Persons Deprived of Freedom: from Condemnation to the Socio-Professional Reintegration

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Abstract

This research identifies the lack of support given to people deprived of their liberty in order to integrate them socially and professionally. The study observes the factors that determine the individual's criminal behaviour, and also mentions methods that experts working in prison have identified in order to prevent their relapse. It also focuses on how the family supports the reintegration of the inmate, but it also searches solutions concerning the recovery of people deprived of liberty. The study uses a qualitative approach and applies the following methods of research: interview, observation and document analysis. The people interviewed were: 20 prison inmates.

47% of the respondents consider that one of the most important factors that determine criminal behaviour is theft and 16% of the respondents consider robbery as a main factor. By analyzing the influence of the family on the individual’s criminal behaviour, 85% of the respondents said that the family assisted them, 10% said that the family was against the crime, and 5% confessed that the family abandoned them after the crime. From the study we can observe that the people who are deprived of their liberty need a new chance to get socially rehabilitated and they don’t need a social tagging such as “villain” and people who treat them with disgust and show no attitude of acceptance.

Our country needs more rehabilitation centres for inmates. These are necessary from the time of transition, before the reintegration, to the point at which he is able to sustain himself alone. It would be of great use for an inmate if he had a recommendation, based on which he can be accepted to work.

Keywords: Person deprived of freedom; criminal behaviour; social and occupational integration; multidisciplinary team.
Introduction

This research began with a couple of questions I put to myself: “Who are the people deprived of liberty?” “What are the reasons for which they were punished?” “Why do people deprived of liberty behave in a way that leads them to commit crimes?” “What is the reaction of the society concerning these people?” “How can a person who committed a crime be integrated?” “What are the factors involved in the recovery of this person?” and “How should I correctly refer, from a social point of view, to these people who are deprived of liberty?”

These questions motivated me to focus more on the people who live next to me and mainly on the people with misdemeanant behaviour. This desire to reach people deprived of liberty overwhelmed me. So, I observed that sociologists define the people deprived of liberty as people who have a deflective behaviour which trespasses the written or unwritten norms of a collective social group or a society (Pitulescu & Medeanu, 2006, 5).

Research instrument of the study, objectives and hypothesis

The purpose of this study is to present the necessity of a sequenced participatory analysis regarding the level of reintegration. Also, it wishes to bring to light, based on the descriptive method, certain defining elements regarding reintegration. In this purpose, I started the study with 4 objectives of exploration: the identification of factors that lead to a criminal behaviour; the role of family influence on the individual’s criminal behaviour; the description of methods of relapse prevention; the solutions identified by specialists.

The discovery of social reintegration methods was made for freedom-deprived persons. In order to follow the previously stated objectives, I noticed the necessity to formulate a hypothesis, which contains those “plausible explanations that are to be verified through observation, testing and reality confrontation”. (Chelcea, 2005, 84)

The assumptions of the study are: a) the individual who grows and develops in an unfavourable environment for its basic requirements is more prone to adopt delinquent behaviour later on; b) the more disorganized the family of origin is, the greater the risk of criminal behaviour; c) if the individual is labelled in society as a felon, he will be more likely to repeat previous criminal behaviour; d) if the individual lacks the necessary support for reintegration, the risk of recurrence is greater; e) if the individual offender is taught to identify and resolve his personal problems, he has a chance of a higher level of social and professional reintegration.

The investigative methods that I used in this research are: interviews, analysis of documents and case studies.

I interviewed 20 prisoners from the prisons of Barcea Mare and Oradea, the social worker and psychologist in the Prison Oradea, and I used the analysis of documents of the prisoners in Oradea. I interviewed four religious leaders and two social entrepreneurs who have contributed to the social reintegration of released prisoners, as well as the presentation of three case studies of released prisoners who managed to reintegrate socially. To this end, I interviewed both these released and reintegrated inmates, and their family members.

The situation of freedom-deprived persons

Now, in Romania, there are 3245 persons deprived of their liberty (http://anp.gov.ro/). Prisoners are deprived of their liberty with the aim to vindicate and help them reintegrate in society, not only to get punished and isolated from the community (Baluţă, 2012, 140).

In the Modern Era, the idea of imprisonment represents a place where criminals are restored by different means of corrective action. But, dozens of years ago, the prison was meant for the suffering of those convicted. It was the place where they were tortured. (Neamtu & Stan, 2004, 192)

The statistical data concerning the period of 1980-1989 show that the minors who have been adjudged from various crimes were as follows: 74% committed robbery, 9.2% abuses and other physical aggressions, 3.3% felony and assault and 4.8% prostitution and vagrancy (Fabian, 2007, 133).

The present study discloses the difficulties of social and professional reintegration of convicts, despite educational problems within penitentiaries. Dorin Muresan, the deputy general manager of the National Prison Administration stated in an article published by Alice Gheorghe that “If 1 out of 10 ex-prisoners finds a job; it is a great achievement for us.” (http://www.wall-street.ro/) According to a survey undertaken by the National Prison Authority, it is estimated that the relapse rate is between 60-80%. Dorin Mureşan said that “a great part of the
prisoners from the Romanian prisons relapse after they are released because conditions outside are more difficult than in the prison.” (http://www.wall-street.ro/)

In order to contribute and support the personal effort to socially reintegrate the persons deprived of liberty, it is very important to take into consideration: profit-productive activities, educational programs, professionalization, art-therapy, moral-religious education, as well as learning by assimilation of behavioural models (Neamțu, Stan, 2005, 246-247). So, the social assisting of inmates and of their families becomes a problem which leads to their social off-casting since there aren’t sufficient qualified employees who manifest their interest to work in a prison (Rachieru, 2009, 32). This difficulty is caused by lack of financial support from ex-convict families, but also by society’s ignorant attitude toward their reintegration on the labour market after they get out.

The results of the study

One of the questions the interviewed persons were asked to respond to was: “What do you believe to be the most frequent reasons for committing crimes?” Most of the answers were alike. The most frequent were: poverty, lack of education, bad family environment, peer pressure, alcohol, drugs, and the wish of young people to become famous, but not through work or studies.

Specialists made an important observation regarding the impact of “unsuitable movies where many crimes, acts of violence, negative behaviour and even psychological problems identified in some characters who commit crimes”. A religious leader observed among others “the company throughout adolescence and youth, the lack of Christian education in the family, failures in material, sentimental, professional domains, and psychological problems”.

The reasons mentioned by the freedom-deprived people I interviewed were as follows: poverty 25%, bad company 20%, lack of education 15%, lack of affection in the family 15%, alcohol 15%, the desire for fame 10%. According to the present study, wanting to find the offense for which they were convicted, I obtained the following results: 47% of the respondents were convicted for theft, 16% for criminal mischief, 11% for rape and rape attempt, 11% for traffic violations, 5% for pimping, 5% human trafficking and 5% for murder. In the first two cases, the factors that caused the respondents to adopt a wrongdoing behaviour are: 45% low financial status, 10% alcohol, 35% enumerating other reasons (entourage, revenge, fear), 5% didn’t answer the question, and 5% of the respondents considered themselves not guilty.

The respondents were imprisoned as follows: 5% were sentenced for 1 year, 45% for 4 years, 35% for 10 years, 10% for 14 years, and 5% for 25 years. 75% of them believe that the punishment they received is too severe for the offense committed, 20% admit their culpability and consider that the punishment they received equals the offense committed, and 5% believe that they are not guilty, so the punishment is really unjustified.

Another aspect dealt with in this research is the climate of the families and how it influences the life of the person deprived of liberty. Two of the specialists who offer social services to these people (the social assistant and the psychologist) declared the following: “the family environment has a strong influence on the child’s behaviour; if the family is united and has values, the child will not commit crimes; but where there is no model, the behaviour will be as such and the child repeats the parents’ behaviour”. Lack of family cohesion in which the familial stability is missing, and is substituted for fights between the parents becomes a hell and is very difficult to endure by the kids. The same is the case of an alcoholic parent, where aggression and the immorality of the family facilitate a path where kids adopt a delinquent behaviour. He doesn’t get the affection that he badly needs, no peaceful quiet home, and no health so, in those conditions, the child prefers to leave the house embracing the escape and becoming a prostitute, the first sign of deviance (Gîrleanu, 1996, 92).

In order to see if family environment has indeed such a great influence upon the prisoners, I took advantage of my chance and asked them 3 questions. The first question: “What kind of relationship did you have with your family (wife, children, parents…) before committing the crime for which you are convicted?” 50% of the subjects answered they had very good relationship with their family; 40% had a good relationship before conviction; 10% had a distant, cold relationship. The second question: “What was the family’s attitude after the conviction?” 85% confessed that their family showed understanding; 10% declared that their family was ashamed of them after their crime; 5% of them had to face rejection from their family. The third question: “Have you been visited by your
family? If the answer is affirmative, how often are you visited?” 80% of the responses were positive while the other 20% negative”. The answers obtained highlighted the relationship between the prisoner and his family before the conviction, which clearly affects the present relationship and, in most of the cases, will foresee what kind of future relationship is to be expected.

The social assistant mentioned based on his experience of previous years that “most of the prisoners keep in touch with their families, but lately, 2009-2010, this aspect decreased enormously: 20% of the convicts hear from their families 3-4 times a month; 30% of them periodically (every 2 or 3 months); the remaining 50% are not visited, “and this rate is unfortunately growing fast”. Regarding the reestablishment, maintenance and consolidation of the relationship between the prisoner and his family, the social assistant has no necessary instrumental means. (Durnescu, 2009, 18-19)

From the psychologists’ point of view, “the prevention of criminality in the family is a prerequisite of the harmonious development of human personality and therefore of the prevention of criminal behaviour. In conclusion, criminal prevention involves the development of this personality in a balanced family (which conveys a secure environment, adequate to human personality development) and further in a society that offers opportunities (educational, social, economic, and professional) for development and manifesting.” But, in order to achieve this, there is a need for as many specialists as possible to cooperate with families (social assistants, psychologists, therapists, counsellors, doctors and religious people), to promote moral and spiritual values in the lives of individuals from needy families so that they may become people with dignity and good character, that is, role models. Unfortunately, our society desperately lacks these kind of people.

Another aim was to find out in the study whether the respondents were verbally or physically abused during their childhood and if that had an influence on their behaviour as adults. 65% of the respondents were not abused in their childhood, 20% were verbally abused, and 15 % were abused both physically and verbally. Out of the 35% that affirmed they were abused during childhood, 30% considered that this abuse had an influence on the offense committed in their adult life, and 5% deny that fact. Another aspect I investigated was to find out whether the respondents were violent in their childhood or in their adult age and if they were, what caused them to be violent. Of the respondents interviewed, 80% recognized that they used to be violent, 15% affirmed that they never had a violent behaviour and 5% didn’t answer the question. The ones that were violent admitted their acts of violence were caused by their anger, financial reasons, self-defence, and vanity-justice of helping others in need.

Additionally, I tried to include in this study what the image was of the prisoner in society before he committed the offense and also, whether this offense had a negative influence on his social relations. 75% of the respondents said they had a good image in society before committing the offense, 15% believe that society was ignorant of them, and 10% had no good image in society. After committing the offense, the situation was as follows: in 75% of the cases that had a good image in society, only 30% remained well seen, and 45% affirm that society changed its attitude in a negative way manifesting a very distant relationship that sometimes led to rejection and neglect. The 15% that affirmed that society had an ignorant attitude towards them remained in the same situation, the 10% who affirmed that they had a good image in society remained in the same situation, but in the last case of 5%, things changed in a positive way because they are now visited in prison by relatives, neighbours, and friends. Because they had been receiving help from the multidisciplinary team (social contractors, psychologist, social assistant, priest) 7 inmates were integrated socially as well as occupationally.

Conclusions

Due to this research, by investigating some aspects about the life of people deprived from liberty, I think that it would be better if we took some measures. First, I observed a great deficiency regarding the education of children and I believe that young families should be helped dealing with the education of children. In this society there is a great need to motivate parents to live according to some principles and moral values which they should firmly establish in the minds of their children. We need parents who sustain their children and teach them the notions of duty and responsibility from an early age. It is very important that children understand as early as possible the importance of a job, the joy of a home, and the respect of a family and of the rest of society.

The novelty of present research stands on evidence of some issues like spiritual assistance and church involvement, in order to gain mentality changes for the inmates. Second, the social impact on these categories
consists in the number of social entrepreneurial involvement, social workers, and psychologists in professional assistance.

Another thing of great importance would be to incentivize graduated students to choose their practice in penitentiaries, not only in NPO. In this way, they will have the opportunity to know better the people deprived of liberty and students would be educated so that in the future, they can choose a job also in a penitentiary. I think that in addition, there would be more assistants and the quality of assisting the inmates would improve, making the preparation of inmates for the process of regaining their liberty more efficient. This would contribute greatly to the social restoration of inmates which would lead to the prevention of their relapse and to a good social and occupational integration.

Another thing worth mentioning is the setting-up of campaigns to make people who are part of multidisciplinary teams that work or have contact with inmates (police officers, judges, attorneys, social assistants, psychologists, doctors, social contractors, business men, priests and religious leaders etc.) more socially sensitive. It is important that this multidisciplinary team show society a clear image of the effort that lies behind the restoration of an inmate. Encourage society to allow a second chance for people deprived of liberty instead of tagging them a “law breaker”.

Acknowledgements

This study was made in 2011 in the Prisons Oradea and Barcea Mare where I interviewed 20 prisoners, the social assistant, and the psychologist who worked in the prison.

References