

Experience of Imprisonment from the Perspective of Female Offenders in the Republic of Croatia

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Scientific studies in criminology mainly neglect the criminality of women, especially the perspective of women prisoners. The aim of qualitative research was to examine the experience of imprisonment and institutional treatment for female prisoners. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview with 10 female prisoners in female penitentiary in Croatia. Research questions focused on the experience of stay in prison, treatment, perceived changes, suggestions for treatment improvement. Data were processed with inductive thematic analysis. Five topics have been separated: Expectations before coming to penitentiary, Experience of stay in penitentiary, Experience of treatment, Perception of personal changes, and Suggestions to improve the institutional treatment. It is necessary to continuously evaluate the treatment programs implemented in correctional institutions to determine their effectiveness, therefore the perspective of female prisoners can be an important criterion for the the creation of measures and policies pursued by the state regarding correctional institutions.

Key words: *experience, female prisoners, imprisonment, penitentiary, treatment.*

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Introduction

Imprisonment is the predominant criminal sanction today, and in countries where there is no death penalty, it is also the most severe. However, it can be considered the main punitive measure only since the mid-18th century.¹ Until the 17th and 18th centuries, the execution of punishment was physical in nature, and torture became the main component of any punishment execution. Torture not only inflicted pain on the punished, but was also a political act that demonstrated the power of the rulers (legal-political function).² The first prisons emerged at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries and were referred to as »the punishment of civilized societies«³, as their function was not only to punish the individual, but also to transform (rehabilitate) them. The cell system of execution of punishment was based on the complete isolation of prisoners (Philadelphia system) or on silence or prohibition of communication (Auburn system). It was believed that in this way the harmful influence of prisoners among themselves would be avoided (preventing the »criminal infection«), but also that prisoners would be given the opportunity to reflect on themselves and their actions. Prisoners financed the prison with their work, and their lives were divided according to a fixed schedule, they were under constant surveillance, every moment had its purpose and was associated with duties and prohibitions.⁴ Through daily work and spiritual care, the prisoner is forced to change his body, habits, mind, and will, which is why the prison also becomes a machine for changing the spirit.⁵

However, complete isolation and the inability to communicate cannot have a positive effect on a person, because complete isolation is neither humane nor good for a person's psychological state. In response to the negative consequences of the isolation system, which had serious effects on the psychological state of prisoners, a progressive prison system was developed. When we talk about progressive penitentiary systems, first of all, it is important to emphasize that they represent the humanization of the penitentiary system. The system is called progressive because the execution of the prison sentence was carried out through certain stages through which the prisoner passed, so that in each subsequent stage the living conditions became more and more similar to the

¹ Cf. Elizabeta IVIČEVIĆ KARAS, *Penitencijarno pravo* [Penitentiary law], Zagreb, *Narodne novine* [Official Gazette], 2016, 5.

² Cf. Michel FOUCAULT, *Nadzor i kazna. Rađanje zatvora* [Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison], Zagreb, Informator, 1994, 46.

³ Cf. *ibid.*, 237.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 126.

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 128.

conditions of life in society (Maconochi's system and Irish or Crofton's progressive system).⁶

It is important to emphasize that the main purpose of serving a prison sentence is resocialization, i.e., changing the prisoner's attitudes, beliefs, and personality traits and training him for a life in society in accordance with social norms. Thus, punishment has both a retributive and a corrective component. To achieve this corrective component, it is necessary to individualize the punishment and address the specific needs of the prisoner. Since women are less numerous, but therefore represent a special category of prisoners, it is necessary to identify their etiological and phenomenological factors, as well as their specific treatment needs, in order for the prison sentence to serve its purpose. In addition, it is important to examine the conditions under which imprisonment is carried out, as well as the experience of imprisonment, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the possibilities for rehabilitation and resocialization of female offenders. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the etiology and phenomenology of women's criminality and their individual and specific treatment needs through the experience of being in a correctional facility. In the research part, the perspective of female prisoners in relation to their imprisonment and treatment in the Penitentiary in Požega is presented, with the aim of improving the conditions for serving a prison sentence and enabling an effective treatment programs in the Republic of Croatia.

1. Theoretical assumptions – institutional treatment, resocialization and treatment needs of female offenders

In scientific criminological research there is a lack of studies on female criminality because of the fact that women are less represented (10 % – 20 %⁷)

⁶ Cf. Irma KOVČO VUKADIN, Vladimira ŽAKMAN-BAN, Anita JANDRIĆ NIŠEVIĆ, Prisoner rehabilitation in Croatia, *Varstvoslovje*, [Journal of Criminal Justice and Security], 12 (2010) 2, 143-162.

⁷ Cf. Zoran ŠUĆUR, Vladimira ŽAKMAN-BAN, Značajke života i tretmana žena u zatvoru [Features of life and treatment of women in prison], *Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja* [Social Research: Journal of General Social Issues], 14 (2005) 6, 1055-1079; Ana JADREŠIN, Josipa MUSTAPIĆ, Women who commit crimes, *Život i škola: časopis za teoriju i praksu odgoja i obrazovanja* [Life and school: journal for theory and practice of education], 60 (2014) 32, 129-135; Sherri DOHERTY et al., Finding Their Way: Conditions for Successful reintegration Among Women Offenders, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 53 (2014) 7, 562-586; Ministarstvo pravosuđa [Ministry of justice], *Izvešće o stanju i radu kaznionica, zatvora i odgojnih zavoda za 2017. godinu* (2019) [Report on the state and operation of penitentiaries, prisons and correctional institutes of 2017], <https://pravosudje.gov.hr/pristup-informacijama-6341/strategije-planovi-i-izvjesca/izvjescje-o-stanju-i-radukaznionica-zatvora-i-odgojnih-zavoda/6720> (21.01.2023).

in the category of criminal offenders⁸. The fact that very little attention was paid to research on women's crime resulted in paucity of theoretical materials on crime amongst women.⁹ Historically, little attention that was given to female offenders usually was limited to three contexts: (1) comparison that understood women's lack of involvement in crime related to men; (2) studies of prostitution; and (3) analyses of the depravity of violent women, thinking that women who do commit violent crime must be sick¹⁰.

Early theoretical explanations assume that women who commit crimes are less evolved than men¹¹ or are motivated by faulty biology or sexual desires¹². Thus, early theoretical paradigms are criticized, particularly the pre-sociological era of criminological thought¹³. This is considered one of the two major shortcomings of the criminological literature. The second major criticism ignored women or have generalized the results of research with men to women without sufficient empirical testing¹⁴.

Research have found that the most common causes of female crime are abuse, poverty, and addiction¹⁵ and that women also differ from men in terms of their motives and categories of crime. Women are more often convicted of the so-called »less dangerous crimes« (theft, fraud, forgery, substance abuse) and less likely convicted of violent crimes (when committed, they tend to involve violence in relationships and families)¹⁶. Some research show that the recidivism rate of female offenders is also lower compared to men¹⁷.

⁸ Cf. Mladen SINGER, *Kriminologija* [Criminology], Zagreb, Fakultet za defektologiju Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova Republike Hrvatske, Globus, ²1994; Ivana BELUŠIĆ, *Kriminalitet žena* [Criminality of women], *Kriminologija & socijalna integracija: časopis za kriminologiju, penologiju i poremećaje u ponašanju* [Criminology & Social Integration: Journal of criminology, penology and bibehavioral disorders], 11 (2003) 2, 165-176; Kelley BLANCHETTE, Shelley Lynn BROWN, *The Assessment and Treatment of Women Offenders: An integrative perspective*, John Wiley & Sons, 2006, 115-136; Tim BRENNAN et al., Women's pathways to serious and habitual crime: A person-centered analysis incorporating gender responsive factors, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 39 (2012) 11, 1481-1508.

⁹ Cf. Ahuja RAM, *Sociological Criminology*, New Delhi, New Age International Publishers Limited, 1996.

¹⁰ Cf. Jahirul ISLAM, On the etiology of Female Offending in Bangladesh: Toward a Quest for Alternative Explanation, *European Academic Research*, 1 (2013) 4, 402-427.

¹¹ Cf. Cesare LOMBROSO, Gugliermo FERRERO, *The female offender*, D. Appleton, 1895, 312.

¹² Cf. Sigmund FREUD, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, New York, Norton, 1933, 8-31; Otto POLACK, *The criminality of women*, New York, A.S. Barnes, 1950, 67-82.

¹³ Cf. Freud, *New Cf. Introductory Lecture...*; Lombroso, *The female...*, 312; Pollack, *The criminality...*, 94-113.

¹⁴ Cf. Blanchette, Brown, *The Assessment and Treatment of Women Offenders...*

¹⁵ Cf. Barbara BLOOM, Gender-responsive programming for women offenders: Guiding principles and practices, *Forum on Corrections Research. Correctional Service of Canada*, 11 (1999) 3, 22-27; Šučur, Žakman Ban, *Značajke života i tretmana...*; Blanchette, Brown, *The Assessment and Treatment of Women...*

¹⁶ Cf. Gill McIVOR, *Women who offend*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004, 44; Blanchette, Brown, *The Assessment and Treatment of Women...*; Islam, *On the etiology of Female...*

¹⁷ Cf. Jadrešin, Mustapić, *Women who commit crimes...*; Doherty et al., *Finding Their Way...*

For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to mention the deprivation theory, which explains how prison life affects female and male prisoners. According to this theory, the prison environment deprives prisoners of some of their basic needs, leading to tension and forms of adjustment to prison life¹⁸. The higher the level of deprivation within the prison is, the greater are the difficulties for prisoners to adapt to prison life. Research shows that prisons with higher levels of security lead to poorer adjustment to prison life, which in turn leads to psychological consequences, more depression and self-harm¹⁹. When prison is overcrowded, there are also fewer opportunities to implement treatment programs and fewer formal and informal support services for female prisoners, leading to greater feelings of loneliness and isolation²⁰. In terms of sentence length, some research shows that there are no differences between female prisoners in their adjustment to prison life²¹, while other research shows that female prisoners serving longer sentences have more problems in adjusting to prison life²². Separation of female prisoners from their children is also an important factor in prison adjustment²³, and also the prison policies regarding visitation and social support for female prisoners. Many studies show that prisoners who experience prison as an unsafe environment and professional staff as unfair have more problems in adjusting to life in the institution²⁴.

¹⁸ Cf. Nicolette PARISI, The Female Correctional Officer: Her Progress toward and Prospects to Equality, *The Prison Journal*, 64 (1982) 1, 92-105; Gina L. FEDOCK, Women's psychological adjustment to prison: A review for future social work directions, *Social Work Research*, 41 (2017) 1, 31-42.

¹⁹ Cf. Fedock, *Women's psychological adjustment...*; Barry R. RUBACK, Timothy S. CARR, Crowding in a woman's prison: Attitudinal and behavioral effects, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 14 (1984) 1, 57-68; Barry R. RUBACK, Timothy S. CARR, Charles H. HOOPER, Perceived control in prison: Its relation to reported crowding, stress, and symptoms, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 16 (1986) 5, 375-386.

²⁰ Cf. Jo BORRILL et al., Learning from 'Near Misses': Interviews with Women Who Survived an Incident of Severe Self-Harm in Prison, *The Howard Journal*, 44 (2005) 1, 57-69; Fedock, *Women's psychological adjustment...*

²¹ Cf. Doris LAYTON et al., Long-term incarceration of female offenders: Prison adjustment and coping, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 16 (1989) 2, 223-238; Caitlin THOMPSON, Ann B. LOPER, Adjustment patterns in incarcerated women: An analysis of differences based on sentence length, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 32 (2005) 6, 714-732; Fedock, *Women's psychological adjustment...*

²² Cf. Mark D. CUNNINGHAM, Mark P. VIGEN, Death row inmate characteristics, adjustment, and confinement: A critical review of the literature, *Behavioral sciences & the law*, 20 (2002) 1-2, 191-210; Meredith HUEY DYE, Ronald H. ADAY, »I just wanted to die« preprison and current suicide ideation among women serving life sentences, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 40 (2013) 8, 832-849; Fedock, *Women's psychological adjustment...*

²³ Cf. Lauren E. GLAZE, Laura M. MARUSCHAK, *Parents in prison and their Minor Children*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2008; Marian KNIGHT, Emma PLUGE, The outcomes of pregnancy among imprisoned women: a systematic review, *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, 112 (2005) 11, 1467-1474.

²⁴ Cf. Mike VUOLO, Candace KRUTTSCHNITT, Prisoners' adjustment, correctional officers, and context: The foreground and background of punishment in late modernity, *Law & Society Review*, 42 (2008) 2, 307-336; Fedock, *Women's psychological adjustment...*

UNODC²⁵ indicates that effective resocialization of female prisoners requires: appropriate assessment, classification, individualized planning, monitoring, and documentation of behavior, as well as work, educational, recreational and other activities. Risk assessment is the basis for effective corrections²⁶, it is the basis for further classification and the application of various treatment measures²⁷.

In Croatian Prison System, some methods of treatment are universally applied to all prisoners – general treatment programs²⁸ like programs related to work, education, and recreation of prisoners. Special treatment programs include group and individual psychosocial treatment for prisoners and form the basis for prisoner rehabilitation and resocialization. By directly acting on the dynamic criminogenic factors, these programs create the conditions for behavioral change, attitudes, and values, and in this way directly affect the achievement of the goal of imprisonment. It is necessary to create an individual sentence program for each prisoner according to the risk, need and responsibility principle. The individual sentence program consists of several important elements: allocation to a unit, working place, involvement in special treatment programs, a need for psychiatric, psychological, social, or legal help, education/vocational training, leisure time activities, contacts with the outside world, privileges, precaution measures, security measures, risk assessment and the preparation for the postpenal period²⁹.

When looking at various characteristics of the male and female prisoners, women are more likely to have a history of exposure to violence, history of childhood abuse³⁰, complex mental health issues, and often concurrent substance abuse problems³¹. In addition, women are more likely to experience

²⁵ Cf. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC (2015), *Žene i zatvor: serija priručnika iz kaznenog prava* [Women and prison: a series of manuals in criminal law], Vienna https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Zene_i_zatvor_HR.pdf (21.01.2023).

²⁶ Cf. Shari A. McKEE, Zoe N. HILTON, Co-Occurring Substance Use, PTSD, and IPV Victimization: Implications for Female Offender Services, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20 (2019) 3, 303-314.

²⁷ Cf. Peter C. KRATCOSKI, *Correctional counselling and treatment*, Kent, Springer, 2017, 314.

²⁸ Cf. Ljiljana MIKŠAJ TODOROVIĆ, Aleksandar BUĐANOVAC, Željko BRGLES, Rehabilitacijski programi u institucijama u hrvatskoj penološkoj teoriji i praksi [Rehabilitation programmes in institutions in croatian penological theory and practice], *Hrvatska revija za rehabilitacijska istraživanja* [Croatian Review of rehabilitation], 34 (1989) 1, 83-92.

²⁹ Zakon o izvršavanju kazne zatvora [Law on the execution on prison sentence], *Narodne novine* [Official Gazette], 128/1999, 55/2000, 59/2000, 129/2000, 59/2001, 67/2001, 11/2002, 190/2003, 76/2007, 27/2008, 83/2009, 18/2011, 48/2011, 125/2011, 56/2013, 150/2013.

³⁰ Cf. Bonnie L. GREEN et al., Trauma exposure, mental health functioning, and program needs of women in jail, *Crime & Delinquency*, 51 (2005) 1, 133-151; Jane R. WALKER, *Women and gestation in prison: Becoming a good enough mother*, doctoral thesis, UNSW, 2018, 89-123.

³¹ Cf. Carrie OSER et al., The adoption of wraparound services among substance abuse treatment organizations serving criminal offenders: The role of a women-specific program, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 103 (2009) 1, 82-90; Grant DUWE, Valerie CLARK, Importance of program integrity: Outcome evaluation of a gender-responsive, cognitive-behavioral program

problems in relationships, parenting, and childcare problems and have more pronounced mental health and self-concept issues³². The above suggests that there are some needs that are universal to both sexes, while others are more characteristic of a particular population. For example, it is necessary to understand that financial stress, emotional problems, low self-efficacy, and parental stress³³ will influence more women than men.

A very large number (almost 90 %) of female prisoners reported being subjected to physical and sexual abuse by their partner in the year prior to incarceration³⁴. When asked about the focus of counselling in prison and the issues they wanted experts to address, they indicated: domestic violence, drug addiction, parenting, PTST treatment, self-esteem, grief, a need for an individualised approach and a psychiatric help. Ninety-five percent of female prisoners reported experiencing domestic violence and one-third of them suffered from serious mental illness³⁵. Many female prisoners reported that prison is a safer environment for them because they are exposed to violence and higher stress levels in the outside world.

Regarding health care in prisons, Young conducted a study showing that there are many problems, such as waiting several weeks for a special diet plan, or simply refusing a medical examination when it has not been scheduled beforehand, even though it is considered urgent.³⁶ Prisoners also indicated that they felt they were being labelled by medical staff and treated as if they did not deserve proper medical care.

Despite their complex treatment needs, some research has shown that women in prison receive fewer services than their male counterparts³⁷ and that they face additional barriers to accessing services in the community. Further, female offenders face numerous stressors upon their re-entry to the community³⁸. These include their re-exposure to social networks and relationships

for female offenders, *Criminology & Public Policy*, 14 (2015) 2, 301-328; McKee, Hilton, *Co-Occurring Substance...*

³² Cf. Blanchette, *The Assessment and Treatment of Women...*

³³ Cf. Lynn STEWARD, Renee GOBEIL, Correctional interventions for women offenders: a rapid evidence assessment, *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice*, 1 (2015) 3, 116-130.

³⁴ Cf. Shannon M. LYNCH, April FRITCH, Nicole M. HEATH, Looking beneath the surface: The nature of incarcerated women's experiences of interpersonal violence, treatment needs, and mental health, *Feminist Criminology*, 7 (2012) 4, 381-400.

³⁵ Cf. Green et al., *Trauma exposure...*

³⁶ Cf. Dianne S. YOUNG, Women's perceptions of health care in prison, *Health Care for Women International*, 21 (2000) 3, 219-234.

³⁷ Cf. Oser et al., *The adoption of wraparound services...*

³⁸ Cf. Emily M. WRIGHT, Patricia VAN VOORHIS, Ashley BAUMAN, Gender-Responsive Lessons Learned and Policy Implications for Women in Prison: A Review, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 39 (2012) 12, 1612-1632; McKee, Hilton, *Co-Occurring Substance...*

that may precipitate their relapse to substance use, criminal activity, and other associated risky behaviors and lack of access to housing and employment³⁹.

Female prisoners are more involved in work therapy than male prisoners, although this mostly involves typical female domestic work such as cooking, sewing, and ironing⁴⁰. This contributes to the perpetuation of traditional gender roles in society, but also affects the more educated female prisoners who are unable to develop their vocational skills.

In Croatia, there is a lack of research about women prisoners, especially about the perspective of women prisoners, but during 2019. one research was conducted in Penitentiary in Požega (similar by methodology to our research) about female prisoners perception of their future and about challenges, taking in account female prisoners perspective⁴¹. By the results of this research female prisoners see their future mostly positive, with the emphasis on family and children, while the challenges which they predict for the future were fear of recidivism and work on personal change.

To be able to better understand the needs of women prisoners and to enable quality resocialization it is important to investigate more the perceptions of female prisoners about their stay at Penitentiary. The research represented in this paper is not a part of any project or any other research with the same goal and sample.

2. Methodology

2.1. The aim of the research

The main goal of the research is to gain insight into the perspective of female prisoners in relation to their imprisonment and treatment in Penitentiary with the aim of improving the conditions of serving a prison sentence and enabling effective treatment programs. Four research questions have been elaborated through questions for interviews:

³⁹ Cf. Emily J. SALISBURY, Patricia VAN VOORHIS, Georgia V. SPIROPOULOS, The predictive validity of a gender-responsive needs assessment: An exploratory study, *Crime & Delinquency*, 55 (2009) 4, 550-585.

⁴⁰ Cf. Zoran ŠUČUR, Socijalnoekonomski i obiteljski status počinitelja kaznenih djela razbojništva i razbojničke krađe u relaciji s indikatorima učinkovitosti penološkog tretmana [Socioeconomic and family status of offenders of robbery and robbery theft in relation to indicators of effectiveness of penological treatment], *Kriminologija i socijalna integracija* [Criminology & Social Integration: Journal of criminology, penology and behavioral disorders], 3 (1995) 2, 179-194.

⁴¹ Cf. Tea ČUTURA, Marijana MAJDAK, Female prisoners looks to the future, *Kriminologija i socijalna integracija* [Criminology & Social Integration: Journal of criminology, penology and behavioral disorders], 29 (2021) 2, 194-225.

1. How female prisoners experience their imprisonment?
2. How female prisoners describe treatment programs in penitentiary?
3. Which changes (on personal, family, professional and other level) they describe, related to their imprisonment?
4. Which suggestions for improving treatment activities do female prisoners offer?

2.2. Procedure and sample

The research was conducted using a qualitative methodology that allows understanding phenomena through individual cases or a »deeper«, non-numerical description of the phenomenon under study, focusing on personal experiences⁴². Data were collected using a method of interview. The participants in this study are female prisoners currently serving a prison sentence at Požega Penitentiary. The sample included 10 prisoners ranging in age from 33 to 56 years. Of the 10 participants, 6 were convicted of crimes against property, 4 of crimes against life and body. The range of sentence length was from 1 year and 10 months to 12 years. The sample was formed in consultation with the treatment manager and the psychologist, on a voluntary basis and according to specific criteria - the length of stay in the Penitentiary, unit affiliation and participation in treatment programs. The research was conducted in May 2019 in the Penitentiary in Požega. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview method. Prior to conducting the study, approval was required from the Ministry of Justice and the Penitentiary in Požega. The interviews were conducted in the library room in the Penitentiary by two researchers who had been previously prepared to conduct interviews with this population. The average duration of the interview was 45 minutes. Each interview was transcribed and the research participants' statements were coded. The collected data were then analyzed using inductive thematic analysis⁴³. Statements relevant to answering the research questions were marked, then the statements were summarized and grouped into codes⁴⁴. Following the same logic, the codes were grouped into several terms called categories. The categories were related to the themes assumed in the research questions posed.

⁴² Cf. Ivan MILAS, *Istraživačke metode u psihologiji i drugim društvenim znanostima* [Research methods in psychology and other social sciences], Jastrebarsko, Naklada Slap, 2005, 726.

⁴³ Cf. Virginia BRAUN, Viktoria CLARK, *Thematic analysis*, in: Harris, Cooper et. al. (ed.), *APA handbooks in psychology. APA handbook of research methods in psychology*, 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological, 2012, 57-71, American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>; Virginia BRAUN, Viktoria CLARK, Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2006) 2, 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>

⁴⁴ Cf. Milas, *Istraživačke metode u psihologiji...*, 726.

2.3. *Ethical aspects of research*

Before each interview, the topic and purpose of the research, as well as the role of the researcher and the participants, were explained, and a statement of voluntary participation in the research was signed. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. For anonymity and confidentiality, participants were not asked their names, but were asked about their year of birth and the type of crime. Participants were informed about who would have access to research data. In presenting the research results, no connection is made between the specific response and the specific identity of the participant.

3. *Results and discussion*

Female prisoners described the experience of their stay in the correctional institution in terms of expectations prior to their arrival in the correctional institution, the experience of the Penitentiary as an institution, the experience of treatment during their stay, perceived personal changes and ways to improve their stay and treatment.

3.1. *Expectations before arriving at the Penitentiary*

Before arriving at the Penitentiary, female offenders were *afraid* of the unknown and *worried* about fitting in, but they also felt *sadness* and *confusion*. According to De Viggiani⁴⁵, when prisoners are admitted to a prison, they arrive in an environment with different values, traditions, rules, and rituals. It is significant that prisoners stated that they were not informed about what to expect and that they were not made aware of a judicial process⁴⁶. Prisoners have the right to be informed about any court proceedings they are involved in and, in case of conviction, about the length of their sentence and the possibility of early release⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ Cf. Nick De VIGGIANI, Surviving prison: exploring prison social life as a determinant of health, *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 2 (2006) 2, 71-89.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Cf. Vesna BABIĆ, Marija JOSIPOVIĆ, Goran TOMAŠEVIĆ, Hrvatski zatvorski sustav i zaštita ljudskih prava zatvorenika [Croatian prison system and the protection of human rights of prisoners], *Hrvatski ljetopis za kazneno pravo i praksu* [Croatian Chronicle of Criminal Law and Practice], 13 (2006) 2, 685-743.

3.2. *The experience of imprisonment – staying in the Penitentiary*

Upon arrival at the Penitentiary, female offenders indicated that they felt sadness and fear, some expressed amazement at the various profiles of offenders in the prison, and disgust at the appearance of the correctional facility. Most female offenders cited family concerns as one of the reactions and some somatic consequences as a reaction to their stay in the prison. They often fear for the quality of care their children will receive while they are in prison and wonder whether and how to explain to their child why they are in prison⁴⁸.

The prisoners describe the organization of the day as part of work activities, but also leisure activities. The organization during the day and the work activities of female prisoners in the Croatian prison system are legally grounded in laws and regulations⁴⁹. Occupational treatment as part of rehabilitation is used to encourage prisoners to maintain existing and acquire new knowledge and skills⁵⁰. In addition, training and work have always been inevitably in the process of treatment or rehabilitation, with the aim of social inclusion of offenders who have served a prison sentence⁵¹. As an important part of the treatment we have to distinguish leisure time during imprisonment which contributes to a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction as well as to the most important function - personality development⁵². The prisoners mentioned various leisure activities such as reading books, sports activities, working in the garden, watching TV, etc. Research has shown that sports activities are also very useful in terms of reducing tensions between prisoners and improving self-control⁵³.

Regarding the living conditions in the Penitentiary, female prisoners state that there are too many prisoners in the room but they are satisfied with the cleanliness of the institution and the renovation of certain rooms.

Finally, prisoners point out that visits of relatives and friends are very important, but that they are quite difficult because the family cannot come for

⁴⁸ Cf. Mladen KNEŽEVIĆ, *Penologija u socijalnom radu (i socijalni rad u penologiji)* [Penology in Social Work (and Social Work in penology)], Zagreb, Pravni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2008, 191-192.

⁴⁹ Cf. Slobodan UZELAC, Vladimira ŽAKMAN-BAN, Ranka FARKAŠ, Rad zatvorenika u fazi adaptacije na zatvorske uvjete u hrvatskoj kaznionici [Work of prisoners in the phase of adaptation on prison conditions in croatian penitentiary], *Kriminologija & socijalna integracija: časopis za kriminologiju, penologiju i poremećaje u ponašanju* [Criminology and social integration: journal of criminology, penology and behavioral disorders], 16 (2008) 1, 1-126.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵² Cf. Renata JUKIĆ, Marin SABLJO, Penološka andragogija – zatvorski tretman i mogućnosti resocijalizacije zatvorenika [Penological andragogy – prison treatment and the possibilities of resocialization of prisoners], *Andragoški glasnik: glasilo Hrvatskog andragoškog društva* [Andragogical gazette: journal of Croatian andragogical society], 21 (2017) 1-2, 27-36.

⁵³ Cf. James H. FREY, Tim DELANEY, The Role of Leisure Participation In Prison, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 23 (2008) 1, 79-89.

various reasons, one of which is the geographical distance. These problems are expected and quite understandable, considering that Penitentiary in Požega is the only women's penitentiary in the Republic of Croatia. There are also examples of female prisoners who had the opportunity to make visits to their home if they behaved well.

Regarding relationships within the prison, prisoners indicate that they strive for fair relationships and that there are no conflicts between them. Some female prisoners indicate that in order to satisfy the need for close relationship and intimacy during imprisonment they go into homosexual relationships. Namely, situational homosexuality is considered a natural reaction to a deviant situation and is considered a situational phenomenon that develops because of sexual deprivation⁵⁴. Thus, it is developed mainly to satisfy psychological and physiological desires and needs, which include feelings of desirability, respect, and sexual relations⁵⁵.

3.3. Experience of the female offenders about the the treatment in penitentiary in Požega

Female prisoners describe treatment program effectiveness in terms of acquiring new knowledge, becoming more aware of their own behavior, and acquiring new skills. The findings on the importance of effective treatment programs in prisons are supported by numerous studies. For example, Sultan and Long⁵⁶ cite improved self-esteem, a sense of greater control over one's life, greater trust in others, and decreased alienation from others. While in the past understanding of the needs of female offenders was neglected and mainly described by the theories of Lombroso and Ferrero (female offenders are given male characteristics), today more credibility was given to feministic theories which put an emphasis on contemporary needs of female offenders (to much expectations, demanding life and financial insecurity and trauma leads to female offenders) and postmodern-reconstructivist approach which consider the contemporary needs of female offenders and their surrounding⁵⁷. The positive outcomes of the treatment programs are evidenced by the fact that rehabilitation programs significantly reduce the incidence of offending, as well as the

⁵⁴ Cf. Una RADOVANOVIĆ, Milica POPOVIĆ, Homoseksualni odnosi u ženskim zatvorima: devijacija ili deprivacija? [Homosexual relations in female prisons: deviation or deprivation?], *Temida*, 15 (2012) 4, 89-104.

⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 93, 98.

⁵⁶ Cf. Thomas W. HAYWOOD, Howard M. GOLDMAN, Anderson FREEMAN, Characteristics of women in jail and treatment orientations: A review, *Behavior Modification*, 24 (2000) 3, 307-324.

⁵⁷ Cf. Maja STEPIĆ, Žene kao počiniteljice kaznenih djela u suvremeno doba [Female offenders in contemporary age], Final paper, University in Zagreb, Faculty of Law, Department of Social Work (2022) 21.

direct and indirect costs to the community associated with victimization and incarceration of offenders⁵⁸.

3.4. Perceived personal changes

Female prisoners highlighted some significant positive changes they have noticed in themselves during imprisonment as a result of the prison treatment. They indicate that they have become more tolerant, have better control of their anger, and that their self-confidence has improved. According to the research findings⁵⁹, many female prisoners have low self-esteem and a poor image of themselves, as well as fear of failure. Due to these facts, boosting self-esteem and having a generally positive look on the future is extremely important for the well-being of female prisoners. It is also known that participation in appropriate treatment programs in prisons helps prisoners reduce anger and hostile mood⁶⁰.

Regarding changes in relationships with others, some female prisoners indicate that they had equal relationships before entering prison and while serving their sentence, and some female prisoners note an improvement in their relationships. In addition, some female prisoners have become aware of the importance of relationships. Research has shown that the quality of prisoners' relationships with their families improved during incarceration because the contacts are reduced and directed only to urgent and important questions so there is no time to develop problematic conversation⁶¹.

The type of communication also plays a role in maintaining relationships, where visits to the institution have been shown to be more important for relationships with partner and children, while telephone calls are more important for other family members⁶².

⁵⁸ Cf. Elizabeth K. DRAKE, Steve AOS, Marna G. MILLER, Evidence-based public policy options to reduce crime and criminal justice costs: Implications in Washington State, *Victims and Offenders*, 4 (2009) 4, 170-196; Gordon DAHL, Magne MOGSTAD, The Benefits of Rehabilitative Incarceration. National Bureau of economic research, (03.2020) <https://www.nber.org/reporter/2020number1/benefits-rehabilitative-incarceration> (21.01.2023); Karen HESELTINE, Rick DAY, Andrew SARRE, Prison-based correctional rehabilitation: An overview of intensive interventions for moderate to high-risk offenders, *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, no. 412, Canberra, Australian Institute of Criminology, (19.05.2011).

⁵⁹ Cf. Morag MacDONALD, Women prisoners, mental health, violence and abuse, *International journal of law and psychiatry*, 36 (2013) 3-4, 293-303.

⁶⁰ Cf. Karen C. EAMON, Michelle M. MUNCHUA, John REDDON, Effectiveness of an anger management program for women inmates, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 34 (2001) 1, 45-60.

⁶¹ Cf. Nancy G. LA VIGNE, Rebecca L. NASER, Jennifer L. BROOKS, Examining the effect of incarceration and in-prison family contact on prisoners' family relationships, *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 21 (2005) 4, 314-335.

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*

3.5. Possibilities for improvement of imprisonment time and treatment

Opportunities to improve treatment from the perspective of female prisoners include better health care, better accommodation and a variety of treatment programs. Better health care refers to the need for a psychiatrist, the need for a dentist, the need for a new doctor, and the lack of nurses.

Female prisoners stated that they waited for several months for an appointment with a dentist or gynaecologist and that they learned how to suffer from health problems and pains such as tooth loss, etc. Considering the fact that some prisoners have had traumatic experiences and suffer from various mental illnesses, the employment of a psychiatrist in the Penitentiary in Požega is really necessary.

There is a need for more quality professional help which would enable prisoners to work on their personal change. The female prisoners distinguish need for spirituality, psychotherapeutic and for psychological help. They also express the need for better accommodation in terms of less room occupancy and the need for renovation, as the Penitentiary is truly old.

Improving the treatment in the Penitentiary from the perspective of female prisoners could be achieved through more programs for prisoners such as: a foreign language program, an IT workshop and a literacy program. Namely, education as a form of treatment should influence the prevention of future criminal behaviour of prisoners, but also facilitate life in freedom. During the prison sentence, prisoners need to be offered knowledge and skills with which they will be competitive on the labour market. Today, in the age of modern technology, computer literacy is of great importance. Prisoners believe that such a program is necessary in the institution. They also state that some prisoners have knowledge of foreign languages and express a desire to organize programs within the institution where they could learn from each other.

3.6. Research limitations

This research was conducted in the only female penitentiary in Croatia, so the data can be relevant only for the Croatian context. Some difficulties in data collection should be mentioned, which are the limitations of this study. The first difficulty was that the responses had to be recorded manually because the Ministry of justice did not permit to record the interviews, which was an enormous effort for the researchers. It was necessary to observe the verbal and nonverbal communication of the participants and at the same time to manually record the responses, which were usually quite extensive. Since most of the questions were open-ended, participants generally gave very detailed answers

and often talked about topics that were not part of the interview. In these situations, it was necessary to assess the extent to which it is possible to allow a certain dose of flexibility that is characteristic of the semi-structured interview method.

Conclusion

The aim of the research was to examine the experience of female prisoners about their stay and treatment in the Požega Penitentiary. The data were obtained in accordance with the results of research within the theory of deprivation. Namely, the results are in accordance with the deprivation theory because they showed that most of the prisoners had certain negative reactions when they found out about being sent to the Penitentiary and already had certain assumptions and expectations about the institution (mostly fear and concern) as well as immediately after arriving at the penitentiary, feelings of sadness and fear and assumptions about negative profiles of perpetrators in the Penitentiary as well as disgust with the appearance of the penitentiary.

During the stay in the prison, there is a certain organization of the day in terms of obligations and leisure time, which gives structure to the stay and provides the possibility of treatment. Female prisoners declare that the rooms are overcrowded and that the prison is very old, but on the other hand they state that it is clean and that certain rooms have been renovated. They are generally satisfied with the work of the professional staff and indicate various positive outcomes related to the effectiveness of the treatment programs, such as the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Despite all this, they suggest improving accommodation and producing a wider range of educational programs during the stay. Almost all prisoners indicate the need for a psychiatrist and a dentist in the prison, a greater number of nurses, and a change of the current doctor. From all this it can be concluded that prisoners are generally satisfied with their stay and treatment in Požega Penitentiary. They believe that the conditions for their rehabilitation are in place and recognize the expertise and efforts of the professional staff. It is necessary to continuously evaluate the treatment programs implemented in correctional institutions to determine their effectiveness, but also to influence the creation of measures and policies pursued by the state regarding correctional institutions.

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Iskustvo boravka u zatvoru iz perspektive počiniteljica kaznenih djela u Republici Hrvatskoj

Sažetak

Znanstvena istraživanja u području kriminologije uglavnom zanemaruju kriminalitet žena, naročito perspektivu zatvorenica. Cilj kvalitativnog istraživanja bio je ispitati doživljaj boravka u kaznionici i institucionalnog tretmana zatvorenica. Podaci su prikupljeni koristeći metodu polustrukturiranog intervjua provedenog s deset zatvorenica u Kaznionici za žene u Požegi. Istraživačka pitanja usmjerena su na doživljaj boravka u kaznionici, tretmana, percipiranih osobnih promjena i prijedloga za unaprjeđenje tretmana. Podaci su obrađeni induktivnom tematskom analizom. Izdvojeno je pet tema: očekivanja prije dolaska u kaznionicu, doživljaj boravka u kaznionici, doživljaj tretmana, percepcija osobnih promjena i prijedlozi za unaprjeđenje institucionalnog tretmana. Nužno je kontinuirano provoditi evaluacije tretmanskih programa u kaznionicama da bi se utvrdila njihova efikasnost, a perspektiva zatvorenica pri tome može biti značajan kriterij za osmišljavanje mjera i politika koje provodi država u zatvorskom sustavu.

Ključne riječi: boravak u zatvoru, iskustvo, kaznionica, zatvorenice.

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