

In the court proceeding, both the civil and criminal one, judges repeatedly make use of expert witness opinions and they can and should use such evidence “in cases that require special *professional knowledge*” or such special knowledge is “essential to confirm the facts that are relevant (*of great importance*) in judicial making process”. Expert opinion constitutes evidence and its purpose is to provide the court with professional and advanced knowledge, which otherwise is unavailable to the court. The expert witness opinions, including psychological ones, are substantial in judicial decision making in such sense that it would be impossible to make the final decision without the evidence. Those court decisions often lead to meaningful, often lifetime consequences in the lives of people they concern. According to one of the rules in the Polish legal system namely the principle of free appraisal of evidence, the court is obliged to evaluate such evidence independently and individually in each case. The court decides which of the evidence is to be considered reliable. While doing so courts are solely obliged to take into account all the evidence and evaluate it using rules of logic reasoning, scientific knowledge and life experience. High quality of psychological expertising and the ability of judges to evaluate are of great importance particularly in cases concerning juvenile delinquency and parental custody. In both types of cases the court is obliged to consider primarily the welfare and well-being of the child or adolescent. The decisions made by court deeply influence their current situation and (potentially) in long-term perspective their whole life.

The main aim of the research project entitled **„Psychological expertise in juvenile delinquency cases and in parental custody cases”** is to analyse the manner in which the courts use the experts’ psychological opinions in court proceedings in the above-mentioned categories of cases and to investigate if those psychological opinions are professional, reliable and correct. Those aims will be achieved by using two research methods – the analysis of court records which include expert opinions in juvenile delinquency and custody cases and in-depth interviews with judges and psychology experts. The research team will use for those purposes specially designed research tools. The court record analysis will be conducted in six different inferior courts around Poland and will involve analysing 600 cases, including 300 juvenile delinquency and 300 custody cases. In-depth interviews will be conducted with 25 judges and the same number of psychology experts.

Research results will be used to create guidelines, sets of good practices and standards which should be taken into consideration by psychology experts who provide courts with their expertise in above-mentioned types of cases. Another set of guidelines will be prepared for judges to enable them to evaluate the evidence of expert opinion. As in juvenile delinquency and custody cases courts decide about the welfare well-being of children and adolescents, the psychological expert opinions should meet the highest criteria of value and on the other hand, the judges need to develop their abilities to evaluate them and point out their flaws and mistakes.