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Motherhood of convicted women as an overarching value in their social rehabilitation process

Fundamental human values: Goodness, Truth, Beauty
Andrzej Bałandynowicz (2019, p. 16; quoted from Plato)

Abstract: The purpose of the article is to attempt to theoretically present the value of motherhood in the process of social rehabilitation of women in prison isolation, through cognition, understanding and pointing to conclusions. This issue is particularly relevant for young mothers who begin the story of their motherhood with their child(ren) while in prison. Such a mother should feel that the value of motherhood depends only on herself, and in this context it becomes essential for her to receive an appropriate offer of rehabilitation from the penitentiary system, without overlooking the huge role of herself in all this. Strengthening inmate mothers' perceptions of motherhood as a value should provide the basis for their social rehabilitation, moreover, it should become a stimulus to intensify this process, and should ultimately be a contribution to changing their lives.

The methodology used to write this publication was the conduct of a critical analysis of literature, using the author's own academic work (elements of research for two future monographs on motherhood) and other documents, including available Internet resources, as well as their own professional experience of many years of working with persons deprived of liberty.

Key words: prison isolation, mother, child, social rehabilitation, values.

Introduction

Many scientific fields are interested in the issue of motherhood, including medicine, psychology, sociology, pedagogy, law, theology, economics or ethnography. Motherhood is an ever-present and popular topic in both scientific discourse and social dialogue. In societies of various cultural backgrounds, it has become established that motherhood is the vocation of every woman – it is her primary biological and social role. Therefore, it could be assumed that this issue has already been comprehensively analyzed from various points of view. In the results of sociological and pedagogical research one can find a number of data, proving the priority placement in the value system of this very value, which is called “successful family life” or “happy family” (Włodarczyk, 2007).

The purpose of this article is an attempt to theorize the value of motherhood in the process of rehabilitation of women who are in prisons. It concerns, on the one hand, the description and explanation of the situation of women-mothers in the phase of active motherhood, residing in prison conditions, and on the other hand, children whose lives begin in a peculiar situation. The study of motherhood becomes necessary to communicate the experience to others, and the goal is to know and understand this important fact. This is especially important for young mothers who begin the story of their motherhood with their child(ren) while in prison. More broadly, the topic of motherhood from its beginnings – how it begins, how it is formed, what determines its quality, will be presented in separate monographs (entitled: “Motherhood in global culture and civilization” and “Motherhood of women in prison isolation as an autotelic value in the process of their rehabilitation”). The methodology used in writing the publication in question became to conduct a critical analysis of the literature, using my own scholarly work and other documents, including available Internet resources, as well as my own experience in many years of working with people deprived of liberty (in 2001–2011 I worked at the Warsaw-Służewiec Detention Center, in the position of prison chaplain, serving at the same time as a spokesman for the National Prison Chaplaincy of the Republic of Poland).

Motherhood

In different languages, the word motherhood, despite its different sound, e.g. in English – motherhood, French – maternité, German – mutterschaft, means the same thing, regardless of the culture of the country – it includes the diad¹ moth-

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¹ Diad (couple) – a social set consisting of two people, referred to by some as a social group because there is interaction, differentiation from others, and the fact that members of a diad can refer to each other as “we”; (Bańko, 2014).

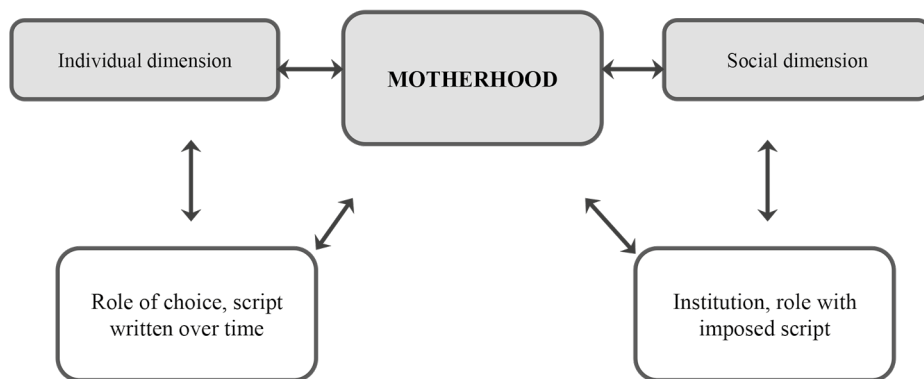


Fig. 1. Individual and social dimensions of motherhood

Source: own study based on Budrowska, 2001; Golonka-Legut, 2012; Aksamić, 2019, p. 15.

er-child (Karwowska, 2007). As Małgorzata Lesińska-Sawicka notes: “in the most general terms, we can say that motherhood is the process of becoming and being a mother. It encompasses the temporal scope not only of the immediate fact of childbirth and care of the child, but the preceding period of pregnancy, as well as the time before conception, which constitutes the prelude, the preparation of the woman for her proper motherhood, that is, for pregnancy, childbirth and care of the child” (Lesińska-Sawicka, 2008, p. 29). Motherhood is treated as a vocation for women, which becomes the primary and most important role in life.

Motherhood in our culture is strongly associated with femininity (which further reinforces the old myth of the Polish Mother), while fatherhood is associated with masculinity – to a far lesser degree. Social disapproval of women’s choices other than the traditional role of wife and mother is far greater (Hulawska, 2002, p. 139).

In many societies, the number of children born to a woman is a measure of her social status, with biological motherhood being valued more highly than social motherhood, i.e. one based on adoption. The research undertaken on motherhood has identified four interrelated research strands, which are: motherhood as an institution, motherhood as both a subjective and social experience, maternal subjectivity (identity), and maternal agency (Gawron, 2016, pp. 23–24).

It is difficult to have a clear answer to the question: who is the mother? Motherhood is understood very differently, most often in two complementary and correlating dimensions: individual and social (Fig. 1).

The accelerated decline in fertility rates observed in recent decades can be considered a form of family adjustment to new socioeconomic conditions. As a result, the development of pro-family ideologies is intensifying, with hopes of shaping public consciousness in such a way that unfavorable demographic processes can be halted.

Possible personal characteristics of mothers in prison

Anna Błasiak argues that “motherhood is a complex and evolving process of fulfilling the social role of mother, which is historically and culturally determined. Maternal love and the quality of the child’s care and upbringing strongly determine the child’s acquisition of social competence and its metamorphosis into a social person. Women who remain in the situation of motherhood manifest diverse attitudes towards their children: positive, indifferent but also negative, which can and do result in this maternal stigma for the whole life of their children” (Błasiak, 2019, p. 115 quoted from Matysiak-Błaszczuk, 2010, p. 250).

The world in which the mother exists brings her a multitude of pleasant experiences, events and opportunities, but also complex, stressful and traumatic situations (including motherhood in the non-freedom system). Protective factors for the mother include personality resources, which have the nature of a “psychological vaccine,” thanks to which the parent is equipped with a specific tool for proper social and personal functioning, despite the often unfavorable circumstances that life can bring (Ostaszewski, 2003 and 2009; Jaworska, 2012, p. 183; Hobfoll, 2006). Personal resources are predispositions that activate in certain life situations (Borys, 2010) of the mother, counteracting the emergence of negative psychological and health consequences.

The most commonly cited personal resources include social support, a sense of personal control over stressful events, positive self-esteem and self-acceptance, generalized self-confidence, optimism, a sense of self-efficacy, and the ability to cope with difficult situations.

The value of the child in the family

Motherhood is an unquestioned value in Western culture. There is no greater joy in a family than when a child is born. Fundamental human values are: Goodness, Truth, Beauty (Bałandynowicz, 2019, p. 16 quoted from Plato). In *Myślenie według wartości*, Józef Tischner states that the world we live in is permeated by values – positive or negative; it is a world of issues and things that move and engage us. Tischner disagrees with the idea of the identity of goodness, beauty and truth. He distinguishes between goodness and values (goodness being the source of light, and values being what is illuminated) (Tischner, 2011; Tischner, 1998, p. 200).

Undoubtedly, one of the sciences that is interested in supporting women in the subjective experience of motherhood, especially “supervised” motherhood, is pedagogy. This science, which deals with the problem of various relationships

that occur in the process of upbringing, poses i.a. the following questions: “Why might a mother not love her offspring?” “Can a mother resort to using corporal punishment?” “What impact can unequal treatment of children have on the lives of adults?” “What might be the impact of not showing interest to children?” The pedagogical discourse pays special attention to issues related to supporting those experiencing motherhood, especially this dimension, which is linked to the need to create a maternal identity.

Anna Brzezinska-Rybicka is of the opinion that: “the task of parents is to actively participate in the process of raising a child in order to be able to positively contribute to its development. The scale of affection that the father and mother display in the family is very important. Affectionate attitudes in father-mother, father-child, mother-child interactions, as well as in interactions with other family members, are particularly influential on the child. The mother is responsible for perpetuating the pattern of alternate reactions, giving the child a chance to learn the rules of the course of interaction” (Brzezińska-Rybicka, 2022, chapt. 2.4). The transformation of a human being into a social being takes place in the family (Bałandynowicz, 1998, p. 54). It should be remembered that: “mother is food, love, warmth, earth. To be loved by her is as much as to be alive, to be rooted, to have a homeland and a home” (Grochal, Przyborowska, 2000, p. 56).

The style of communication is important. In terms of contact, the dysfunctional system is characterized by invasion, deprivation, absorption or melding of individual boundaries. Parental attitudes affect children in a variety of ways. Eleonor Maccoby and John Martin became famous for developing a typology of parental attitudes, distinguishing four basic types of parental behavior toward the child: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and dismissive (Bałandynowicz, 1998, p. 58).

Selected values of motherhood are shown in Figure 2.

Motherhood and childcare should be associated with happiness, joy, warmth, fulfillment and home. A mother is required to love her child, constantly nurture it and raise it appropriately. Childbearing and raising children make up the cultural and social script of female motherhood (Bańko, 2008, p. 43). The mother keeps vigil when the baby is sick, feeds it at her own breast, prepares food, puts it to sleep, cuddles it, sings lullabies, dresses it. She is a person the child can count on constantly, she will understand it, comfort it, do the laundry, make sandwiches for school, prepare the school kit, cook, talk and ask it questions (Jundziłł, 1989, pp. 24–25; quoted from Więclawska, 2018, pp. 47–48).

In general, motherhood is presented as a recipe for happiness, the highest (autotelic) value, as the mission of every woman. Undoubtedly, pregnancy and the birth of a child is a crucial period in a woman’s biography, changing her previous self-image, lifestyle and scale of values.

Contact with the mother is of great importance not only for the development of the child in the first years, but throughout life. In the first months of life, when

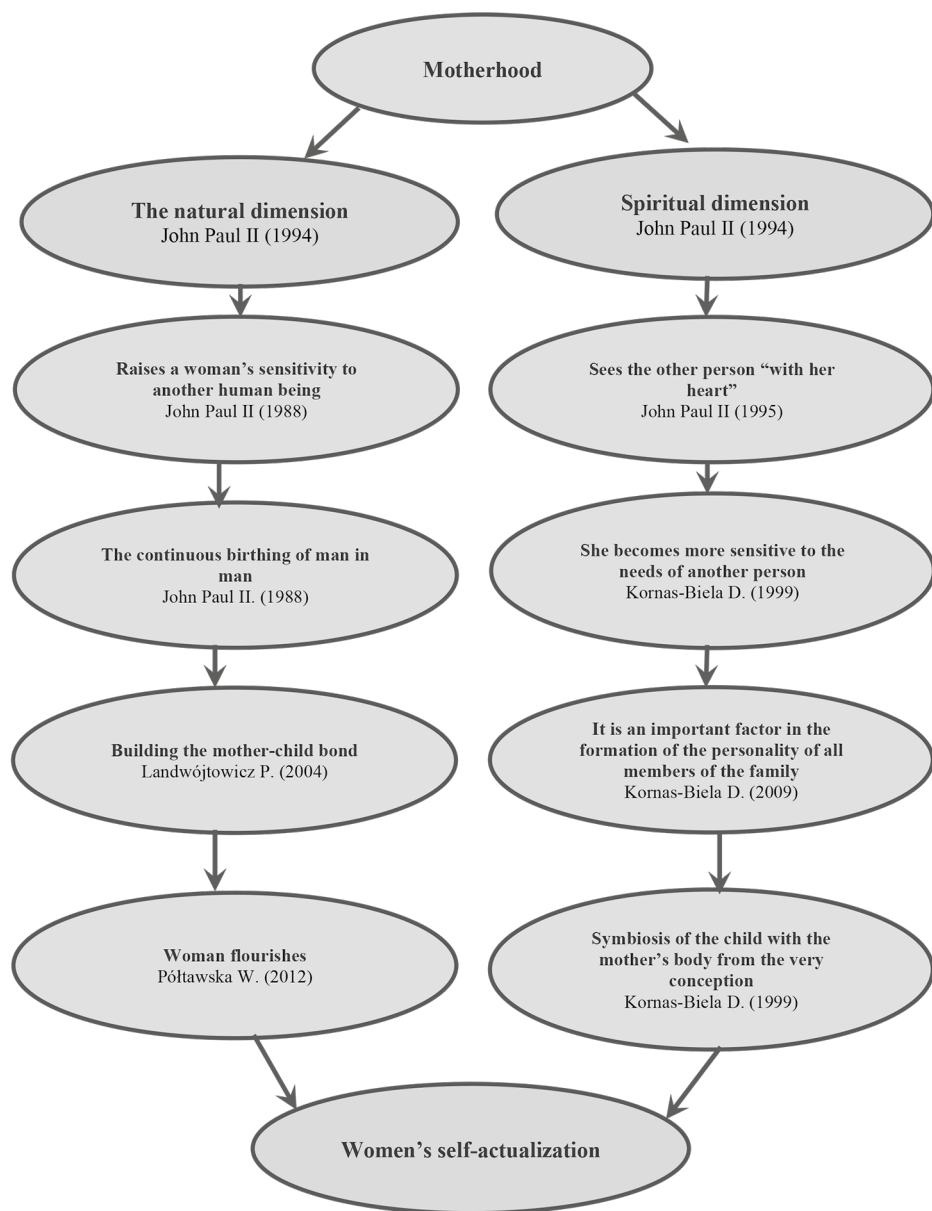


Fig. 2. Selected values of motherhood

Source: own study based on (Brzezinska-Rybicka, 2022, Figure 1).

the child is vulnerable, weak, dependent on the environment, it is the mother who satisfies the child's basic psychological need, which is the need for security. Thus, the mother is "the first person of the human encounter" for the child

(Wojcieszek, 2001). Numerous scientific studies confirm the strong correlations between attachment patterns in the first year of life of children and their subsequent emotional, cognitive, social and personality development (e.g. Senator, 2012).

The quality of motherhood provided to the child, from birth to adulthood, largely determines the child's becoming a social person. The mother should create a social situation for the child and formulate a reciprocal relationship with it. It should give the child a sense of security and protect it from dangers, stimulate the child's psychological development in a broad sense, and create social dispositions and competencies that will enable the child to enter the cultural and social sphere (Maziarz, 2004, p. 7).

Motherhood as "anti-value"

Motherhood can also be "anti-value," and that does not mean it is strictly for mothers deprived of freedom. Such a situation occurs when the mother denies the value of motherhood, for example, due to unfavorable life events that may occur at different periods of her motherhood and may occur with varying intensity (Górnikowska-Zwolak, 2004, p. 14). Unfortunately, there are also mothers who manifest the disappearance of maternal feelings, having a disturbed emotional contact with their own children. Unfortunately, a large percentage of mothers admit to lacking a sense of responsibility for the fate of their own children, and even claim that children can interfere with their lives. It is sometimes the case that children in their future prefer their mother's criminal lifestyle, taking their behavior as a model for their life model (Matysiak-Błaszczuk, 2016, pp. 56–57).

The anti-value of motherhood can also have an illness, psychological basis. We are talking about postpartum depression. This is fortunately a transitional time. Difficulties in realizing social expectations cause some mothers to experience a mental breakdown, a temporary aberration of feeling other than the joyful affirmation of motherhood. Often the obstacles and dramas experienced are downplayed (Stańczak-Wiślicz, 2013, p. 378). Almost always the mother feels anxiety about the health of the baby and fears that she will cause it harm. There are even suicidal thoughts. Despite the gradual emancipation of women, motherhood is still seen as a very important determinant of their value (Namysłowska, 2010, p. 10).

Sometimes the "anti-value" can be an unplanned pregnancy. This may be accompanied by conflicting emotions and experiences. Unplanned motherhood provides new challenges and difficulties. In time, however, it can bring much satisfaction and joy. Initial recognition of a pregnancy as undesirable does not mean that the mother will not form a strong bond with her child and that she will not love it. Such an attitude can result from cultural patterns, social expectations and gradual adaptation to parenthood (Koronkiewicz, 2014).

The value of motherhood of a female convict versus social rehabilitation

Inefficient or incompetent functioning of women in the maternal role can sometimes occur together with violations of the law, which can result in the activation of institutional control against them or the placement of pregnant women, or mothers who already have children up to the age of 3, in mother and child homes attached to prisons.

Pregnant women and mothers serving prison sentences have a maternity deficit. It should be remembered that the family model in which they grew up was often skewed (pathological). The convicted mother should feel that the value of motherhood depends on herself and not on anyone else, that is, “I” – “I am the creator of myself.” It is important to remember that in this regard there is no need to change the “system,” and the result itself must come from the mother. A convicted mother should receive such an offer from the penitentiary system in terms of social rehabilitation, so that she can feel that the value of motherhood depends on herself (cf. Pierzchała, 2013, 2015, 2016). A mother’s fulfillment of her social maternal role, that is, remaining in a direct social (socialization) relationship with her child(ren) under conditions of penal isolation, is undoubtedly a situation that requires pedagogical intervention preceded by a reliable empirical diagnosis (Matysiak-Błaszczyk, 2016, p. 11).

The depreciation of the value of motherhood can result in a lifelong stigma, for a child deprived of the bond with its mother in childhood becomes an emotionally mutilated person, deprived of those qualities and dispositions that, as Aleksandra Maciarz put it, “constitute the basis of humanity, contained in the totality of relations with other people” (Maciarz, 2004, p. 7; cf. Bałandynowicz, 2022).

There are some people who say that keeping a child in prison is not the best solution. It should be remembered that to date, the world has not come up with another offer with a view to reducing the criminal situation of a mother sentenced to imprisonment. The child (its welfare) cannot be treated as a “means” for rehabilitation. Anna Matysiak-Błaszczyk believes that: “it should not be naively believed that the presence of the child with the mother during her imprisonment will affect her rehabilitation and the post-isolation, socially acceptable and expected performance of roles by the ex-offender that stabilize her and her child(ren) in the social structure and environment of her (their) placement” (Matysiak-Błaszczyk, 2016, pp. 176–177).

Pregnant women and mothers are perceived in a special way in prison. They constitute a category of women for whom fulfilling the role of mother does not come easily. This is due to their psychophysical and physiological distinctiveness during this period and the specificity of their roles. Performing maternal functions

often brings a lot of problems due to the lack of adequate knowledge, skills and competence (Matysiak-Błaszczuk, Włodarczyk, 2004, p. 56).

According to the rules of imprisonment, pregnant and lactating women, as well as mothers in prison with their children, are provided with specialized care, the right to enjoy a longer walk, use their own clothes and shoes, receive a food parcel once a month, and shop more often (Reczek, 1996, p. 225). Women also have the right to benefit from a postponement of their imprisonment. This postponement may be granted multiple times. The assumption of such a derogation is that the child will be cared for on a permanent and direct basis.

Henryk Machel, who wrote about the role of social rehabilitation and penitentiary interactions with inmates, pointed out that an inmate cannot be left alone, it is necessary to provide her with "remedial," corrective, compensatory programs, otherwise the entire serving of the sentence and the rehabilitative function does not make the slightest sense (Machel, 2007, p. 147). The social rehabilitation system, especially the offer of post-penitentiary assistance to convicted mothers, should be constantly reformed in the direction of correct preparation of women for life outside prison.

Mother and baby homes have been striving since the early 1980s to develop a useful way of having a rehabilitative impact on convicted mothers. The plans of almost every mother leaving the walls of prison include creating a family home for her children. Such a need is dictated, according to Barbara Jarzębowska-Baziak (1987, p. 248), by making amends for a childhood spent in prison. No anacletic depression is found in children who have had regular contact with their mothers (Kolarczyk, 1988, p. 213). Magdalena Teleszewska further states that: »Prison children« develop mentally and physically better than children who are placed in multifunctional care facilities. It should also be emphasized that the presence of the child with the mother in prison most often has a positive effect on the process of rehabilitation of the convicted. In convict mothers who have been housed with their children, the maternal instinct in particular is awakened, which often leads to a change in behavior. Convicts are becoming more critical of their past behavior (Teleszewska, 2018, p. 62).

It should be considered necessary to surround mothers who find themselves in a difficult situation due to becoming pregnant at a young age with special protection and support.

As part of the humanization of the execution of imprisonment against women with children, the aim is to create conditions in prison that will enable the development of the child. This is the only possibility to create opportunities in penitentiary isolation to reorganize not only the mentality of women, but also their attitude to life, society and the world (Szecowka, Krzyzanowska, 2008, p. 245).

Kazimierz Pospiszyl describes the importance of the impact of motherhood on a woman's development as very positive, especially in relation to women experiencing emotional problems, because motherhood provides the mother with

a number of positive sensations. According to the aforementioned scientist, deprivation of maternity considered through the prism of maternity care leads to institutionalization of the child, separation of the child from the mother or a surrogate mother, multiplication of motherhood or distortion in maternity care. Institutionalization refers to the situation in which a child is institutionalized. When a child passes into the custody of persons other than the mother, it is then said to be a separation. Multiplication of motherhood occurs when a child is cared for by more than one person. This is a depraving situation, as it is very difficult for a child to establish a lasting and stable emotional bond with several people. Distortion of motherhood is a disorder in the fulfillment of maternal functions demonstrated by a lack of interest in the child on the part of the mother or exaggerated interest, i.e. pathological overprotectiveness (Pospiszyl, 1986, pp. 133–144; cf. Wołyniec, 2015).

Irena Wesołowska-Krzysztofek refers to this as atrophy of maternal needs in inmates who had no contact with their children (cf. Rudnik, 1970, p. 19).

Penal institutions for mothers with children

The legislator has made a distinction between the isolation of men and women only in the case of pregnant women and women caring for small children (in Poland this is practiced in two prisons, where the prisoner stays with a child/children aged up to three years).

In the past, women did not serve their imprisonment in separate prisons, but in the same facilities as men, only in specially designated wards. Today they are sent to specially separated institutions that do not hold male prisoners. Women are incarcerated in semi-open facilities unless safety concerns and the degree of demoralization suggest placement in another facility. The special treatment of women in prisons is also related to motherhood. The child's stay in prison with its mother is in accordance with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (the child has the right to maternal care and family life) (KlaŹkowski, 1979, p. 283; Deklaracja Praw Dziecka). In Poland, there are two facilities for convicted mothers and their children: Prison No. 1 in Grudziądz (where there is a hospital obstetrics and gynecology ward – the only such ward in Poland – and a home for little children) and the Prison in Krzywaniec (where there is a mother and child home) (Toroń-Fórmanek, 2020, p. 97).

Final conclusions

Women function in penal institutions in the role of convicted prisoners. It should not be forgotten that even pristine prison conditions do not always produce the possibility of an emotional bond between mother and child.

In the whole process of social rehabilitation of the convicted mother, the fact of motherhood raises the prospects of a fuller and more direct educational contact with the convict. The best concept of motherhood for a convicted mother, which can only positively affect her social rehabilitation, is to make the mother not look at the world only as herself, but from the angle of her child(ren), i.e. by holistically uniting the mother with her child.

The turmoil that seems to be affecting the value of motherhood (parenthood) today is due to a number of factors, and its causes should be sought in the broader social context. Children give parents incomparably more than all the values or pleasures e.g. buying a car, career advancement, freedom, luxury apartment. Undoubtedly, children are of paramount value for parents, and "motherhood is an unquestionable value in our culture" (Łamejko, 2003), an autotelic value.

Becoming a parent causes a transformation of the previous self-image, changing priorities, goals, lifestyle. Of great importance is the conduct of the child's father on the mother's mental condition and her attitude toward her offspring. It is very important for a woman to receive social support.

Through motherhood fulfilled in prison, a woman can become more responsible (for herself and her child), feel valued and be inspired to reflect on her life so far. She can have a better outlook on the life ahead of her, desire to compensate the child for the situation of being born in prison, can love it and ensure its happiness (Lewandowski, 1995a and 1995b). Motherhood can become a factor that weakens or cancels women's criminal behavior altogether. Having a child, being close to it, can undoubtedly improve the mother's value system, represent the highest value and give a signal to change oneself, adopt to society and its expectations. The goal of her life may become to raise her child in love, as well as renewal. It is important to educate for love, which is fostered by an attitude open to the affirmation of a shared hierarchy of values. The whole process of renewal should be that what was not fully given to her, i.e. true love, is released onto the child. The mother at the level of combining her own and the child's psychobiological needs should release maternal love, which is an autotelic value. The penitentiary system (prison service) should strive to keep the time of the mother and child in isolation as short as possible, and on the other hand, there should be no rationing of any contact between the mother and the child(ren). The convicted mother should feel that the value of motherhood depends on herself and not on anyone else,. No one is demanding change or general reevaluation of her personality from the convicted mother, just "transformation" (Reczek, 1996, p. 485). Authentic contact between inmates and their children is extremely beneficial to themselves and their children. The whole process of "prison" motherhood is a continuous development, self-education, self-knowledge, self-awareness, self-affirmation, the final point of which is love, because only it allows self-realization of "oneself" and the child (Matysiak-Błaszczuk, Włodarczyk, 2004, pp. 56–57). It is then that convicted mothers can begin the process of analyzing their own past life

outside the law and understand that all this can become a threat to their current family life and even its degradation. The ideal situation is the social readaptation of convicted women and the (relatively) optimal socialization of their children.

This also raises the question: Is prison motherhood always a boon for mothers staying in prison “under special conditions,” and is the privileging of women serving time with their children not an encouragement of instrumental use of motherhood during isolation? It should be remembered that not every mother residing in a house for mother and child is of exemplary conduct. Of concern may be the use of maternal activities of convicted mothers through situational conditioning. Reconciling two extremely different roles – the role of a mother and the role of a convict may prove too difficult for many. It should also always be remembered that the welfare of the child is paramount and “the welfare of the child is the main goal and principle of all legislation” (Supreme Court, 2016).

It should also be borne in mind that the complicated biographies of women cannot be irrelevant to the interaction with their own child, who also views the mother through the prism of the prison situation. One must always keep in mind the welfare of the child. This begs the question: how to make it work properly? It is important to consider what measures can be taken to optimize these situations? Strengthening an inmate’s perception of motherhood as a value can become the basis for social rehabilitation work, a stimulus to intensify the process and ultimately a contribution to changing her life. It should also be remembered that universal values are being supplanted by individually determined values, which generally happens with social consent.

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