

THE PERCEPTION OF FREEDOM-DEPRIVED PEOPLE IN SOCIETY AFTER THEIR LIBERATION

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Abstract

The study comprised in this paper aimed at identifying the way the freedom-deprived people are perceived when they try to reenter society after their liberation. The research covered a number of 60 subjects and based on this study we found out the terms under which the vast majority of freedom-deprived people want to reintegrate in society, as well as the labor market, by all means. The outcome of the study proves that when the ex-convicts do not face issues after their liberation and are not discriminated against on the labor market, the chances for their reinsertion and the shortness of time in which they are able to find a workplace increase, whereas in the situations when the employers refuse to deal with ex-convicts, the introduction of a supervising program carried out by a specialized unit is advisable. In the end, all the hypotheses we started from were confirmed by means of applying questionnaires to the subjects.

The most important conclusion drawn based on the analysis of the hypotheses is that freedom-deprived people want to step over the threshold of social development.

Key words: *convicts, freedom-deprived people, penitentiary, social reintegration*

1. Introduction

In Romania, the role of penitentiaries and reeducation centers is not seen any longer as being essentially punitive and custodial, with an emphasis on social integration problems, respectively education and recuperation. Their role is now to reduce the risk of recidivism and to increase the chances of social integration and reintegration, especially in the area of juvenile delinquency (Sirca, 2018).

The concept of “prison” has evolved from simply retaining the convicts in order to protect society, a fact leading to the implementation of certain strategies for the convicts in view of a possible social reinsertion (Gavrila-Ardelean & al., 2018; Sirca, 2018).

“Social reintegration takes place by the restructuring of a criminal’s behavior so that he/she can function in society and refrain from committing other future crimes.” (Garner, 2001).

“Social reintegration is often seen as the support given to the criminals when they reenter society after doing time in prison.” (Griffiths, Dandurand, Murdoch, 2007).

The National Administration of Penitentiaries plans to develop a comprising set of measures which will lead to freedom deprivation and social reintegration, for personal development, in order to increase the level of community safety, maintain public order and national security (ANP).

The experts of the social reintegration structure in each unit will permanently assess the convicts’ needs for education, psychological and social support, both in the education centers and the detention ones, in order to insure the administrative separation of the criminal ways. The Ministry of Justice is in charge of the whole social reintegration activity of the ruling staff of penitentiaries (ANP).

The penitentiaries have four types of regimes for executing freedom depriving penalties, namely: the maximum security regime, the closed regime, the semiopen regime and the open regime. The penalty execution regimes have the role to protect the convicts’ life, health and dignity. Depending on the degree of freedom limitation, these regimes differ from one another and under

each of them the convicts are subjected to observation and control, although the control in the maximum security regime is a lot stricter compared to that in the closed, open and semiopen regimes (ANP, 2015, Neamțu, Stan, (coord.), 2005).

2. Theoretical aspects

2.1 Juvenile delinquency and the causes of the appearance of this phenomenon

One of the most serious issues society is facing nowadays is the escalating of worrisome criminal phenomena, among which juvenile crime and some forms of behavioral crime weigh heavily, so that the age of violence in the whole world is now comprised between 19 and 29 years (Damir, Toader, 2006).

Juvenile delinquency reflects the incompatibility with the social laws and moral systems and represents the worst negative misdemeanor out of all the other forms, including the breaking of social coexistence norms, of human integrity and individual rights and liberties (Damir, Toader, 2006).

The causality of juvenile delinquency relies on two types of factors: internal or personal factors and external or social ones. The internal factors include the particularities and neuro-psychological structure of the course attendants. Among the external factors, the most important ones are: social and cultural factors, economic and educational factors (Gavrila-Ardelean, 2014, Roșan, 2006, Sîrca, 2018). Some neuro-psychological factors might be inherited, while others are acquired, personality structure, like schizotypal personality for instance is related to low self-esteem, lower life quality, anxiety and depression have been raising significantly in recent years at teenagers (Barron, D., Vintila, M., Swami, V., 2020). While educational factors are very much family related, as primary socialization takes place in the family environment, when the psychological and social needs of the child are not met the development of the child is affected in several areas, including behavior, community integration etc (Fond-Harmant, Gavrila-Ardelean, 2018, Goian, C., 2019).

The relationship between the two types of factors is one of the most controversial issues, the psychologists highlighting the psychological factors, and the sociologists the socio-cultural ones (Roșan, 2006, Sîrca, 2018).

The causes of juvenile delinquency are multiple due to the fact that various factors intervene. There is a number of specific reasons, such as: dropping out of school, lack of parental supervision, school-family dysfunction, community relationships, criminal subculture, drug and alcohol use, low level of resilience and also structural reasons, like: life style level, social and juridical influences, social inefficiency, and external reasons as well, namely the lack of publicity and prevention plans (Gavrila-Ardelean, L. & Gavrila-Ardelean, M., 2018, Roșan, 2006, Sîrca, 2018, Otovescu et al, 2015). Even more, another factor that influences the social integration of juvenile delinquents can be represented by the environment they live in. Thus, juvenile delinquents mostly come from disorganized families, and those children who live in vicious environments with only negative role models are socially integrated to a lesser extent than children who have some positive examples, some people they can look up to, even though they live in mono-parental families (Coman, 2018, p.90).

The 7th United Nations Congress on crime prevention and criminal justice (1990), underlined several “delinquency factors”: poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of goods and cheap housing, the adaptation to education and formation systems. There was no perspective on social inclusion or social inequity; the parents’ lack of education led to a severe breach in the social and family connections, which often made the living conditions harder; difficult conditions for immigrants both in cities and other countries were noticed; destruction of origins, racism and discrimination (ONU, 1990).

Some cultural characteristics could have caused social or health challenges, as well as employment issues; the urban environment deteriorated due to the lack of collective facilities in some communities; modern society shows difficulties in coping with the people’s fair integration in the community, family, work environment, school and cultural identity; alcohol, drug and other

forms of substance abuse (Sirca, 2018). However, taking into account that in today's global society elements such as "mobility, transport infrastructure or access to information are more important than spatial settlements" (Rezeanu et al, 2016, p.5), it can be inferred that in the case of freedom deprived people aspects like mobility, the ability to move freely and travel or to have access to a variety of information also gain importance.

2.2 Factors freedom deprived people have to deal with

According to the nature of the crime, social integration must be reported for each person separately. Relating to the crime forms, various reintegration formulas are recommended (RJP). Social reintegration is based on the reinsertion in the family and being welcome back by it, as the family support and willingness to sustain the convicted person both materially and ethically are of great importance. The main objective of social reintegration of a freedom deprived convicted person is to maintain the relationship with the family or even better, upgrade it (RJP). Even more the reintegrating of freedom deprived people in society might also be influenced by mass media. Due to the fact that through its varied communication channels, mass media holds the potential of reaching multiple and distinct types of public (Coman et al., 2018, p.41), by adopting positive attitudes towards the idea of integrating such people in society and by sending messages regarding diverse opportunities that these people could take advantage of, mass media could facilitate their process of social reintegration.

As far as work is concerned, for the efficient reintegration in society of those deprived of freedom, the convicted person must manifest real interest in it and not just try to find grounds to reduce the prison sentence or penalty or replace it with a community service sentence. It is therefore quite important for the employees to realize that the employers demand commitment and motivation from people willing to work. It is equally important that the employers manage to integrate the freedom deprived people in their working teams. In order for the social reintegration of the freedom deprived people to work, it takes the following: self-confidence, keeping in touch with the family; discovering and nurturing pro-social benefits, such as: work, literacy, education and the positive influence of the work mates or roommates (RJP).

The involvement of well-trained social workers in this process of reintegration is of major importance to guide them along the process of reintegration. Specialists in the field must be trained to be able to communicate efficiently with the beneficiaries, but also with the employers, to use a language that is clear and simple for the first to understand, else it might lead for them to feel excluded (Goian, 2010). Moreover, as a large number of cases involve Roma people the social assistance specialized vocabulary must face the challenges and adapt to the specific needs of these beneficiaries helping in their reintegration process (Gavrila-Ardelean, 2016, Goian, Vintila, Bucur, 2012). The penitentiary system supports the social reintegration of all the freedom deprived people, starting with their basic personal needs, namely the social needs, the access to health care and education facilities for each individual deprived of freedom. Moreover, the penitentiary system does not punish the people who have not been accepted by society and relapsed after their liberation (RJP).

One of the major problems facing the Romanian society refers to the high recidivism rate in the case of Roma people. This has as causes the low degree of social integration of the latter, but also the perpetuated discrimination in certain social environments (Otovescu, 2009). In recent years, there have been numerous programs designed to solve, at least in part, this problem. An example of a project that supports social reintegration for young Roma offenders has been successfully implemented contributing to the creation of the context for the development of common spaces of interaction, meaning the creation of positive interaction frameworks between youngsters with different backgrounds, young offenders of Roma origin and students. (Baciu & Trancă, 2021).

3. Research methodology

Starting from a quote by Burrhus Frederic Skinner, “People act on the world, transform it and are in turn transformed through the consequences of their actions”, I consider that each of us can become a pillar of change in both attitudes and mentality.

This was also the reason for entitling this paper the way I did, namely “The perception of freedom-deprived people in society after their liberation”, since people tend to look differently at the aspects seen by them as inappropriate for society, or even more belonging to the the edge of society. The reason I chose this theme was the sincere willingness to learn more about this particular domain and my curiosity regarding the opinion the freedom deprived people believe society holds on them after they came out of confinement.

The purpose of the research is to identify the perception of freedom deprived people with respect to the way in which they will reenter society after their liberation. Given that we are aiming at reaching our objectives, it would be useful to mention the objectives at this point. The first objective is *to analyze the perception of freedom deprived people regarding the way in which they will be regarded after their liberation from prison*. The second objective of this research is *to emphasize the perception of the people detained regarding the way in which participating in certain activities during confinement helps them feel prepared for their liberation or how useful they believe such activities might be*. The third and last objective of the research is *to identify the expectations the convicts have regarding the place they will go to after their liberation or if they will look for a workplace*.

The research sample included a number of 60 people deprived of freedom, both from the urban and rural environment, aged between 18 and 45 and older than 45 years in the penitentiary in Drobeta-Turnu Severin, nr 5 Carol Davila street. In order to carry out the research, the questionnaire has been used as an instrument, a survey type of research has been applied, containing both closed questions, 18 in number, and open questions, namely 3 of them, regarding the social reintegration of freedom deprived people. The period of time when we used the questionnaire was May 2020. The respondents were insured that both their personal data and the answers they gave are confidential and shall be used in an academic purpose only, to finish the research.

4. Results

The 1st hypothesis: If the perception of freedom deprived people by society after their liberation is positive, their chances of social reinsertion increase.

In order to validate the first hypothesis, we correlated the following two questions: “How do you think you will be regarded by society after your liberation?” and “How easily do you think you will adapt to the society after your liberation?”. The data obtained can be seen in table number 1.

Table nr. 1 the correlation between society’s opinion about freedom deprived people and their adjustment to society

		How easily do you think you will adapt to society after your liberation				Total
		Very easily	Easily	So so	Very hard	
How do you think you will be regarded by society after your liberation?	In a good way	10	7	9	0	26
	I will be discriminated against	4	3	4	0	11
	I don't know/refuse to answer	9	9	4	1	23
Total		23	19	17	1	60

From the data in the table above, one can notice that out of a total of 23 people who think they will adapt to society very easily after their liberation, 10 claim that they will be regarded positively by society after leaving the penitentiary environment, 4 believe that society will discriminate against them, and the rest of 9 persons do not know what society's reaction to them is going to be.

As for the people who think they will easily adapt to society after being freed, 19 in number, 7 of them claim that society will have a good opinion about them, 3 believe that they will be discriminated against by the society and 9 of them do not know what society's opinion about them will be after their liberation.

Out of a number of 17 persons who believe that adjusting to society will be neither easy nor hard, 9 think that they will be fairly treated by society, 4 consider that a distinction will be made by society between them and the rest of people, and also 4 of them do not know what society's opinion about them will be.

Only one person believes that adjusting to society after being freed will be a long and difficult journey and does not know how he/she will be perceived by society after leaving the penitentiary.

After analyzing the correlation, we noticed that a percentage of 43.3 of the people questioned answered that society will have a positive view on them, 18.3% represents the persons who consider that society will discriminate against them after they leave the penitentiary, while the rest of 38.3% of the respondents do not have a clear perception of society's opinion regarding their reintegration. Therefore, one can easily notice that the highest percentage is made of people who say that society's perception of them will be positive, which means that the chances for reinsertion are increased and the hypothesis is confirmed.

Only one person believes that the integration in society after being freed will be difficult from her/his point of view and claims he/she does not know how society will react to his/her return to it.

The three subjects who say that they do not know what their status will be when trying to reintegrate in society also claim not to be aware of the possible view society will hold on them after they leave the penitentiary.

Based on the data analysis, we have the following outcome: out of a total of 60 people inquired, most of them, that is a percentage of 40, see themselves as able to reenter society very soon, 33.3% consider that their reintegration will be a quick process, 20% believe that their social integration will be neither quick, nor slow, 5% are those who do not know how quickly they will reenter society and the smallest percentage, a mere 1.66 think their social reintegration is going to be difficult.

From this correlation it is clear that the subjects see their future in a positive manner and have high chances of being reintegrated in society.

The 2nd hypothesis: The more the convicts participate in various activities in the penitentiary, the stronger their belief that they will easily reintegrate in society becomes.

In order to validate the second hypothesis, we correlated the following two questions: "How fast do you think you will integrate in society after the liberation?" and "How often do you participate in activities that prepare you for the liberation?". The data obtained can be seen in table number 2.

Table nr. 2 The correlation between social integration and activity participation

		“How often do you participate in activities that prepare you for the liberation?”				Total
		Once a week	Once a month	Seldom, I do not know exactly	Never	
“How fast do you think you will integrate in society?”	Very fast	9	2	6	7	24
	Fast	12	2	5	1	20
	Neither fast, nor slowly	5	2	3	2	12
	Slowly	1	0	0	0	1
	I do not know/I do not answer	2	0	0	1	3
Total		29	6	14	11	60

After applying the questionnaire, we have obtained data which shows that out of 29 persons who participate in activities in the penitentiary meant to prepare them for the liberation once a week, 9 believe that their reintegration in society will happen very fast, 12 consider that the process will be fast, a number of 5 people reckon that their reintegration is going to be neither fast, nor slow, one person thinks it will be a slow process, and 2 people are confused regarding their social integration after being set free.

Out of a total of 6 persons who participate in activities which prepare them for the liberation once a month, in sets of two they believe, respectively, that they will integrate in society very fast, the next set see it as just fast, and the last one consider that their social integration will take place at an average rhythm, that is neither fast, nor slowly. Apart from that, there are no people who see their social integration after the liberation as a slow process and there are no respondents who refused to reply.

Out of a total of 14 persons who participate in penitentiary activities which help to prepare them for the liberation quite rarely, 6 people believe that they will integrate in society very fast after their liberation, 5 persons consider that their social integration will take place quickly, and a number of 3 people see the social reintegration process as neither fast, nor slow. In this category also there are no answers regarding the social integration after the liberation as a slow process and there are no individuals who showed confusion on the topic.

A number of 11 persons claim that they never participate in penitentiary activities which help to prepare them for the liberation, out of which 7 people think that they will integrate in society very fast, one person believes it will be a fast process, 2 people consider that their social integration will happen neither fast, nor slowly. Not a single person perceives their social integration after the liberation as a difficult process and there is one person who confessed to not having thought about the social reintegration after the liberation.

Based on this analysis, one can notice that the people who take part in activities organized by the penitentiary aimed at preparing them for the liberation feel more motivated to reenter society once they are set free.

The 3rd hypothesis: If freedom deprived people have a clear plan about their work prospects, their chances of reinsertion on the labor market increase.

In order to validate the third hypothesis, we correlated the following two questions: “Do you know where you want to work after the liberation?” and “How easily do you think you will integrate in your future workplace?”. The data obtained can be seen in table number 3.

Table nr. 3 the correlation between workplace prospects and labor market reintegration

		How easily do you think you will integrate in your future workplace?				Total
		Easily	Quite easily	Hard	Very hard	
Do you know where you want to work after the liberation?	Yes	19	10	9	0	38
	I have not thought about it	5	4	0	0	9
	I will not work	0	2	0	11	13
Total		24	16	9	11	60

Out of a total of 24 persons who believe that they will reintegrate easily in their future job, 19 of them have concrete prospects regarding their working future, 5 of them have not considered the matter of a specific workplace after their liberation, and not even one person replied that they do not want to work after being set free from the penitentiary environment.

Out of a total of 16 respondents who consider that they will reintegrate quite easily on the labor market, 10 of them know exactly where they want to work after their liberation, 4 of them have not thought about a certain future workplace, and 2 people say that they are not going work after being set free.

From the table above, one can also notice that a number of 9 people consider that they will have a hard time reintegrating in their future workplace, but at least they know the domain in which they are going to work after their liberation.

All the 11 respondents who think it is going to be very difficult to get integrated in the future job hold the opinion that they will not even go to work after being set free.

Following the correlation analysis, we have obtained the following outcome: 66.6% of the respondents are people who want to work after their liberation and believe that they will be able to find a workplace easily, whereas only a percentage of 33.3 do not want to work after being set free, thus the hypothesis according to which the freedom deprived people’s reintegration quota on the labor market goes up is confirmed.

The 4th hypothesis: If freedom deprived people have a strong relationship with the family, their chances of reinsertion on the labor market increase.

In order to validate the fourth hypothesis we correlated the questions: “What is your relationship with the family like?” and “How easily do you expect to find a job?”. The result was obtained after analyzing the data included in table number 4.

Table nr. 4 the correlation between the relationship with the family and the swiftness of finding a job.

		How easily do you expect to find a job?					Total
		Very easily	Easily	So so	Hard	Very hard	
What is your relationship with the family like?	Very distant	0	0	0	1	1	2
	Distant	1	0	0	0	3	4
	Neither distant, nor close	9	3	1	1	2	16
	Close	3	7	10	1	1	22
	Very close	1	3	3	7	2	16
Total		14	13	14	10	9	60

After applying the questionnaires, we have noticed as shown in the table above, that out of a total of 14 people who consider that they will find a job very easily, not even one person states that the relationship they have with the family is very distant, only one person claims that the relationship with the family is distant, 9 of the people questioned say that their relationship with the family is neither close nor distant, 3 persons state that their relationship with the family is close and one person even says that the relationship with the family is very close.

Out of a total of 13 persons who consider that they will easily find a workplace, there are no respondents who believe that their relationship with the family is distant or very distant, 3 people claim that their relationship with the family is neither close, nor distant, 7 persons state that their relationship with the family is close and a number of 3 persons answered that their relationship with the family is very close.

Out of a total of 14 persons who consider that finding a workplace after their liberation will be neither too difficult, nor too easy, similar to the previous category, there are no respondents who believe that their relationship with the family is distant or very distant, one person says that their relationship with the family is neither close, nor distant, 10 persons state that their relationship with the family is close and a number of 3 persons answered that their relationship with the family is very close.

Out of the 10 persons who consider that it will be tough to find a job after their liberation, one person claims that their relationship with the family is very distant, another one states that their relationship with the family is neither close nor distant, and a third one believes that their relationship with the family is very close.

Out of the 9 people who consider that it will be very difficult to find a job after their liberation, one person says that their relationship with the family is very distant, other 3 people state that their relationship with the family is distant, 2 people believe that their relationship with the family is neither close nor distant, another one believes that their relationship with the family is close, and 2 more people regard their relationship with the family as very close.

After analyzing the data in the table above, we have obtained this outcome: out of a total of 60 subjects, most respondents, i.e. 63.3%, consider their relationship with the family close or very close, a percentage of 26.6 see their relationship with the family as neither close, nor distant, and 10% consists of the respondents who feel that their relationship with the family is either distant or very distant.

Therefore, given the results of the correlation, we can conclude that most of the people inquired state that their relationship with the family is a good one and their chances of being reinserted in the labor market go up, thus our hypothesis being confirmed.

5. Conclusions

According to the National Strategy for Social Reintegration of the freedom deprived people, the definition of a freedom deprived person is “a person sanctioned with the educational measure of confinement in an education or detention center, a person carrying out a prison or life sentence, person held in preventive detention in special places subordinate to the National Administration of Penitentiaries, for short ANP.” (ANP)

The social reintegration of freedom deprived people presupposes the criminal’s restructuring of character, so that he/she becomes able to act in society without committing further crimes (Garner, 2001). A very important role the penitentiary plays in the social reintegration is the post-detention period.

The National Administration of Penitentiaries has the role of contributing to the defense of public order and national security, by ensuring the guarding, escorting, surveillance and application of the confinement regime, playing a special part in the education and social reinsertion of freedom deprived persons. According to the law in the criminal field, it is the responsibility of the education and detention centers to organize educational, counseling and cultural activities for the freedom deprived, thus giving them the proper instruction and professional training in order to facilitate their social reintegration. The existing activities from the area of education or psycho-social offered by social workers, psychologists, educators, working with minors in educational and detention centers (see Iovu & Morar, 2019a and Iovu & Morar, 2019b) are targeting social reintegration, but there are far from being enough to guarantee their social reintegration. Knowing personal characteristics (psychological, social, educational, medical, and legal) it is equally important in designing and choosing the appropriate intervention process aimed at obtaining cognitive and behavioral changes supporting their reintegration and future social functioning (Morar & Iovu, 2017) Social work in the field of delinquency provides a wide range of clients, problems, requirements, situations, and challenges, so it is necessary to develop specific skills to this area of intervention. (Trancă, 2016)

Therefore, the fact that penitentiaries offer activities coordinated by psychologists, educators, social workers helps with the educational process and personal development of the convicts, but is far from being enough to guarantee their social reintegration.

At the end of our research, after analyzing the findings, we came to the conclusion that the vast majority of freedom deprived people have a positive vision regarding the way society will perceive them after their liberation, thus the chances for social reintegration increasing, as we stated in the first hypothesis. Taking into account the fact that the willingness to reintegrate quickly in society is found in a lot of the respondents, this being also the key element in the preparation and recuperation of the freedom deprived during confinement, one can notice the positive attitude they have towards personal change.

At the same time, we can conclude that according to the second hypothesis (The more the convicts participate in various activities in the penitentiary, the stronger their belief that they will easily reintegrate in society becomes) their participating in various activities organized in the penitentiary helps them prepare for liberation, further more for their working prospects, as well as it supports them in developing communication and integration skills.

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