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Meanings attributed to punishment by recidivists from the Wołów Prison

Abstract: The concept of punishment is strongly connected with penology. Justice system is punishing criminals to make them change and discourage them from inappropriate behavior. I as a scientist, was interested in question: what prisoners who reoffends repeatedly think about punishment, effectiveness and necessity of this. In theoretical part of my publication I described how scientist write about purpose and functions of punishment. I did that because I want to compare scientific theory with reality. I was talked to ten recidivists from Prison in Wołów and every conversation was different, so my conclusions are not ambiguous. There is a need to make more research.

Key words: Punishment, imprisonment, recidivists.

Introduction

Punishment is an element of this world, it is used not only by humans, but also by animals, insects and plants. For a person, punishment is an essential part of the experience of being a member of any society, this is why the punishment evolved along with the changes taking place in society. With the creation of states and criminal codes, a unique type of punishment also appeared i.e. criminal punishment. Its aim is to provoke an internal transformation in the convicted person, so they develop a sense of responsibility for their decisions through resocialization (Boińska 2016a, p. 22). In Poland, the punishment system changed significantly after the fall of communism and the accession to the European Union, which re-

sulted, among other things, in the abolition of capital punishment (Fijałkowski, p. 154).

During my research I tried to determine the way the prisoners from a selected prison (here: recidivists from the Prison in Wołów) understand the notion of punishment, their attitude towards it and whether it affected them in any way. I managed to gain information from the respondents about their families, their relations with them and the course of their criminal life. I asked the prisoners about their views on imprisonment, alternative types of punishment and prison as a place where the sentence is served. I believe that understanding the perspective of people sentenced to imprisonment, who experience the consequences of imprisonment in their daily lives can help to change and improve the punishment system in Poland.

Punishment

The notion of punishment is defined in a number of different ways, depending on the field dealing with a given phenomenon. In the most popular approach this is the “unpleasant consequences of an individual’s behavior” (Encyclopedia PWN 2004, p. 378). On the other hand, a criminal punishment is perceived as “a state measure of restrained applied by a court to the perpetrator of an offence, consisting in imposing certain pains or legal consequences on the perpetrator and expressing social condemnation of the act” (PWN Encyclopedia 2004, p. 378).

Pedagogy speaks about the primary character of punishment, which is based on the stimulus satisfying the basic human needs and about the secondary one, when it results from the acquired social needs. Pedagogues assume that punishment through stress or abandonment of positive reinforcement will inhibit reprehensible actions, while only those forms of punishment that actually lead to the disappearance of undesirable behavior are truly pedagogical. The least severe form of punishment for the offender are verbal warnings, while the most severe, currently very condemned, is inflicting physical pain. Natural punishment, which consists in bearing the consequences of one’s improper behavior, also has its supporters (Kupisiewicz, Kupisiewicz, 2009, p. 75).

In **penology**, criminal punishment is presented as a social and cultural fact. It is defined very broadly as institutionalized social actions resulting from social control. Criminal punishment is designed to meet the needs of individuals and society concerning a sense of social order, justice and security. Individuals who have committed an act that severely violates social order are to be subject to punishment. They are subject to actions aimed at condemning wrongdoing and imposing certain pains on the offender by depriving them of assets. At the same time, these actions are based on respect for the free will and dignity of the individual, imposing a punishment determined by a competent authority, recognition

of the right be pardoned and enabling the subject to return to normal functioning in society (Utrat-Milecki, 2007, p. 58–59).

Criminal punishment is related to the **legal system** of a given country and is imposed for committed crimes, i.e. acts which violate criminal acts and are characterized by visible harmfulness (Ciosek, 2008, p. 319). It is imposed by the state authority on a citizen because of their behavior, which was considered socially reprehensible and deserving of punishment by some form of purposefully imposed pains (Nowak, 2016, p. 29). Seven functions of criminal punishment are distinguished:

- **expiatory punishment**– relates to the offender and is carried out at the stage of serving of the sentence. It enables inmates to make amends for their wrongdoing in the eyes of society, to redeem themselves and to experience moral responsibility for their actions;
- **expressive punishment**– is addressed to the public and covers all stages of serving of a criminal punishment. It shows citizens the efficiency, effectiveness and severity of the justice system;
- **guaranteed punishment**– the setting of specific penalties for specific offences and the guarantee of lack of freedom in the choice of the sentence;
- **punishment through isolation**– is to separate dangerous individuals from the rest of society through imprisonment;
- **just punishment**– gives the society and the victims a sense that justice has been served. It is achieved by inflicting harm equal to the crime committed;
- **rehabilitation**– punishment through imprisonment which assumes that the sentenced person will change their ways, improve the moral side of their behavior and comply with applicable law in the future;
- **preventive punishment**– concerns both the offender and society as a whole. Its purpose is to deter people from committing prohibited acts (Nowak, 2016, p. 29).

Pains related to the serving of a prison sentence

In addition to discussing the pains experienced by people sentenced to imprisonment, I shall describe the phenomenon of prisonization and the concept of recidivism as well. These two topics are important because all my subjects are recidivists, and their statements, at least in part, relate to the pains they experience and the feeling that life is easier for them in prison than living free.

“The pain of imprisonment is related to the change in the fundamental structures of the world being experienced due to being placed in prison” (Żelazek, 2003, p. 81–83). This kind of punishment interferes with time, space and natural social relations of a human being (Żelazek, 2003, p. 81–83). Its abuse has many negative consequences for the convicted person. Isolation leads to the breaking

of social and family ties, deprivation of needs, forced participation in the prison subculture, and after leaving the prison, stigmatization of the convict. However, despite the doubts and many negative consequences, every year thousands of people are sentenced (Ciosek, 2016, p. 50–51).

Pains related to the prison environment can be divided into four aspects, which can be considered an immanent part of the punishment:

- **stimulative aspect**– prisons are poor in stimuli provoking the activity of the human brain. The environment is gray and monotonous, devoid of new information and stimuli, as a result the brain no longer performs its proper functions;
- **spatiotemporal aspect**– prison space is associated with a large number of people of the same sex occupying a limited space. It is connected with the loss of the sense of individuality, resulting in the formation egoistic attitudes in the inmates and violation of individual interpersonal distance, which causes a sense of discomfort in the prisoners. Time for prisoners, on the other hand, is a value that measures the period of isolation and is irretrievably lost for them. They focus on the past and the present, rarely on a future which is uncertain for them;
- **social aspect**– the prison community, consisting of prisoners and prison officers, is a source of great stress for them. The prisoners fear each other, they are constantly afraid of losing their property or being attacked. Conflicts often arise between prisoners and officers regarding obedience, performance of duties and cooperation.
- **functional aspect**– individual value systems of people sent to prison often contradict the values and capabilities of the prison environment, leading to deprivation and frustration (Jezierska, 2008, pp. 90–92).

To the above can be supplemented the **identity aspect**. A prisoner is deprived of their social position, the support of their loved ones and the feeling that their lives are exclusively their own, thereby losing the concept of self. An individual ceases to fulfil the social roles that defined them in some way and has to adapt to the requirements of the environment in which they find themselves. In addition, the prisoner is deprived of their personal belongings, clothes, cosmetics, hygienic utensils, making them unable to create their image. Instead, the prisoner receives these objects from the correctional facility, which are the same for everyone and in the same quantities. A person deprived of freedom is exposed to numerous humiliations by officers and co-prisoners. Moreover, prisons strip people of every bit privacy. This causes the prisoner to lead their life in such a way that they seem to be a stranger to themselves – they lose their sense of identity.

One of the many processes affecting people serving a prison sentence is **prisonization**. This means that over time the prisoner acquires knowledge of the norms and rules that apply in the given prison community, adapts to the rules governing the behavior and relations between prisoners and, over time, adopts

a new attitude and becomes more familiar with the new reality. The prisoner becomes assimilated, so that they suffer less from pains of imprisonment, adapts better, integrates with other prisoners, but also begins to accept crime uncritically. Prisonization is not conducive to effective rehabilitation and limits the adaptability of prisoners released from prison. Overpopulation of prisons, inadequate living conditions, lack of organization of free time for prisoners, the ratio of the number of officers to prisoners, lowering the standards of social security, the resulting dehumanization of prisoners fosters the development and consolidation of prisonization processes. Factors which may hamper the development of this phenomenon include the prisoner's independent and resistant personality, their indifference to the norms and rules of the prison code, strong ties between the prisoner and their family or friends on the outside, their involvement in therapy, work, educational and cultural activities offered by the prison, and a short sentence (Małek, 2009, pp. 135–137).

Recidivism is taken as an indicator of the (in)efficiency of rehabilitation work in prisons. In Poland, the proportion of repeat offenders returning to prison was over 50% of the total prison population in 2016 (Central Board of Prison Service, 2016, p. 23). Research was conducted on the return to crime of people leaving correctional facilities in 5 consecutive years. Between 2010 and 2014, the percentage of people who returned to crime was 25.8%, among whom those who did so in the first year accounted for 50.2% (Strategy and European Funds Department, 2016, p. 2). High results of recidivism mean that despite all efforts and changes, imprisonment does not fulfil its functions and does not bring the expected results (Machel, Chęcińska, 2016, p. 489).

So far, no adequate alternative to imprisonment has been invented. It is necessary to isolate dangerous individuals preventing them from continuing to commit crimes. It also has a general preventive function and deters a part of society from committing crimes. However, imprisonment cannot be regarded as a universal means of punishment and needs to be rationalized. It should be used in case of serious, dangerous criminals who cause enormous damage to society. Persons with short-term sentences or small-time offenders should not be imprisoned as it may lose its deterrent effect and the prisoner may become more demoralized (Machel, Chęcińska, 2016, p. 489). In such cases, non-isolation punishment should be imposed, such as fines, restriction of liberty, community service or serving sentences using the System of Electronic Surveillance (Wirkus, 2016, p. 512–520). First of all, rehabilitation activities should be strengthened and the prisoners should strive to intensify their cooperation with society, especially with their families (Machel, Chęcińska, 2016, p. 503–505).

Punishment and rehabilitation as understood by recidivists from the Prison in Wołów Presentation and analysis of own research results

General description of the situation of the subjects. Introduction

The scientific material concerning the concept of punishment is extensive. There are many definitions, concepts and theories that describe this issue in detail. Scientists such as Boińska, Ciosek, Machel, Pospiszył or Pytka have been describing and discussing criminal punishment for many years, striving to make the concept more precise and adapt it to the requirements of the modern world. The issues of the justness of imprisonment are discussed in detail (Machel, Chęcińska, 2016, p. 481–507), the inconveniences experienced by prisoners during isolation (Piotrowski, Ciosek, 2016, p. 428–460), the factors influencing the effectiveness of imprisonment are analyzed in detail (Żukowska, 2016, p. 56–67). All these theories, ideas and discussions are a sign of the complexity of the matter, but also of the great amount of scientific work.

I, in turn, was intrigued by how the interested party, i.e. people serving a prison sentence, “experiencing” the scientific phenomena described by the authors mentioned above on themselves, understand punishment, and what inconveniences they experience. I was also interested in why one sentence of imprisonment for some people (including my own respondents) is not enough, which is reflected in the fact that after serving their first sentence they return to the life of crime and, as a result, they serve sentences in prisons again.

“Career” as a criminal

At the beginning of the study I asked my respondents to provide some information about themselves, their past and the reasons for their imprisonment. Some of the respondents, when describing themselves, immediately gave information about the crimes committed and the punishment imposed. **B2** mixed the description of family with information about convictions. It seems that these two issues are intertwined and in some way inseparable for this prisoner. The “career” development of a criminal seems to be important as well– the respondent started with minor crimes, moving to increasingly serious crimes with time.

B2 “Well, at the moment I am serving a total of seven and a half years in prison. I come from a large family, because there were eight of us. This isn’t my first time in prison. It’s my seventh sentence, including some sanctions. I get along quite well with my family, [but] not with everyone. It’s not the first time that I’ve been in a penitentiary, and let’s say I started with minor theft, and now I’m here because of some more serious crimes– armed robberies.

B3 also clearly explained at the beginning of the conversation the circumstances of imprisonment and the time spent in prison.

B3 “I’ve been in prison for 11 years now, I’m serving a life sentence. On the outside I traded in various things, especially weapons, then I moved to ATMs, and so it just happened that there were some scores to settle between groups, one person was killed and I was sentenced to life in prison for that.”

The time spent in prison, both during the first and second sentence, and the time remaining until the end of the sentence, was also specified without hesitation by **B6**, but he mentioned the reason for his conviction (attempted murder and murder) much later, while answering a completely different question. Perhaps it was caused by the type of crime that might have frightened me and distanced me from the respondent, which perhaps he wanted to avoid initially.

B6 “I mean, yes, I’m 37, I’ll be 38 this February. I’ve been in prison for 15 years now. It’s my second prison sentence, I’ve done seven and a half years before. I had a four-year break, and I’m serving 17 years in prison. I still have 10 years to go.”

When asked to say something about themselves, the three gentlemen spoke very enigmatically. At first neither of them stated what the reason for their incarceration was and how long the sentence was. **B8** confessed that he was serving a sentence of 2 years and that he had 3 months left before he was released from prison only at the end of the conversation. Similarly, **B7**, who spent the least amount of time in prison of all my respondents, “in total, including the first sentence, it’s only a few months, not even half a year of everything”. At the beginning, **B10** confessed that when he was young, he got long sentences, but discussed the crime much later.

The other respondents admitted that they had committed crimes under the influence of alcohol.

B1 “[...] a traffic accident brought me here.

A: An unfortunate incident?

B: A car accident and I had a few [makes a gesture indicating the consumption of alcohol].

B4 “Frankly, when I was on the outside, I used alcohol from time to time, not to get drunk, but to have a drink somewhere like a normal guy, and after I drank, if someone tried to start something with me, I was already a bit aggressive then. It’s not that I started a fight, but I talked a lot, and from the talking, a brawl would come, and someone would make a phone call and the police would show up, and it’s because of nonsense like that I landed here.”

B5 “And so I would drink, and then got into trouble. [...] well, I’m in prison for muggings and robberies.”

B9 “I started drinking, I started stealing, and extortion, I also did extortion.

The “career in crime” of my respondents began in adolescence and was caused by inappropriate educational patterns and peer relations. The statements of the respondents indicate a tendency described in the literature on the subject. For example, the statistics available show that there is a strong link between crime and alcoholism. People who excessively consume alcohol commit crimes much more frequently than others (Hołyst, 2016, p. 449). According to the statistics of the Polish General Police Headquarters, in 2012, as many as 81% of homicide suspects tested for the use of alcohol were found to be intoxicated. Also, more than half (64%) of those suspected of causing physical injury were under the influence of alcohol. The same applies to those suspected of involvement in a brawl or battery (78%), rape (64%), mugging, robbery and extortion (71%). However, in the case of persons suspected of stealing someone else’s property, where testing for the use of alcohol was possible, only 32% were under the influence of alcohol (Nietrzeźwi... 2018). It is possible that alcohol consumption is conducive to committing certain crimes. I believe that such a high percentage of people who commit crimes under the influence of alcohol is concerning and requires further research.

Meanings attributed to punishment by prisoners of the Correctional Facility for Recidivists in Wołów

Defining the concept of “punishment” turned out to be a difficult task for the respondents. They did not treat this term as an abstract term that applies to the society as a whole and is an important factor in upbringing and education, but when asked about it, immediately referred to themselves and their current situation. Interestingly, four people answered this question indirectly– talking about their attitude towards the punishment received, or generally presented their opinion on the whole criminal justice system. Half of the other respondents expressed the opinion that “punishment” is simply imprisonment (**B2**, **B8**), and thus isolation (**B10**). One prisoner stated that the term “punishment” meant to him “a certain amount of time to reflect on one’s life and behavior, what can be changed in oneself” (**B5**). Another responded (**B4**) put it in similar terms: “But it also gave me a lot, because there was simply time for some reflection, some examination of my conscience, I mean, there were a lot of things, it’s better not to return to the past.”

The other two respondents considered the term to mean being held responsible for their actions, consequence of their actions (**B7**, **B9**). The last three answers seem to be positive. The conclusion is that the respondents understand the purpose of the punishment, take responsibility for their actions and accept the consequences. The other respondents, however, either did not consider their life situation and their choices at all, or accepted what fate brings completely passively.

Respondents' statements mainly concerned punishment in the context of the isolation and rehabilitation function. None of the respondents mentioned the harm done to other people and possible compensation (expiation and just punishment function), nor did anyone admit that punishment could deter anyone from committing a crime (preventive function). Perhaps for them, these functions have no meaning whatsoever, or perhaps they simply had never considered these issues before. It is also possible that public awareness of the concept of punishment is low and the brief answers of the inmates are not of real significance. I believe that the issue requires further research.

The attitude of recidivists towards the punishment imposed

During the interview, I tried to determine the respondents' attitude towards the sentence received, what they considered to be the worst in serving the sentence, what losses they had incurred and whether they noticed any change in themselves (as a result of the imprisonment).

Each of the respondents presented a slightly different view of their punishment. **B1** believed that the sentence was too lenient and felt that he deserved the punishment. He also declared that he accepted the court's decision and wanted to serve the sentence with humility and actively, so as not to waste time.

B1 "I mean, from my point of view, the way I see it, I deserve this punishment and that's why I am serving it this way, meaning I accepted it. Humility. I mean, I'm trying to actively serve this sentence."

I noted a similar attitude in **B8**, who admitted that he should have been sent to prison long before his sentence. However, I did not observe in him the humility and acceptance of fate, which were very evident in **B1**. One could rather get the impression that **B8** was indifferent to his fate and not caring where he was.

A completely different approach was presented by **B2**, who openly stated that "even a punishment of five years of prison won't scare me"—expressing his demoralization. He admitted that his sentence was adequate to the crime, but he was not impressed by it and was not concerned about it, he said "I will steal 200,000-worth of stuff and I can do my five years in peace, because it's hard to earn this kind of money in a month or two living a honest life on the outside."

For **B4**, being in prison was a "break in life, behind the walls, being locked up." As I have already mentioned, **B4** used his time in prison to reflect on his life and conduct an examination of conscience. However, he did not fully accept the court's decision. As he himself puts it:

B4 "[...] they look at the code, not the man, because I'm in prison for some minor nonsense and the sentence was unsuspended because of my..., I talked too much and that's why I'm here, because if it wasn't for that, my probation would have ended a year ago, because I had a suspended sentence. But the probation officer unsuspended it, just because she wanted to, and that's what happened."

B9 also expressed a certain disagreement with the punishment imposed, believing that he had received too high a sentence. **B10** had a similar opinion, believing that he received the current punishment only because he is a recidivist and not because of the seriousness of the crime. However, **B3** found that the court's decision was "inadequate to his life." He was sentenced to imprisonment at an early age, and a long sentence deprived him of the chance for a normal life.

B3 "In my opinion, the punishments that are imposed by the courts are inadequate to crimes that people commit. Because if you sentence someone to 25 years of prison and he was 19 when he was arrested, I mean, I understand that he committed a crime, but I don't think the punishment is adequate to that person's life, right? He will spend more in prison than being a free man."

According to research, the sense of harm is a common phenomenon among inmates, and may even suppress the sense of guilt for committed crimes (Boińska 2016b, p. 76). Similar conclusions can be drawn from the statements made by my respondents. As I mentioned earlier, the respondents do not see the function of just punishment, which may be associated with a lack sense of guilt. However, the sense of harm which replaces guilt may significantly hinder the process of rehabilitation, because inmates search for guilt outside of themselves and do not take responsibility for their actions. The sense of guilt and harm in prisoners is a very interesting and important subject that requires further research.

A quite clear consensus among the respondents on the subject of the most difficult or the worst aspect of imprisonment is noticeable. It turned out that the most troublesome aspect of imprisonment was monotony (**B2**, **B5**, **B7**, **B8**), not being able to with one's family (**B2**, **B4**, **B9**) and the fact of constantly being locked in a cell with other inmates (**B2**, **B3**, **B6**). In addition, two of the respondents considered that the worst for them was simply "the lack of freedom" (**B3**, **B4**), while two others indicated the feeling of powerlessness (**B1**, **B10**). In addition, **B6**, who has been transferred between different prisons numerously, admitted that the transfers are very cumbersome, as are the sudden changes of cells. **B10**, on the other hand, pointed to the inability to decide for oneself and the lack of logic of the prison system (perhaps he meant bureaucracy, the abundance of regulations and rules, but did not put it very clearly).

B10 "There's no logic. The basic thing you learn when you come to prison is there's no use trying to find logic of this life. When someone has at least a little bit intelligence, it's... I mean, I meet people who, for example, read the code and say 'but it's written here'. Well, it is written there, but it's only in writing, I'm telling you, when you start to face this government official machine, they'll explain it to you."

Table 1. Inconveniences and difficulties related to serving a prison sentence in scientific terms

Pain of imprisonment according to G.M. Sykes	The most difficult aspects of serving a prison sentence according to the respondents – recidivists from the Prison in Wołów
Deprivation of material and services facilities and amenities	monotony
Deprivation of freedom; restriction of contacts with family and friends	inability to be with one's family
Deprivation of a sense of security	being constantly locked in a cell with other people
Deprivation of autonomy, the ability to decide for oneself	"lack of freedom"
Deprivation of heterosexual contacts	sense of helplessness
	transfers between different prisons and/or sudden changes of cells
	lack of possibility to decide for oneself
	the lack of logic in the organization of the prison system

Source: Chmielewska J. *"Jestem bezsilna, mogę popłakać w ukryciu" – kobiety skazane na kary długoterminowe o dolegliwościach pobytu w więzieniu* „Resocjalizacja Polska” issue no. 13, 2017, p. 150 and in the opinions of the surveyed prisoners

Despite many inconveniences, the respondents did not have much to say about the losses experienced due to their imprisonment. They spoke about it in a rather superficial way. For example, **B8**, a father of two children (7 and 10 years old), considered that due to the isolation he had lost a lot of when it comes to contact with his sons. Similarly, **B2** pointed to a loosening of family ties, but also to a loss of time, which was also mentioned by **B3**. For the **B6**, who spent his childhood travelling around the world, the greatest harm is the inability to continue travelling. On the other hand, **B1** pointed to more emotional losses. He admitted that long prison sentence leaves people with a sense of fear, anxiety and uncertainty.

Despite the losses and inconveniences, the respondents also noticed positive changes in themselves, which were sparked as a result of their imprisonment. The vast majority of them admitted that they had time to think, to examine their consciences, to change the way of thinking, their worldview or attitude (**B1**, **B2**, **B3**, **B4**, **B5**, **B8**, **B9**). Several of the inmates stated that they became more balanced and stable as a result of their punishment (**B4**, **B8**, **B9**). **B7** admitted that he discovered that he did not want to go back to prison "and to what was before". He added, however, that whether this proves to be true "will turn out on the other side", as if he wasn't quite sure about his decisions. **B9** in addition to declaring to have reflected a lot on himself and calmed down, he said:

B9 “I was an alcoholic. I’m not trying to hide it. I used to drink a lot, right? And drinking was the most important thing to me. Now, being here, in prison, I become a workaholic.”

This is a worrying statement, as the transition from one addiction to another is common to many addicts and is not a sign of full recovery. The trap of a substitute addiction should be noticed by a psychologist, who should make the prisoner aware of it and possibly direct him into addiction therapy in order to work on the mechanism of addictive regulation of emotions (Ginowicz, 2004, [2018]).

B10 has not experienced any positive changes in himself. He believes that the long prison sentences makes it impossible for him to find his place in interpersonal relations on the outside:

B10 “I know that there is a problem with my psyche in the sense that I have served 10 or 15 years, I don’t participate in the life out there, I don’t know certain patterns, and if I do know some, it’s from books, films or stories. When I get released and, for example, I start a relationship or something like that, and something goes wrong and I do not know how to react, I haven’t learnt it like most normally functioning people have, who had one, two or three relationships when they were 20 years old, because I was in prison at the time.”

The respondent pointed out that he knows how to function mainly in prison, knows the appropriate reactions and defense mechanisms, which are completely useless and incomprehensible for a free man.

B10 “Either the partner says after a year that it’s cool, you don’t drink, you don’t take drugs, you work, but you don’t talk to me, you don’t share your problems, for example. And I say: listen, but sharing is hard for me, because nobody does that in prison, nobody shares with anyone.”

The inmate’s statements suggest that he has experienced prisonization. Being sentenced to long imprisonment, he has adopted behavioral patterns appropriate to the prison environment, which are not applicable to life outside of prison and sometimes even hinder proper functioning in society. In this case, the emotional sphere and the ability to talk about it suffered the most, resulting in the inmate’s problems in establishing close interpersonal relations.

On the basis of the interviews, I managed to identify strategies for coping with the difficult prison conditions my respondents face. Some of the inmates admitted that isolation from others was the most suitable under these conditions.

B1 “I separated myself from this life in prison by putting up a small wall and I just don’t cross this wall. Of course, I have to take an active part in these classes, I have to participate in some way. But I try not to cross this wall and not to let anyone through the wall. This the way I do it.”

B3 “I’m a single cell now, because I’m simply tired of listening to some people, their stupidity, their lectures, so in my opinion the more time a person has for themselves, the more they can learn to understand and this the way it should be done in prisons.”

B10 “I do isolate myself. I isolate myself from people who don’t know much about life.”

In the case of **B6**, creating a “wall”, isolating oneself from others took the form of obsessive care of hygiene:

B6 “I kind of noticed that it’s making me separate myself with a kind of a wall. That hygiene, right, everything’s clean, it’s like I’m home, right? That’s how I feel more comfortable, it’s kind of like I’m running away from this place, right?”

According to research, the prison population is characterized by a high number of chronic or sexually transmitted diseases and mental disorders (depression, psychotic states, neuroses). Probably the reason is the chronic stress experienced by inmates in prisons (Piotrowski, Ciosek, 2016, p. 448). It may be that **B6**’s obsessive hygiene is a sign of neurosis and the inmate should undergo regular psychological therapy.

Other prisoners coped with the prison by being involved in various activities (**B4**) or work (**B9**). For **B9**, thinking about family and contacts with family gave him a lot of strength and motivation to change and overcome various difficulties. **B2**, on the other hand, talked about how he suppresses negative emotions, not expresses them, just have an aggressive outburst later on. He did not see anything wrong with it, he described it as his way of dealing with aggression and did not agree to any help either by a psychologist or a correctional counselor.

B2 “But that was not what I expected, because I know how to deal with aggression. I know it in my own way and let’s just say that neither the counselor nor the psychologist will help me. I suppress these emotions, but when my inner-jug fills to the brim, the handle will break and I’ll explode.”

The recidivists’ opinion on imprisonment, alternative forms of punishment, prison as a place of punishment and the reasons for recidivism

During the interview I asked the respondents about their opinion on the prison sentence, what they thought about alternative forms of punishment, such as community service or electronic surveillance, and what they thought about prison as a place of punishment.

As far as imprisonment is concerned, the prevailing opinion was that isolation is necessary to maintain social order and prevent the individual from continuing to commit crimes, especially serious ones (**B5**, **B6**, **B7**, **B8**, **B10**). It may be stated that the awareness of the respondents on the elimination function of

imprisonment is rather high, while the deterrent or corrective function was not mentioned by practically anyone. Perhaps this is due to their personal attitude, their lack of fear of punishment or their disbelief in rehabilitation, and perhaps they do not see such options at all in relation to imprisonment, which they only see in terms of isolation.

According to **B3**, punishment give a person willing to reflect the time to think, but for other people it can be nothing more than spending time idly. He also believes that the sentences are inadequate to the crimes committed.

B3 "I think that the punishment in itself is good, because in a sense it can somehow influence a person, so they can sit down and think about themselves, of course if they're willing to do it. In my opinion, the punishments that are imposed by the courts are inadequate to crimes that people commit."

B4 expressed a similar opinion, he admitted that in his opinion "not everything is fair, not everything is as it should be, because everyone looks at the code, not at the person". However, **B10** drew attention to the changes in the Penal Code, which he considered to be good, such as not being sentenced to prison for cycling under the influence of alcohol. However, he also believes that the punishments for recidivists will never change. The bitterness on this subject, a certain sense of injustice was evident.

B10 "I have an example, I recently had a hearing in which the judge herself said that if I had not been a recidivist, I would have probably ended up with some kind of, I do not know, stay of proceedings or something."

Perhaps because of this, the sense of injustice or inadequacy of the sentences, all the inmates expressed positive opinions in favor of alternative types of punishment. The respondents pointed out that such punishments do not result in losing the family ties (**B2**, **B7**) and it are less costly for the state, which does not have to finance the prisoner in prison (**B3**). However, my respondents admitted that electronic surveillance or community service are good for minor offences (**B6**, **B10**) or for first convictions (**B8**), while isolation is good in case of murderers (**B5**). Three respondents admitted that they would be willing to work off their sentences (**B4**, **B9**) and that this would be a more perceptible form of punishment (**B10**).

Whereas as there was a relative consensus on the subject of alternative punishment, it was not the case when the respondents were asked about prison as a place of punishment. The opinions were extremely different. **B1** admitted that staying in prison stigmatizes a person for life, while **B2** admitted that some "treat the prison as a sanatorium, a form of escape from drugs and alcohol, because some abuse those, and here they're able to escape from that for some time, take a break from it and then get out again". For **B3** prison is a place where one

can contemplate their life choices, change for the better or “if someone doesn’t want to, they’ll make some friends on the inside and try to continue with what they did before”. In turn **B6** claims that people in prison feel anxious and live in a lot of stress, in constant readiness fend for oneself. **B9** had a completely different opinion, because he did not feel any inconvenience connected with being in prison, perhaps because he spent most of his time at work outside of prison. **B8** decided that all prisons are the same, while in the opinion of **B10** “every prison in Poland is different and everyone does what they want”. Such differences in opinion about prison as a place of punishment may be a result of personal and life situation differences between the respondents. For one person, imprisonment is a terrible experience that will be difficult to forget, and for another, it is a break from the even worse reality awaiting on the outside.

I asked the respondents what they thought were the reasons for the recidivism, why one punishment was not enough and why people return to prison. The answers were different, although the prevailing opinion was that if someone did not have a family, a home or a livelihood, it was easier for them to commit a crime and return to prison where they had guaranteed living conditions (**B3**, **B4**, **B8**, **B9**, **B10**). There have also been voices that some people are not able to live a different life (**B2**, **B3**, **B4**, **B5**, **B9**), that committing crimes is easier than living honestly (**B6**), that some people do better in prison than on the outside (**B2**), and that some people are not willing to reflect and continue to make the same mistakes (**B4**). Three respondents considered that the cause of the recidivism was alcohol, drugs, unemployment/lack of money and bad company (**B5**, **B7**, **B8**). **B8** also pointed to emotions, as did **B6**, who talked about his problems with controlling his behavior. The failure to deal with aggression was also mentioned by **B2**. Additionally, **B2** saw the causes of recidivism in external factors, e.g. too low wages for honest work, ill-prepared society.

B2 “One reason is that society is not prepared, the other is that some people have never worked before in their lives. [...] But when look at it, say, I earn two, two and a half thousand a month, but doing a certain thing and I can make even ten times that amount in literally 10–15 minutes, I will choose to go down that bad road rather than to work hard on a construction site or anywhere else.”

B10 also pointed to external causes, considered that post-penitentiary assistance was insufficient and the probation officers did not provide enough help.

B10 “For example, I get out of prison after 10 years and say, I get parole after 9 and a half years instead of doing the full 11 and a half years. Is anyone interested in this? I mean, I know where to go, I have a father, my father has a company, I don’t work there, but the probation officer comes once a month and asks some questions. If a man doesn’t sort things out for himself, then he has nothing like that, there is this post-penitentiary assistance or something like that.”

None of the respondents pointed to prisons or prison sentences as reasons for recidivism. Although in scientific research, the level of recidivism is an indicator of the effectiveness of a punishment (Żukowska, 2016, p. 56–67), the respondents did not link these two factors at all. In their opinion, certain issues from the “outside” world are the reasons to continue committing crimes. It is possible that prisoners do not treat the prison at all as a place where they can learn to function better in society, but rather as a “hideout” where they can take a break from the hardships of life having guaranteed living conditions.

Summary

The attitudes and opinions of the respondents on the subject of criminal punishment, imprisonment or the prison itself were very diverse, partly positive, partly negative. This may depend on their personality traits, type of crimes committed and/or the life stories of the inmates. A similar distinction was noted in the statements of American prisoners published in 1989 by M. Cambi and in the personal notes of H. Machel. They often talked about broken family ties, lack of privacy, but also about time for reflection and change for the better (Machel, Chęcińska, 2016, p. 498–500). In my research, these issues were emphasized by the respondents.

I was concerned with what the inmates said about the lack of logic in the prison system, the inadequacy of the sentences and the way in which they talked about their crimes. **B1** speaking about the car accident he caused by under the influence of alcohol, said that “suddenly something happened”, as if he did not take responsibility for their act, decision taken, and it was just a fate. **B2**, on the other hand, said that “at some point the police decided to take my driving license away”, suggesting that he had no influence over his life. **B3** spoke in similar manner.

B3 “But the probation officer unsuspended it, just because she wanted to.”

His return to prison was not due to his behavior, but to the animosity of the probation officer towards him. **B5**, on the other hand, believes that his actions were the result of alcohol, drugs and bad company.

B5 “I know I only need one beer to get me going. [...] I am simply aware that if I start drinking, doing drugs, I will of course come back to my friends and it will be the same, there will be a bet and I will be back to the starting point.”

Only **B7** and **B8**, the two people who were reluctant to speak and quickly ended the interview, admitted that their imprisonment was a result of their actions.

All the statements, opinions and attitudes of my respondents lead me to conclude that there is a very low sense of coherence among my respondents. In their opinion, life is unpredictable, incomprehensible and that they have very little real influence over a lot of things. This conclusion is confirmed by scientific studies on criminal behavior. According to these, criminals have a low sense of comprehensibility, as evidenced by:

- the lack of reflection on the consequences of one's own actions,
- favoring concrete thinking over abstract thinking,
- tendency to transfer responsibility for their actions to external factors,
- inadequate assessment of a situation, especially from the perspective of other people,
- problems with setting, formulating and achieving own goals (Niewiadomska, 2007, p. 319).

In addition, people who commit crimes are affected by cognitive distortions, which manifest themselves in an incorrect image of themselves, transferring responsibility for their actions to other people, minimizing the damage resulting from their own antisocial behavior (Niewiadomska, 2007, p. 319). A similar attitude can be observed in my respondents' answers.

Final thoughts

To sum up, according to the respondents, punishment means imprisonment and isolation, which for some is an unpleasant pain in itself, and for others is a time for contemplation. However, alternative types of punishment, i.e. electronic surveillance or community service, are a good idea according to the surveyed prisoners and should be used more frequently. On the basis of the analysis of the interviews I have shown that the inmates showcase features and behaviors that have been revealed in other studies, e.g. a sense of injustice that suppresses guilt, and that they experience a process of prisonization and numerous pains, also widely described by scientists. In turn the prisoners' understanding of the term "punishment" decisively differs from scientific theories. The inmates had problems with defining this abstract word and saw only a part of the function of punishment, most often those that directly affected them (isolation, rehabilitation function).

Our knowledge of the mechanisms governing the actions of people who commit crimes is growing. Also, the processes taking place in people during their imprisonment are being described in a much better way. And yet there is still a lot to explore. The most important issue is addiction among prisoners, which seems to be a common problem in the prison environment. It would be worthwhile to examine the addicted inmates' awareness of the mechanisms for governing the addict's action, their attitude towards substance use and their opinion about the therapies carried out in prison. I also believe that a study should be carried out

on the understanding of the concept of punishment among people who do not come into contact with the prison system, perhaps the awareness of its functions and objectives is generally low and it would be advisable to work with the entire of society, and not just with those excluded from it.

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