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Renata Szczepanik
University of Łódź [renata.szczepanik@now.uni.lodz.pl]

Experiences of parents of individuals labeled as a deviant

Abstract: The article is devoted to the problems of parents of convicts and those who are struggling with alcohol or drug addiction problems. It is the parents' shared experience that because of violations of moral and legal norms their adult children are labeled as deviants. Parents who undertake efforts to help and support their child in struggling with the consequences of deviant activity are in a special situation. Scientific analyses devoted exclusively to the problems of such parents are rare. In this paper I will trace the results of research to date and show that although the basic problems of all members of families of prisoners or those with substance abuse problems are universal, there are some that apply only to parents. It is the questioning by the community of their parental skills and blaming the mothers for the problems of the child, as well as depriving them of the moral right to experience loss and separation from the child who went to prison or disappeared from the parents' lives as a result of addiction. Moreover, attention is drawn to the strong tensions within the parental role due to the collision of the system of professed values and experienced emotions.
Key words: parents, adult child-parent relations, parents of prisoners, parents of children with abuse problems, stigmatization.

Introduction

The addiction to psychoactive substances, often lasting for many years, and the accompanying process of psychosocial degeneration, as well as breaking the law – especially recidivism, result in people being labeled as deviants. And even if some of the deviant behaviors remain in the sphere of discussions about health

and disorders or are analyzed as consequences of defective conditions of growing up, they still arouse resentment and the rebellious perpetrators are shunned by society. In such situation of significant social degradation, it happens that the few people who remain by the side of the "deviant" and are constantly battling to change their life situation are their parents, especially mothers (Płachcińska 1999; Szczepanik 2020).

The issue of adult child – parents' relations has been discussed in the scientific literature in various contexts. It is most often taken up when analyzing the needs and problems of providing care for aging parents (e.g. Pillemer, Suitor 2006; Rosochacka-Gmitrzak, Racław 2015) and of gaining independence by children (e.g. Wojciechowska 2008). The problems of parents and their relations with adult, already independent children undergoing a crisis caused by their serious life problems or socially deviant behavior are very rarely described (Greenfield, Marks 2006). This does not mean, however, that there is no such research, or that the meticulous analysis of data presented in studies devoted to family problems does not provide interesting findings that can be applied only to fathers and mothers. This paper is the result of such analyses. Their aim is to identify the dominant experiences of mothers and fathers of those labeled as socially derailed, particularly in the context of their efforts to improve their child's life situation.

The group of parents whose problems will be discussed include those who have experience of their child being in prison, as well as those whose adult daughters and sons abuse alcohol or struggle with drug addiction. Most often, if such parents are included in studies of family environment of people with addiction or convicted of committing crimes, they are part of the group referred to by the capacious term family members or closest relatives (Gueta 2018; Szczepanik, Okólska 2018). In the next section of the paper I will investigate and describe individual problems based on findings from studies presented in contemporary scientific literature (Polish and English-language). The main criterion for the selection of research papers was their complete focus on fathers and mothers of persons violating moral or legal norms (less frequently) or at least the presence of separate data allowing the identification of parents' experiences and problems (more frequently).

I will begin my analysis by presenting the studies that provide much insight into the problems of parents. I will separately discuss those whose adult children are in prison and those whose sons and daughters are struggling with the social consequences of addiction. Next, I will list and describe common experiences and problems that arise from being a parent of a child in conflict with the law and evoking negative reactions from the community as a result of addiction. In this paper I will demonstrate that while the primary experiences and concerns of all family members of individuals with problems of addiction or imprisonment are universal, e.g., anxiety, separation, helplessness, shame, and sharing the burden of the sentence (Comfort 2009; Szczepanik, Okólska 2018), there are particular ones that apply only to parents.

Parents of convicted individuals

In the academic literature there is data from studies conducted in prisons that conclude that it is parents, especially mothers, rather than other family members or loved ones who are the people that most frequently visit prisoners, both male and female (Murray 2003; Condry 2006, Duwe, Clark 2013; Turanovic, Tasca 2019). It may come as a surprise, then, that studies devoted to the specific problems of parents of convicted persons are rare. The shortage of research with their participation has been recognized by contemporary researchers and in the last few years the scientific literature has been enriched with empirical works that place the experiences of precisely these family members in the center of attention (McCarthy, Adams 2019; Gueta 2018; Benisty et al. 2020; Cieślikowska-Ryczko 2021 in print).

The reasons for the lack of insightful research in this area should be sought not so much in the researchers' disregard and failure to recognize the importance of the topic. Quite the contrary, this gap has been repeatedly pointed out by scholars when discussing complex problems of prisoners' relations with their relatives (e.g. Codd 2013). Rather, it is a matter of the difficulty of accessing potential respondents. An in-depth analysis of these very problems is made by Angelika Cieślikowska-Ryczko (2021 in print), who has undertaken research involving parents of imprisoned children in recent years in Poland.

What issues of parents of prisoners can be extracted from the empirical works to date? Karen Gueta (2018) reviewed data from interviews with families that were presented in ten articles in the scholarly literature between 2000 and 2016. In almost all of the studies, parents usually represented a small proportion of the total number of family members surveyed. The subjects of the research she described were: types of relationships with convicts, methods of providing support to the imprisoned, the impact of imprisonment on the social situation of families, tensions concerning gender roles accompanying women at different stages of the conviction of the man they were close to, problems related to child care, reorganization of family life as a consequence of imprisonment, and difficulties related to the organization and course of visits in prison. Virtually none of the parental experiences highlighted by the researcher provided clear conclusions allowing one to say that the problems and emotional responses differ from those of other family members. Especially if the parents were the sole or primary providers of support, the child's imprisonment was a challenge and caused a significant reorganization in many areas of life, including relationships with the environment. The problems of collateral consequences of imprisonment and secondary punishment well-recognized by Gueta apply to all family members who provide support to the convict and are in constant contact with them. However,

what draws attention is the manifestation of unconditional love for the child, especially maternal love. This is perhaps best captured in the sentence quoted in the study under discussion: "He's a murderer, but he's still my son" (Howarth, Rock 2000, p. 69).

Parents of children convicted of a crime, as well as other family members, face the problem of stigmatization and shame. The situation is even more difficult when the crime the children have committed is more condemned and particularly shameful, such as acts of pedophilia (Levenson, Tewksbury 2009). The situation of sex offenders is a particular kind of "test" of the bond. It happens that mothers put all their own issues aside and devote all their energies to saving their adult child and making sure that they find the strength to carry on while in prison (Condry 2006, p. 105).

Noticeable is the crisis of values leading to changes in personal definitions of parental roles. For example, mothers admit that under the impact of the imprisonment of their adult child they revise previous resolutions and break promises of "steadfastness" and plans to cut the relationship with the child if they were to go down the wrong path (Benisty et al. 2020). Sometimes the transformations affect deep layers of identity, especially if the type of crime evokes particular condemnation or disgust. Parents experience a degradation of their hitherto status. Their identity as a decent and reputable person is lost. It is replaced by that of "a mother of a murderer and rapist" (Gueta 2018). Women experience these identity changes even physically, by feeling tainted, dirty. Interestingly, some women engage in specific work on this identification. They oppose defining their parenting solely through the lens of their child's conviction and demand the burden of shame be lifted from their shoulders and the recognition that "there are many children of good parents in prison." (Gueta 2018, p. 775).

Studies reveal that some parents (especially mothers representing the middle class) try to engage in dialogue with the prison management in order to improve their child's situation (e.g. access to education, work in prison). These actions constitute a strategy for reaffirming their parental responsibility for children in prison. At the same time, researchers report relatively rare success in their efforts (McCarthy, Adams 2019).

Negative experiences with prison and a sense of disregard for parental problems on the part of the system causes a serious disturbance in the system of values and a decrease in trust not only towards the justice system institutions, but towards the state in general (cf. Condry, Minson 2020). Israeli researchers (Benisty et al. 2020) have even found that parental methods of coping with the sense of rejection and isolation include manifesting resentment against the country that fails to fulfill its functions towards loyal taxpayers and patriots (e.g., by boycotting public holidays).

Parents of convicted persons often appear in scientific publications devoted to the organization of visits and dealing with overcoming difficulties in commuting to

prisons (Christian 2005; Holligan 2016). Unfriendly structure of public transport, especially in winter, and cumbersome procedures of prison visits represent a problem particularly for an elderly person. For parents whose household budget was not based on their adult child's income, they are sometimes faced with a choice: medical treatment or travel and making a package to prison. They often choose the second option at the expense of giving up their own needs, especially those related to their health (Gueta 2018).

Parents of individuals with alcohol and drug addiction

Harmful drinking and drug abuse are at the top of the list of problematic behaviors of adult children that engage parental attention and concern in the first place (Birditt et al. 2010, Szczepanik 2020). However, as in the case of families of convicts, the interest of researchers tends to focus on life partners and children of people diagnosed with addiction receiving help from various institutions and therapies (Szczepanik, Okólska 2018). What problems are characteristic of families and relatives associated with alcohol or drug abusers? The list is long and the issue is well described in the scientific literature (Szczepanik, Okólska 2018). If an addicted child has a close relationship with their mother and father, lives with them, or returns to the home where they grew up after a period of independence, the parents' daily experiences are no different than those of other relatives (Szczepanik 2020).

Research on mothers of adult children diagnosed with drug addiction stands out as a separate section of knowledge in scientific studies much more clearly than on parents of convicts or harmful drinkers (Trębińska-Szumigraj 2010; Feigelman et al. 2011; Zucker 2014; Dion 2014). Some of their experiences are probably similar to the problems of mothers of "alcoholics". The common denominator here is, for example, the mechanism of the addiction process and the interpretation of problems by the environment as a "culpable violation of social rules" (Wciórka, Wciórka 2000, p. 353).

The factor differentiating these two groups of parents is their age and the dynamics of deterioration of the child's health and social situation. Typically the process of psychosocial degradation caused by harmful drinking is longer than in the case of drug addiction. As a result, it happens that parents realize the extent of the damage only after many years of treating such drinking as a marginal problem (Szczepanik 2020).

The scheme of providing support to a family with an addiction problem includes referring individual family members to therapy. This is accompanied by a strongly rooted, especially in addiction therapy practice, image of the person close to the "alcoholic" or "drug addict" who is codependent and fosters the development of problems (Szczepanik, Okólska 2018). Research with the

participation of parents of harmful drinkers indicates that they are reluctant to take on the role of a patient. It happens that they avoid any contact with institutions, focusing all their activity on hiding the "family problem" and reducing the damage on their own. The experience of staff at addiction treatment and social service centers shows that people turn to institutions as a last resort, when the problem is so advanced that it is too late for constructive change (Szczepanik 2020).

Experts divide parents of addicted individuals into "difficult" and "easier" parents. The "difficult parent" is one who goes to counseling expecting a miracle cure and a ready-made solution. The "easier parents" have prior experience with the alcohol problem in their family of origin or their marriage. Sometimes they have previously been patients of the same institutions and the same therapists to whom they come again, this time seeking help for their son (Szczepanik 2020).

Parental (co-)responsibility for problems of adult children

As Karen Gueta (2018) rightly points out, for many parents, the imprisonment of their adult son or daughter is a consequence of many years of criminal activity or trouble adhering to norms since childhood. Also, in the case of drug and alcohol addiction, it happens that problematic use of psychoactive substances in adulthood does not come as a surprise to parents. Rather, what surprises them is the intensity and extent of the damage and the helplessness (their own and of those around them) in dealing with the problem (Szczepanik 2020).

Of course, not all adulthood deviant activity is preceded by disturbances of behavior in adolescence. Both being in conflict with the law and harmful drinking or reaching for drugs may begin in adulthood, with no prior history of such activity (e.g., as a consequence of one's job, being subject to temptation or persuasion, etc.) (Szczepanik 2015; 2020). Regardless of the period of initiation, parents raise questions about the causes of their son's or daughter's deviant activity and often look for blame in their own failures or attitudes (Szczepanik 2020). Unfortunately, there are a number of circumstances conducive to self-blame.

Inducing guilt and blaming parents for the disturbed behavior of the adult child is fostered by oppressive-cultural ideals of motherhood and a specific culture of blaming mothers (Warner 2005), social stereotypes, as well as therapeutic and diagnostic practices (Allan 2004). All of these conditions are closely related.

The role of the woman in the family is constructed around responsibility for the well-being of all family members. "A good mother" puts the needs of her children before her own. This is why it is mothers in particular who are blamed when "something goes wrong" and in the first place they are accused of being overprotective or too distant (Condry 2013, p. 70). Over many decades, the oppressive-cultural ideals of motherhood have fostered the construction of theories and speculation about the extent of their responsibility. Paula J. Caplan

and Ian Hall-McCorquodale (1985) analyzed numerous professional articles and found that mothers have been blamed in the case of more than seventy different types of children's problems. There are well-known theories about a rejecting mother being the cause of autism and schizophrenia or an overprotective mother being responsible for her son's homosexuality that have persisted in psychiatry for many years. For years, working mothers have been blamed for minors committing crimes because of their professional activity (Ladd-Taylor, Umansky 1998).

An interesting and detailed review of such research was conducted by Rachel Condry (2006). She presented an entire list of studies of particular types of offenders and risk factors inherent in the family of origin indicated by researchers (e.g. influence of mother on incestuous behavior of sons, links between parents' divorce and committing homicides). The researcher noticed that sometimes a detailed analysis of the statistics shattered initial beliefs and the authors of the investigations admitted their surprise at the results, e.g., finding that the vast majority of killers do not come from a dysfunctional family environment. When, in another publication, Condry (2013, pp. 70–74) looks at the long history of accusing parents, especially mothers, for children's malbehavior, she concludes that women are accused of what they did (commission), what they did not do (omission), and what they do (continuation). Women (mothers, wives) who live under one roof with partners, sons labeled as deviants are attacked and blamed for not noticing the symptoms and recognizing the danger in time. Especially mothers are criticized for not preventing their son's or daughter's deviant behavior and the tragedy despite knowing their child. They are therefore under attack for hiding disturbing signals or pretending not to notice them (Condry 2013).

Particularly susceptible to the internalization of allegations of responsibility are mothers of individuals who have been convicted of sex crimes and homicide. Such women are convinced of their own guilt, especially their own failure to act. The feeling of guilt and responsibility is reinforced by rejection from friends or ostentatious neighborhood isolation (Jackson, Mannix 2004). As a result, women who are trapped between accusations, responsibilities, and parental emotions decide on "conspiracy motherhood" (Szczepanik 2020, p. 2013). In secret, they provide support for their child condemned by the environment to exile and isolation.

The situation of parents of sex offenders is particularly difficult. A considerable number of scientific studies offer elaborate explanations of the causes of criminal behavior stemming from the family. Although the phenomenon of sexual abuse and violence is very complex in nature and cannot be explained by analyzing single factors, the study of family upbringing and the role of parents in the etiology of sexual crime has attracted the attention of numerous researchers (e.g. Craissati et al. 2002; Szymańska-Pytlińska, Szumski 2014; Alexander 2014). One can easily find conclusions from expert papers that the environment in which sexual assault perpetrators were raised directly or indirectly contributes to the deviant nature of their sex lives (e.g., Dąbkowska 2017).

Condry (2013) points out that it is not without reason that the motif of the mother-child relationship is eagerly used in film scripts about serial offenders. According to her, a factor that reinforces the conditions conducive to blaming women and holding them responsible for children's problematic behavior is the presence in the media discourse of clear tendencies to analyze family upbringing and to present the family of origin of notorious offenders. The attention of the public opinion, in cases of perpetrators of violence that arouse widespread resentment, particularly young people, is keenly directed by the media to the parents (Melendez et al. 2016; Pickett 2017). The most moving example of the intensity and reality of the discussed problem of the sense of responsibility for the child is the peculiar understanding that the Japanese society has for the suicide of parents whose daughter or son commits a heinous crime (Benedict 2005).

Also therapists, when analyzing the sources of maladaptive behavior, tend to focus on patients' relationships with their parents, particularly with their mothers (Allan 2004). A logical consequence of seeing problems in the behavior of parents is the formulation of expectations that they should seek therapy. However, while examining one's parenting makes sense in the case of young mothers and fathers, it is questionable to plan support for a person with very extensive consequences of years of drinking by encouraging aging mothers and fathers to participate in therapy. The research involving such parents reveals that they give the referral to such therapies the meaning of changing the definition of the problem: from being victims of their son or daughter's harmful drinking, they become co-dependent, that is, responsible for this drinking (Szczepanik 2020).

Sometimes mothers are targeted by institutions of social control and are obliged to work on their parenting if their child's behavior is disturbed (Peters 2012). It also happens that they attribute to therapeutic intervention the meaning of "disciplining their love" towards the problematic child. Especially addiction therapists working with parents of harmful drinkers emphasize that guilt is a frequent reason for seeking help, and parents come to therapy seeking absolution (Szczepanik 2020).

It is worth adding that locating the source of problems by the parents themselves in their own deviant past is a painful experience. The scientific literature has reported a sense of guilt manifested by fathers who are ex-convicts or recidivists and feel remorse that their sons have followed in their footsteps (Szczepanik 2015; Gueta 2018).

Types of parental loss

The losses of parents of individuals suffering from significant social derailment or the stigma of deviance are different from those experienced by other family members. They can be described as physical and symbolic. The former include

separation from and no access to the child because of their imprisonment, vagrancy, or states of permanent intoxication (Gueta 2018; Szczepanik 2020), loss of a sense of security and joy in interacting with one's own child because of their disturbed behavior (e.g. Halsey, Deegan 2012; Szczepanik 2020), severed or broken bonds with their children's children (e.g., Szczepanik 2020), loss or fewer friends (e.g., Jackson, Mannix 2004), health losses due to the stress and anxiety experienced and the financial burden of providing support to the derailed child (Gueta 2018; Szczepanik 2020). When describing the various symptoms of emotional reactions that she identified from the content of interviews with parents of imprisoned children, Gueta (2018) finds that they resemble the symptoms of mourning after the death of a loved one. She gives examples of the pain associated with separation from the child, such as: despair at the sight of an empty chair, lack of appetite, a sense of emptiness and a huge failure in life.

In the second group of losses, the loss of faith in the power of one's motherhood and the possibility of having a positive influence on one's own child (Szczepanik 2020), changes in identity, e.g. from being the mother of a successful child to the mother of a pedophile (Gueta 2018), and the loss of the perspective of a so-called "peaceful retirement" as a result of the need to strive to reduce the damage caused by the child's deviant activity (Granja 2016; Tasca et al. 2016; Gordon 2018).

Substance abuse and intoxication cause a loving and devoted child to become aggressive, full of hatred and hostility. Sometimes parents describe such a child in the following terms: estranged, stinky, and "like not mine" (Szczepanik 2020). One loses the "good child" and gets one who, under the influence of heavy intoxication, uses violence against parents, sometimes even drastic violence such as dousing with gasoline and setting on fire (Szczepanik 2015) or stabbing them with a knife (Halsey, Deegan 2012). It happens, therefore, that the conviction of irreversible changes caused by degeneration even leads parents to control their relationship with the child at a safe distance. Some hope that they will never leave prison and will not pose a threat to themselves or those around them (Halsey, Deegan 2012).

Parents of addicted individuals compare the complexity of their emotions to a roller coaster. These are experiences of very extreme sensations occurring interchangeably over a short period of time: emotional exhaustion and optimism (Titlestad et al. 2020). This is because parental love and faith in their own child makes them extremely suggestible and sensitive to the slightest change. They intensely look for change in a child who is imprisoned (Tasca et al. 2016) or in therapy (Szczepanik 2020). Yet, there are also those who are aware that as a result of significant disorders and psychosocial degradation, they have lost their child forever. The scholarly literature offers profiles of mothers who experience a specific kind of mourning after losing a child (even though the child is physically alive) who is a drug addict or a vagrant with an unknown whereabouts (Oreo, Ozgul 2007; Szczepanik 2020).

A common experience for parents of individuals with significant addiction is being permanently prepared "for the worst." The risky lifestyle makes anticipation of news of their child's death an integral part of each day (Dion 2014). Sometimes parents linger in a state of readiness for such information for 20 years... (Titlestad et al. 2020).

When this loss becomes real, they experience a specific social exclusion referred to in the scholarly literature as disenfranchised grief. Broadly speaking, it means that someone is denied the moral right to experience grief and sorrow after losing a loved one. This issue was first raised by Kenneth J. Doka (1989), and the category was subsequently developed to become useful in explaining problems associated with the inability to experience various losses (Attig 2004), such as the separation caused by someone's imprisonment (Szczepanik, Miszewski 2016). If one wished to translate this experience into the dilemmas of parents whose deceased son or daughter struggled with the particularly hideous stigma of a derailed person (e.g. a serial killer), this type of mourning could be captured in the question: did one say farewell to one's own child or to a monster?

The issue of how parents, especially mothers, cope with the losses mentioned above is signaled in the scientific literature. Sometimes women demand systemic solutions and recognition of their needs and status of victims in need of an adequate support system (Gueta 2018). In the field of addiction issues, these problems have been raised by mothers of children who died as a result of drug overdose, demanding that their specific grief be legitimized in public discourse and that separate specialized support be provided in assistance institutions (Feigelman et al. 2011).

One of the losses and dilemmas of being a parent is related to notifying public services or law enforcement authorities of the child's offenses. Mothers and fathers lose their status as parents who protect their offspring from harm. Calling the police on one's own child can be a specific turning point in the relationship with the son and daughter labeled as socially derailed. The dilemmas surrounding these steps find a separate place in the literature on parental problems (Titlestad et al. 2020; Szczepanik 2020).

The loss of the "good parent" image is directly related to processes of stigmatization. This is a very broad topic that is well documented in the scientific literature of the subject. At this point, I shall only hint that parents may use various tactics to hide the stigma and protect their image. This is usually to draw the curtain and hide the problem within the family (Szczepanik 2020). Of course, this is only an illusive protection against stigmatization, because permanent fear of disclosure is more devastating emotionally than an open confrontation with the reaction of the environment. Thus, it happens that parents use the method of "selective concealment" of information about the child's stigma and try to neutralize the ways of defining their family problems, for example by only partially revealing the facts of the child's criminal life, not telling the truth, and not using

labels (e.g. referring to sexual violence in the family as "marital problems") (Gueta 2018). These observations find support in Cieślikowska-Ryczko's (2021 in print) descriptions of the difficulties involved in contacting parents of imprisoned children.

At the crossroads of expectations

The commitment of spouses in dealing with the problems of the person labeled as socially derailed and the bond based on the romantic relationship may come to an end. Such individuals have relative freedom in deciding whether to stand by the deviant or end the relationship. It is different for family members who are related to the deviant by blood ties. One cannot divorce a mother from her child or a sibling from their brother or sister. Parents and siblings of prisoners, for instance, feel not only related but have a strong sense of moral obligation stemming from cultural and familial ties ((McCarthy, Adams 2019). It is sometimes the case that the parents of a child excluded because of their deviant behavior work on obliging their siblings to support their brother or sister (Szczepanik 2020).

At other times it is the mother who is the only one left on the battlefield for the life of the person who, as a consequence of their deviancy, has already lost everything and everyone (Płachcińska 1999). It happens, however, that this unconditional love is considered by professionals to be a hindrance rather than a help. Mothers of individuals diagnosed with addiction emerge as a particularly "difficult" client, with whom the first step is to "discipline love" (Szczepanik 2020).

Parents, and especially women are positioned at a crossroads of expectations. They experience natural obligations that arise from unconditional maternal love. On the other hand, they are forced to be rational "for the sake" of the therapy (or this constitutes one of its elements). The most dramatic manifestation of "rationalization" of maternal love is the obligation not to let the child in to the house or to throw them out in the street as part of "reaching the bottom" by the addict. Reconstructions of the course of such events are very poignant. Even with the benefit of hindsight and the successes achieved in the struggle to improve the child's quality of life, mothers' retrospective accounts are filled with feelings of guilt and remorse that never left them. Mothers often have not worked through this experience and it represents a clear scar or even an open wound in the relationship with the child even when the child is regaining their health and balance (Szczepanik 2020).

The signaled "crossroads of expectations" is strongly related to the previously discussed issue of blaming mothers for children's failures and problems. Women face a trap of different, sometimes mutually exclusive expectations and accusations: they are too pushy or too passive (Colker 2015), overly attached to the role of "good mother" or breaking out of it (Malacrida 2009). In studies of mothers of

male harmful drinkers, professionals have formulated the following assessments: they are overprotective of the child and at the same time uncritically follow the therapist's recommendations. They notify the police and then hide the child; ask for help and collaborate with their son against the therapist; accuse the child of problems and hide the harmfulness of the behavior (Szczepanik 2020). These are just some of the contradictory reactions and behaviors proving the inconsistency of parental love, the inability to separate action from emotion, and the enormous emotional strain inherent in the role of a parent, especially a mother of a person labeled a deviant.

Parents stand at a crossroads: on the one hand they are respectful of the law and sympathetic to the victims of their child's deviant behavior; but on the other, driven by love, they cover them up or even get involved in their son's or daughter's dirty business. They are aware of these contradictions and that is why they often seek justification by appealing to the nature of motherhood, which is governed by its own laws: "Are you a mother? I will only tell it to a mother, a mother will understand" (Cieślikowska-Ryczko 2021).

Gaining power and agency

The research literature explores the relationship between the social status of parents of convicted offenders and the type and intensity of support provided and responsibility for improving the child's life situation they demonstrate. Middle-class parents have a greater sense of agency and belief in the success of their actions. This is because they possess specific cultural capital and social resources, which orientates them to action and gives them a sense of power. They can negotiate with representatives of justice system institutions or formulate clear expectations and demand that their rights be respected. The situation is different for parents from lower social classes. Their everyday problems are connected with the necessity to meet basic needs. Researchers also report different approaches to parental responsibility among the two groups of parents. For the latter, their general frustration, sense of helplessness and belief in low agency causes them to focus solely on providing their convicted children with time spent together and they do not intervene or confront representatives of the justice system (Halsey & Deegan 2012; McCarthy, Adams 2019).

The figure of a "fighting parent" who intervenes with prison authorities is less frequent than one who provides emotional and social support by arranging frequent contact, including visits. These parents are often focused on strengthening the bond not only between them and their children, but also with other family members (Turanovic et al. 2012; Gueta 2018). This is usually through efforts to create conditions for collective experiencing of good emotions and family atmosphere in such a non-familial place as prison. Chris Holligan's (2016) work,

for example, offers a glimpse into the kind of hardships endured by older mothers visiting their children in prison. Sometimes women try to mitigate family losses and normalize relationships by giving the visitation the meaning of a close-knit picnic, and by treating the very venture of traveling to the prison and visiting as a simple Sunday family outing (Comfort 2002). The zealously prepared food delivered to the prison is given by mothers the meaning of smuggling a substitute for a "normal" home-like atmosphere into the prison (Tray et al. 2016).

It is worth noting that the concern for consolidation of the family and deepening of bonds in a crisis situation caused by imprisonment or severe addiction is analyzed in the scientific literature from the context of coping with stigmatization and counter rejection (Condry 2013).

Studies of mothers of harmful drinkers have revealed a very clear division of parents into those who willingly seek the assistance of addiction institutions and those who avoid such facilities. These parents are referred to as "institutionalized" and "non-institutionalized" (Szczepanik 2020).

The institutionalized ones are those who have extensive and rich positive experiences with representatives of various agencies of formal control and addiction treatment institutions. This group also includes those for whom intervention of institutions (e.g. probation officers, the police or social workers) is a permanent element of family life, a specific intergenerational legacy of families. The non-institutionalized parents are those who take independent, sometimes intuitive actions in order to solve the child's problems. They do so for two reasons: their attempts to ally with institutions have not met their expectations, or simply avoiding such help and support is part of an accepted strategy of tightly closing the curtain between the stage of family life and the public. The fundamental reason here is the protection of the family image (problems of stigmatization).

Those who base their relationship with their child on instructions received from support institutions are usually mothers (much less often fathers) whose parenting is called into question – by the environment, institutions and themselves. They themselves have "admitted it" by making their child's problems public and asking for help. So it would seem that they have a need of guidance on the path of "good" motherhood and "proper" fatherhood for a child who has a problem with addictive and harmful drinking. However, research indicates resistance to such work and an unwillingness to change. In fact, the "institutional" parent does not expect or need "self-work". Most want first of all support for their responsibility.

The experience of researchers of family environments of people with socially condemned behavior problems proves that it is extremely difficult to reach representatives of the second group of families (non-institutionalized) and to obtain their consent to participate in research. This is why the data on problems of stigmatization are actually poorly recognized when it comes to parents of those labeled as socially derailed. The "institutionalized " parents have already worked

through much of these problems. Participation in research is sometimes seen as a logical consequence of previous decisions to involve institutions in solving their problems and supporting their child. The curtain that hid the problems of the family is unveiled, at least partially. This group of parents (or families in general) is well studied because it is for the most part the only accessible one (Szczepanik, Okólska 2018).

This is why the dominant perspective for interpreting what happens to the family and parents of addicts is the category of codependency. This problem is automatically generalized for all families and parents with child addiction problems. Some light on the issue is shed by attempts to get a look into the non-institutionalized families where the addicted child lives with the parents or they are the coordinators of family coping programs (Szczepanik 2020). Among them are those who provide conditions for maximum reduction of the damage associated with their child's drinking, including securing a minimum existence for the future, and those who activate all family resources and forces in an effort to eradicate the problem (or at least keep it under control). If the parents have an appropriate social and family support base, community of action is an essential source of strength for them. If the possibilities for interpreting what happens in such a family were to be oriented not towards co-dependency but towards the natural forces that lie dormant in the family and which are mobilized in crisis situations, then the phenomenon could be characterized in the category of "spillover effect". Studies of such parents reveal a high sense of power and an ability to see "small victories" and to experience satisfaction in preventing the development of a problem. And even if what integrates and strengthens the community of action is the concealment of family secrets and fear of stigmatization (cf. Condry 2013), the positive "spillover effect" of family conspiracy deserves attention. I would add that the "spillover effect" of taking action to rescue a child who is an alcoholic should also include a specific improvement in the relationship, a sense of closeness not felt before, conversations one has never had. It also makes room for deeper self-reflection on parenting (Szczepanik 2020).

Conclusions

Helplessness in the face of prison and court procedures, financial burdens associated with children's deviant behaviors or providing them with support, feelings of insecurity and emotional reactions, pain of separation or abandonment, and ultimately feelings of shame and stigmatization are problems well documented in the literature on problems of families – partners, spouses, children, and parents. This group of experiences seems to be universal for all relatives and does not depend on the type of relationship. However, if we look deeper into the individual problems, we can recognize those that concern only the parents. They are related

primarily to the specific duties arising from the unbreakable blood ties and the sense of responsibility for their offspring.

The article points to the most important experiences of parents of individuals who arouse negative social reactions because of their demoralization. Parental love and responsibility is full of ambivalence. It combines both unconditional loyalty to the child and condemnation of the deviant. Parents feel guilty and are blamed by others. They struggle with the experience of doubting their parenting competence and blaming themselves for the child's problems. Especially mothers of individuals labeled as deviants are eagerly targeted by the media and the neighborhood. They become perpetrators of omission and are indirectly accused of causing the tragedy. They try to free themselves from this guilt by seeking specific absolution in support institutions. They feel permanent pain from the many physical and symbolic losses they have experienced. Some wounds never heal.

Parents are active in efforts to improve the life situation of the child labeled as a deviant. Sometimes they take the trouble and effort to provide them with support even when everyone else has left them. Especially if they are of older age, they find the various costs associated with long-distance travel to prisons or attending therapy (e.g., for codependents) to be a challenge.

When a child loses their health and life because of alcohol and drug abuse (implicitly: "at their own request") or is stigmatized and excluded because of committing a crime, especially a heinous one, there are times when parents are deprived of the moral right to experience loss and separation from their son or daughter. The paper signals the researchers' findings that increasingly loud voices of parents who demand respect for their rights, expect understanding of their specific problems and recognition of their suffering from deviant activity of their children can be heard.

Broadening and deepening the knowledge of the vastness and types of experiences of parents of individuals with the stigma of a deviant (convicts, alcoholics, drug addicts) may foster reflection on the specific needs and the place and significance of their activity in the system of prevention of demoralization and crime, and especially social readaptation.

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