positive “face of justice”.

Gender is found to be important variable determining differences of juveniles' attitudes toward law-enforcement officers (police) [37]. Some findings show, that adult women, in comparison with men, have developed more negative views about law-enforcement officers [43]. However, the findings of present study indicate that the character of the image of judge drawn by girls and boys does not differ – 7–10-year-old girls and boys depict and evaluate all aspects of the image in a similar way. These results may suggest that acquired experience increasing with the years may be important for gender differences (indeed, 7–10-year-olds still lack experience of encounter with law-enforcement officers). On the other hand, it would be worthwhile to find out when and why women's views about law-enforcement officers (judges) start to diverge from the men's views.

Children of different age imagine judges at their working places in a rather similar way (the realism of drawings did not differ among the groups of children differing in terms of age and gender). However, obtained data show the following tendency: the realism of drawings increases with the drawers' age. This tendency is in line with Piaget's [27] view: the older the children, the more detailed, proportional and realistic are their drawings.

Children belonging to different age groups appraise the environmental and the service image of judges' / courts' in a rather similar way. However, evaluation of the findings points to the following two opposing tendencies – the highest ratings of the environmental image are given by 10-year-olds (their responses are dominated by positive descriptions of the court building, and their drawings contain various indicators of solemnity). In contrast, the highest ratings of the image of services provided are offered by 7-year-olds (they told more often that people were satisfied with the decisions issued by judges, and that judges treated people fairly). These findings may be interpreted in a light of Piaget's theory of moral development [28]: 10-year-olds begin to understand that different people may have different opinions about judges (this is characteristic of the autonomous morality stage). Comparing the features of the judge image perceived by groups of children representing a wider age gap between them would be worthwhile in future researches.

In addition, we have found that the social image of judges perceived by children becomes less positive with the age. This difference is especially visible when responses given by 7- year-olds and 10-year-olds are compared (e.g. 10-year-olds, compared to 7-year-olds, indicated more often that people had negative opinions about judges). A possible explanation for this finding could be that older children, possessing richer social experience, are able to appraise other people's behavior and consider other people's intentions in greater detail.

Earlier researches show that television is the main source of information about crimes and law-enforcement system [21; 22]. This finding is supported by the results of our research: a large number (60.8%) of participants has learned about courts from television. It is important to note that the children who learned about courts from television produce more realistic drawings (in comparison with the children who learned about courts from their family members). On the other hand, television offers visual material, so its reproduction in drawings may be a simpler task compared to the reproduction of oral accounts supplied by family members.

We also found that different information sources are not related to the evaluations of the image of environment and services supplied. However, the children who learned about judges and courts from their parents (compared to the children who used the television as their source of information), appraised the social image more favorably. This may be related to the circumstance that parents telling their children about courts and judges share with them not only their negative experiences (on which media is more often focused). The present research did not allow us to determine the particular character of judge-and-court-related information encountered by TV watching children (however, this may be an important issue for further researches to illuminate).

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