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Parental attitudes of mothers and fathers serving a prison sentence

Abstract: The article analyses parental attitudes of mothers and fathers serving prison sentences. A comparison was made between the attitudes of 50 women and 50 men, parents of minor children up to the age of 18, who had been raising them up before they were imprisoned and maintain regular contact with them during their imprisonment. In M. Plopa's Parental Attitudes Questionnaire, convicted fathers achieved high scores in the subscale of requirements, while low scores within the scope of autonomy and protection attitude. Convicted mothers, in turn, tend to adopt an excessively protective and inconsistent attitude towards their children. The intensity of individual parental attitudes depends on the type of crime committed. The perpetrators of crimes against the family, compared to other parents, accept their children to a significantly lower degree and are significantly more demanding towards them. The results of the survey clearly indicate that respondents carry out their parental roles improperly, which probably disturbs mutual relations in their families. It was suggested that in penitentiary work with sentenced parents a comprehensive and systematic diagnosis of parental attitudes should be carried out and their pedagogical awareness should be raised, among others, through shaping the ability to communicate with a child, appropriate selection of punishments and rewards, showing affection.

Keywords: parental attitudes of convicts, domestic violence, people convicted of domestic violence, education of convicts

Introduction

The family is a place where a child gains first experiences, learns about the world of values, learns about patterns of behavior and emotional response. The personality of an individual is shaped by the conscious and unconscious educational influence of parents, which consists mainly of parental attitudes (Sikora D., 2010).

Stay of one or both parents in penitentiary isolation clearly hinders the fulfillment of parental roles. The consequences of imprisonment are extremely severe and long-lasting for both convicts and their families. The moment of putting in prison becomes a key moment in the life of a convicted mother or father - from now on, all their activities begin to be subject to constant control, including those related to family life and contacts with the loved ones (Zajęcka B., 2007). There is a two-way relationship between the mother or father in prison and the child. Limitation of a child's contact with a parent and disturbance of the natural bond of attachment may lead to psycho-emotional disorders and difficulties in social functioning in the later period of life of a child. For a child, conviction of a father or mother means the loss of an important and significant person. Breaking the parental bond can also have negative consequences for the parent, most often in the form of emotional difficulties (Adamska E., Wawrzyk M., Owsianka D., 2009).

In order to mitigate the unpleasant ailments of imprisonment and counteract the process of adjustment to prison conditions, prison staff are responsible for shaping and maintaining contacts between convicted people and their loved ones. In the Criminal Executive Code (Journal of Laws of 1997 No. 90, item 557 as amended) the need to initiate, maintain and strengthen the emotional bond of convicts with children was expressed (Article 87a § 1 of the Criminal Executive Code). These activities should be implemented by allowing additional visits with a child (Article 105a § 3 of the Criminal Executive Code), the obligation to meet maintenance obligations and provide material assistance to children, as well as cooperation with childcare and educational institutions in which these children stay (Article 87a § 1 of the Criminal Executive Code). The above mentioned regulations apply equally to women and men serving prison sentences.

The degree of social maladjustment varies between mothers and fathers serving prison sentences. In the families they have established, there is often an accumulation of unfavorable factors indicating their dysfunctionality. According to the Susan Forward's theory (1992), we are dealing here with a specific cyclicality of toxic behavior, passing on the schemes of conduct learned in childhood from generation to generation. Children of parents

with disorders, in adulthood, suffer from similar disorders and show similarly inappropriate behavior. Negative patterns of behavior are, in turn, taken over by their children and thus the cycle repeats.

The problem of dysfunctionality of the family is also analyzed by representatives of the concept of family systems, according to which the family should be treated in a comprehensive manner. Every member of the family is part of the whole family system and they things they experience and the way they behave affects other members to a certain extent. Therefore, the dysfunctionality of the family may be expressed by a single signal or a single behavior originating from one member of the family. According to systemic theory, dysfunctional families are characterized by clear disturbances of mutual interactions (Bradshaw J., 1994). Therefore, it seems justified to fear that in criminal families, as a result of a lack of positive role models and the presence of inappropriate models, new generations of young people who break the law are being brought up. It should be remembered that the time when a mother or father comes to prison to serve their sentence does not mean that they stop acting as a parent. Despite staying in prison, prisoners participate in the upbringing of their children through telephone calls, correspondence, visits, and sometimes through a temporary release system. Their educational influence will also continue after they leave the prison. For many convicted mothers and fathers, children and their future may become the meaning of life, motivating them to change their behavior.

A British study concerning prisoners' relations with their families and children during their imprisonment revealed that family support and systematic contact with their children, as felt by many prisoners, had been effective in stopping them from returning to crime (Williams K., Papadopoulou V., Booth N., 2012).

Most research on parental attitudes in the context of crime and social rehabilitation concerns the criminals' families of origin, while attempts to show a criminal as a parent are extremely rare, and in addition, they focus only on imprisoned mothers. The question of the parental attitudes of fathers deprived of their liberty therefore remains entirely a matter of guesswork and hypotheses.

Parental attitudes of mothers and fathers in the retrospective assessment of criminals and non-criminals are presented in the research conducted by E. Olszewska. She noted that convicted men, much more often than the comparative group, perceive their mothers

and fathers as people whose behavior is dominated by excessive requirements and overprotection. On the other hand, in the opinion of not convicted men, their mothers and fathers showed signs of acceptance and autonomy (Olszewska E., 2012). In turn, the parental attitudes of convicted mothers were the subject of research by E. Piotrów, who concluded that the majority of women in prison accept their children, but at the same time show overprotective attitudes, and half of them also show a lack of autonomy in the upbringing influence towards children (Piotrów E., 2009). Similar observations result from research by A. Latoś, who developed case studies on female murderers of children. On their basis, the author concluded that none of the surveyed women were prepared for the role of a mother and all of them presented inappropriate parental attitudes, especially the attitude of dominance over the child and the attitude of excessive distance in contact with the child. All female prisoners also used various forms of violence against their children, in the form of neglect, beating, pushing, starving, jiggling, screaming, etc. (Latoś A., 2012).

Research into the parental attitudes of imprisoned parents, the parenting styles they adopt, as well as the use of punishments and rewards in the upbringing of children, can be a starting point in designing social rehabilitation effects aimed at improving their parenting competence. Shaping and strengthening the positive parental attitudes of those convicted and correcting inappropriate attitudes creates a chance that, when they leave prison, they will be able to fulfill their parental roles properly, and perhaps also to correct mistakes they made previously.

Own research

The subject of the presented research are parental attitudes of mothers and fathers serving prison sentences. The study used a questionnaire (in order to collect socio-demographic data and to learn about the respondents' relations with their children) and the Parental Attitudes Scale by Mieczysław Plopa (version for parents), which contains 50 statements for the mother and the father evaluated by each of them on a 5-degree scale. Individual statements are assigned to five scales measuring parental attitudes: acceptance-rejection, autonomy, excessive protection, excessive requirements, lack of consequence (Plopa M., 2008).

The aim of the research was to answer the question whether and to what extent gender and the legal qualification of acts committed by parents deprived of their liberty differentiate the intensity of particular parental attitudes? In response to the such formulated issue,

it can be assumed that convicted fathers have more unfavorable parental attitudes than mothers. It is also believed that inappropriate parenting attitudes are more intense in case of parents convicted of crimes against their families than in other detained parents.

The research was conducted in two penitentiary units for men (Prison in Łupków, External Department in Moszczaniec) and in the Custody Suite in Nisk, where women serve imprisonment sentences. The study covered 59 men (from two typical penitentiary wards) serving a prison sentence in the conditions of a half-open prison and 53 women, also serving a prison sentence in a half-open prison. After preliminary verification of the completed questionnaires, 12 of them were rejected due to incomplete or unreliable statements. Finally, 100 questionnaires were qualified for analysis (50 questionnaires each from both groups). The selection of respondents for the study was intentional, the criterion used was to be a mother or father of at least one minor child (up to 18 years of age). On the basis of the respondents' declarations, it was established that they participated in the upbringing of their children prior to imprisonment and are now also in regular contact with them in the form of phone calls, correspondence, visits and a temporary release system.

The average age of the surveyed men is 35.44 years (s=5.82) and women 32.64 years (s=6.14). The age difference of 2.8 years between men and women is statistically insignificant. There were no significant differences between fathers and mothers within the scope of the structure of own family. Nearly half of the surveyed parents declare functioning in a complete family: natural (31%) or reconstructed (16%). It should be noted that although the convicts surveyed have children, a significant part of them (42%) did not establish formal families living in a concubinage (women - 40%, men - 44%).

Convicted men are slightly better educated than women - half of them have vocational education. Women, on the other hand, most often have completed only primary school (40%). 1/5 of both women and men declare having secondary education. In the studied group, one woman and one man graduated from university.

Table 1. Number of children the respondents have

Number of children	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
One child	15	30	17	34	32	32
Two children	12	24	20	40	32	32
Three children	15	30	9	18	24	24
Four children (and more)	8	16	4	8	12	12
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Convicted women are much more likely than men to have children from two or more different relationships (64%), while the majority of convicted fathers declare that all their children come from only one relationship (82%). Nearly half of the mothers surveyed have numerous offspring - 30% of women declare raising three children and 16% of women have four or more offspring. Convicted fathers, in turn, usually raise one or two children.

Table 2. Legal classification of crimes committed by the respondents

Legal classification of the crime	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Offenses against property	19	38	17	34	36	36
Offenses against the family	21	42	23	46	44	44
Offenses against life and health	7	14	5	10	12	12
Offenses against sexual freedom and decency	1	2	2	4	3	3
Offenses against transportation safety	2	4	3	6	5	5
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Criminal offenses committed by the respondents were assigned to 5 categories of crimes (tab. 2) according to the Criminal Code in force. The most common offenses committed by both women and men in prison are crimes against the family (44%) and crimes against

property (36%). When analyzing the first of the above mentioned categories of crimes for which the respondents were convicted, it should be noted that:

— men are most often held criminally responsible for family abuse (Article 207 of the Penal Code) and evasion of maintenance obligations (Article 209 of the Penal Code);

— women in turn, serve prison sentences for abandoning a child (Article 210 of the Penal Code) and child abuse (Article 207 of the Penal Code).

12% of the respondents are perpetrators of offenses against life and health (women - 14%; men - 10%). It is worth mentioning that this group includes four mothers sentenced for taking care of children while being under the influence of alcohol and two women serving sentences of imprisonment for infanticide.

Study results

Below, the results obtained by imprisoned parents in the Parental Attitudes Scale by Mieczysław Plopa are presented. These results were calculated according to sten scores, separate for women and men. Significance of differences between the groups was checked by nonparametric U Mann-Whitney test. The basis for the application of this test (as an alternative to the Student's t-distribution) was the rejection of the assumption of normal distribution, which resulted from the application of the Shapiro-Wilk test, recommended in the case of comparing groups of up to 100 persons (Jurek K., 2011).

Table 3. Gender of parents and their parental attitudes (results in stens)

Attitude	Women (N = 50)		Men (N = 50)		Differences	Z	P
	x	s	x	s	x-x		
Acceptance - Rejection	5.34	2.89	4.96	2.99	0.38	0.726	0.468
Requirements	4.64	2.39	6.74	2.00	2.10	4.360	**0.000****
Autonomy	4.48	2.83	4.24	2.45	0.24	0.234	0.815
Inconsistency	6.88	2.03	5.36	2.34	1.52	3.213	**0,001****
Protection	6.52	2.70	4.68	2.28	1.84	3.558	**0,000****

*p < 0.05; **p< 0.01; ***p< 0.001

The parental attitudes of convicted mothers and fathers are as follows (tab. 3):

— fathers achieved significantly higher results than mothers in the subscale requirements ($p<0.001$);

— mothers achieved significantly higher results than fathers in the subscale of protection ($p<0.001$) and in the subscale of inconsistency ($p<0.001$).

A characteristic feature of the surveyed fathers is that they have increased requirements towards their children. In the discussed subscale, they achieved an average score of 6.74 sten scores, which is 1.24 higher than the middle of the scale, which means from sten 5.5. The increased requirements of convicted fathers illustrate their pedagogical beliefs: only high educational requirements and their enforcement will successfully prepare children for the difficulties they will encounter in adult life.

Convicted mothers, in turn, are primarily characterized by a lack of ability to cope with a child. It is difficult for them to judge when they should be firm towards the child and when to give it up to a child. Most of their behaviors depends on the current mood or well-being. The results obtained by them, at the level of 1.33 sten scores above the middle of the scale, indicate a significant intensification of the inconsistent attitude ($x=6.88$). The variability of women in parental influences may result from lack of maturity and unreadiness for the role of mother. Moreover, the convicted prisoners behave in a way that is too protective towards their children. They show tendency to excessive concern and anxiety, obtaining results about 1 sten score higher than the middle of the scale, i.e. 5.5 sten ($x=6.52$). The overprotectiveness of mother-prisoners shown in the questionnaire may be to some extent a result of separation from the family, causing concern about the fate of children left at large.

In terms of acceptance and autonomy attitudes, differences between groups are statistically insignificant. The entire surveyed population, both mothers and fathers, accept their children to a similar degree, achieving results in the range of 5-6 sten scores, which according to Plopa can be considered "average, typical for most Polish parents" (Plopa M., 2008, p.375). On the other hand, in the subscale of autonomy, both examined groups of convicted parents achieved results lower by about 1 sten score than the middle of the sten scale, i.e. sten 5.5 (fathers by 1.26 sten scores and mothers by 1.02 sten score below

the middle of the scale), proving the tendency to impose their opinions on the child andtomisunderstand their natural need for autonomy and independence.

Table 4. Legal qualification of the offense and the parental attitudes of the convicted persons (results in sten scores)

Attitude		Offenses against the family		Common offenses		Differences	Z	P
		x	s	x	s	x-x		
Acceptance - Rejection	K	3.14	1.15	6.93	2.26	3.79	4.437	**0.000*****
	M	3.30	1.36	6.37	2.27	3.07	3.635	**0.000*****
Requirements	K	5.90	1.86	3.72	2.34	2.18	3.067	**0.002****
	M	7.39	2.21	6.18	1.66	1.21	2.534	**0.011****
Autonomy	K	3.47	2.56	5.20	2.83	1.73	2.180	**0.029****
	M	4.08	1.62	4.37	2.03	0.29	0.433	0.665
Inconsistency	K	7.00	1.70	6.79	2.27	0.21	0.020	0.984
	M	5.17	2.03	5.51	1.87	0.34	0.493	0.622
Protection	K	4.47	1.71	8.00	1.46	3.53	4.227	**0.000*****
	M	4.13	2.18	5.14	2.21	1.01	1.465	0.143

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p< 0.001

Table 4. shows the distribution of results in terms of parental attitudes of convicted women and men by type of crime committed by them. The respondents were divided into two categories: perpetrators of crimes against the family (21 women and 23 men) and perpetrators of other crimes not directly related to the family, i.e. against property, life and health, against transportation security, sexual freedom and morality (29 women and 27 men).

Based on the results obtained, it was found that women convicted of crimes against the family compared to other mothers surveyed:

— have a significantly lower degree of acceptance of their children (p>0.001),

— are significantly more demanding towards children ($p<0.01$),

— have significantly greater problems with providing children with a proper range of reasonable freedom and autonomy ($p<0.05$),

— protect their children to a significantly less extent ($p<0.001$).

A comparison of fathers serving prison sentences for offenses against the family and other convicted men reveals regularities similar to those of women selected in the group. It turned out that the perpetrators of crimes against the family:

— accept their children to a significantly less extent ($p<0.001$),

— have significantly higher requirements for children ($p<0.05$).

Emotional rejection of their children is, in the light of the results obtained, a characteristic feature of both mothers and fathers guilty of crimes against the family. On a sub-scale of acceptance-rejection, they achieve average results just above the third sten (3.14 for women and 3.30 for men), which indicates that they have serious difficulties in accepting children, showing them love and support. The tendency to reject children emotionally by this category of criminals, as showed by the test, explains - in a way - what they have committed, i.e. child abuse, evasion of material benefits for the family (non-alimony), as well as abandonment of children.

It is worth noting that parents convicted of crimes against the family, in comparison toother respondents, are clearly characterized by an increased tendency to have excessive requirements towards their children. It is the most common in case of fathers guilty of crimes against the family, who on average achieve the results almost 2 sten scores higher than the standardization population. Setting a child tasks above their abilities can be connected with a rigorous upbringing style that is very often present in the families of people who apply severe corporal punishment and other forms of absolute execution of demands from children. This type of educational practice is most likely to be found in the families of people convicted of crimes related to domestic violence.

In terms of inconsistent attitude, differences between the groups compared are statistically insignificant. However, it is worth noting that mothers have a much stronger tendency to be inconsistent in relation to their children than fathers.

Discussion of results and conclusions

The obtained results confirmed the assumption of unfavorable parental attitudes of imprisoned parents. Mothers are usually overprotective and inconsistent, and fathers are too demanding. Moreover, showing incorrect parental attitudes is connected to the type of crime committed. The perpetrators of offenses against the family - both women and men – as parents tend to reject their children and are also too demanding. Mothers guilty of crimes against the family are also characterized by a low level of caring attitudes and a lack of respect for children's autonomy.

The results of the study on the parental attitudes of convicted women are to a large extent in line with the results of previous studies. The surveyed mothers, similarly to the convicts, who were surveyed by E. Piotrów (2009), are characterized by an overprotective attitude and the attitude of limiting the natural freedom and independence of a child. In terms of the attitude of acceptance, they obtained average results, while the convicts surveyed by E. Piotrów revealed an excessive tendency to accept children. This difference may be due to the fact that nearly half of the women in current research are serving imprisonment for crimes against the family, which indicates a drastic lack of concern for children. Meanwhile, the women participating in the study cited by E. Piotrów are mainly mothers who stay in penitentiary isolation together with their children.

The picture of parental attitudes of mothers convicted of crimes against their families, which emerges from the current research, is consistent with the results of the research carried out by A. Latoś (2012). She surveyed women prisoners serving custodial sentences for infanticide, who used various forms of violence against their children before committing a criminal offense. In their relations with children, they adopted attitudes of domination over a child and excessive distance towards a child. These styles of an approach towards a child are very similar to those suggested by the attitudes of rejection and excessive requirements that are characteristic of mothers participating in the current study who committed crimes against the family.

The presented studies of parental attitudes of fathers deprived of their liberty are probably the first to be published. So far, attention was paid to the offenders' families of origin and their retrospective assessment of their fathers' parental attitudes (e.g. research by E. Olszewska, 2012), while the study of functioning of the offenders as a father has been

omitted. The specificity of parental attitudes of convicted fathers compared to convicted mothers, as revealed in the present research, may help to direct the construction of educational competence improvement programmes in the course of penitentiary social rehabilitation, taking into account the sex of the convicts.

The results of the research encourage to formulate several practical postulates, which can be used by educators and psychologists in penitentiary work with parents deprived of their liberty:

1) It would be useful to diagnose the parental attitudes of prisoners who are parents, which would allow for the selection of appropriate social rehabilitation influences. For this purpose, it would be worth equipping penitentiary staff with the appropriate knowledge and skills to use tools to study the functioning of the individual as a parent. Appropriately selected methods of working with imprisoned parents, taking into account the results of the diagnosis, provide a chance to correct inappropriate parental attitudes.

2) It seems necessary to raise the pedagogical awareness of imprisoned mothers and fathers. For this purpose, specialist pedagogical and psychological counseling should be organized for them on the subject of raising and caring for children.

3) Correction of inappropriate parental attitudes and educational styles of convicts should be carried out primarily through their participation in penitentiary programs aimed at developing parental skills (including conflict resolution, appropriate ways of communicating with a young child and adolescent, showing affection, proper selection of penalties and rewards, including knowledge of the conditions of effective punishment and rewarding, organizing attractive ways of spending free time with a child). The construction and implementation of such programs should be treated as a priority task in penitentiary social rehabilitation.

4) The initiatives organized by prisons to maintain contacts and family ties between mothers and fathers staying in prison and their children and life partners are extremely important for the reintegration of prisoners. These meetings are an opportunity for them to use the learned and desired methods of dealing with children, as well as to observe the transformations taking place in this area.

The presented research allows us to look at convicted parents through the prism of their parental attitudes. Making a full diagnosis of their functioning as mothers and fathers, including preferred parenting styles, opinions on punishment and rewarding, family ties, sense of responsibility for the family and many other variables is a challenge for further research. Another important research project should be the evaluation of the effectiveness of programmes of improving the educational competences of convicted mothers and fathers, which are implemented in prison conditions.

Abstrakt: Postawy rodzicielskie matek i ojców odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności

W artykule dokonano analizy postaw rodzicielskich matek i ojców odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności. Porównano postawy 50 kobiet i 50 mężczyzn, będących rodzicami małoletnich dzieci do 18 roku życia, którzy wychowywali je przed osadzeniem i utrzymują z nimi systematyczny kontakt również w trakcie pobytu w zakładzie karnym. W Kwestionariuszu Postaw Rodzicielskich M. Plopy skazani ojcowie osiągnęli wyniki na poziomie wysokim w podskali wymagania, natomiast wyniki niskie w zakresie postawy autonomii i ochraniania. Z kolei skazane matki wykazują wyraźną tendencję do przyjmowania względem dzieci postawy nadmiernie ochraniającej i niekonsekwentnej. Nasilenie poszczególnych postaw rodzicielskich zależy od rodzaju popełnionego przestępstwa. Sprawcy przestępstw przeciwko rodzinie w porównaniu z pozostałymi rodzicami w istotnie mniejszym stopniu akceptują swoje dzieci oraz są wobec nich istotnie bardziej wymagający. Wyniki badań wyraźnie wskazują, że respondenci niewłaściwie pełnią role rodzicielskie, co prawdopodobnie zaburza wzajemne relacje w ich rodzinach. Zasugerowano, że w pracy penitencjarnej ze skazanymi rodzicami powinno się prowadzić kompleksową i systematyczną diagnozę postaw rodzicielskich oraz podnosić ich świadomość pedagogiczną m.in. poprzez kształtowanie umiejętności komunikacji z dzieckiem, właściwego doboru kar i nagród, okazywania uczuć.

Słowa kluczowe: postawy rodzicielskie skazanych, przemoc w rodzinie, skazani za przemoc w rodzinie, pedagogizacja skazanych

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