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Educational atmosphere as the basis of dynamic security in a penitentiary unit*

Abstract: The penitentiary interventions aimed at fostering positive inmate activity towards their internal transformation (readaptation) and subsequent acceptance by the external—liberating environment (social reintegration) must take place in an appropriate educational setting. This setting should ensure an atmosphere conducive not only to isolation and disciplinary goals but, above all, to educational and resocialization objectives. Dynamic security represents a unique philosophy for constructing security in prisons, grounded in subjective relationships between staff and inmates, actively preventing threats before they become dangerous and escalate. The article addresses the issues related to the possibilities and organizational and mental constraints influencing the implementation of dynamic security as a practice for shaping the proper educational atmosphere while maintaining safety conditions in penitentiary units.
Key words: educational atmosphere, dynamic security, penitentiary rehabilitation.

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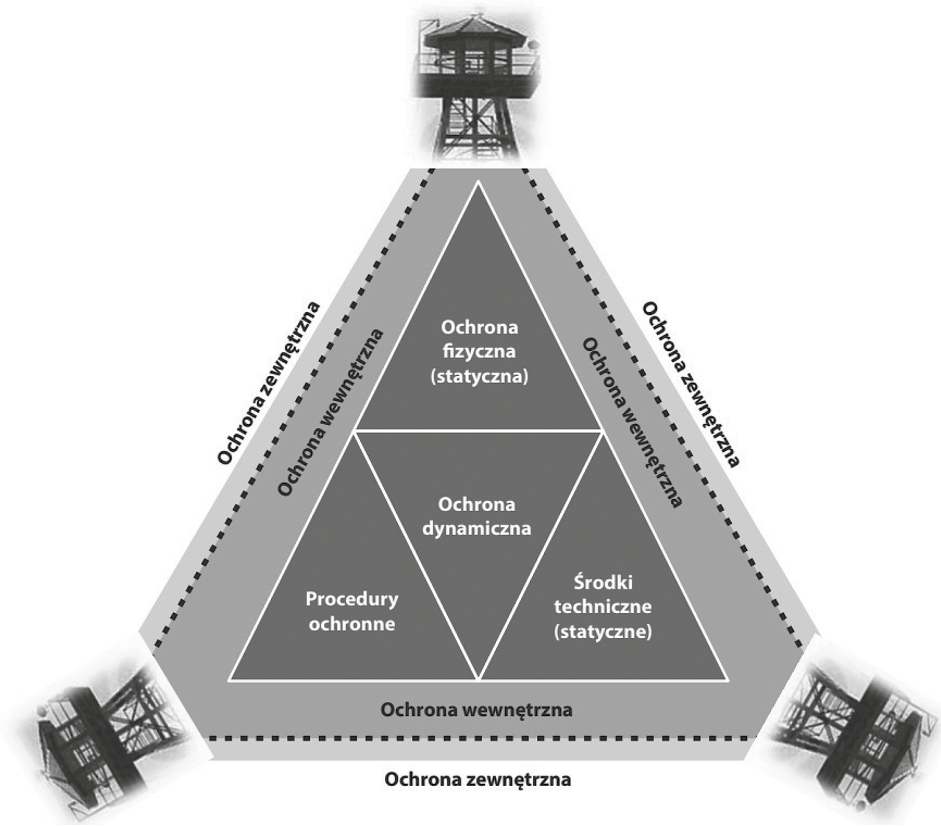
Educational atmosphere in a correctional facility and dynamic security – an introduction to the issue

Every educational reality encompasses interconnected and interdependent educational objects: the subject of education, i.e., the learner, the educational situation, and the person or persons providing education. The quality of interactions and the educational outcome are largely the result of the depth and intensity of interpersonal contacts. These interpersonal relationships are crucial in both the process of adapting the learner to institutional conditions and the interventions made toward them (Konopczyński, 2016). On the other hand, achieving the goals of serving a sentence of imprisonment and temporary detention, as described in Article 67 and Article 207 of the Act of June 6, the Executive Penal Code requires the implementation of penitentiary interventions. These interventions can be carried out in favorable psychosocial and architectural conditions. Creating a proper educational climate, referred to as the social climate of the institution or the educational atmosphere, is a sine qua non condition for inducing favorable changes in the personality, attitudes, motivation, identity, and other psychosocial characteristics of the convicted person (Pierzchała, 2018). In other words, all elements of the penitentiary system, such as infrastructure – the facility's premises and equipment, laws and legal institutions, and most importantly, the penitentiary staff (Bulenda 2014, Górny 1996, Śliwowski, 1982, Walczak, 1972), should contribute to creating a proper educational environment and an appropriate social climate (Konopczyński, 2013).

The educational environment is linked to the ecological, social, and cultural environment. However, unlike other environments, it constitutes a space for interpersonal interactions intentionally exerting educational influences (Sroczyński, 2008). This involves purposeful processes aimed at cooperating in shaping the attitudes of individuals in a given institution (care and educational institution, school, shelter for minors, probation center, etc.). This understanding of the educational environment is also a means of intervention, used to achieve the goals for which prisons are established as institutions (Benedyczak et al., 1995), simultaneously dynamically securing penitentiary units against various threats inherent in the specificity of prison isolation. The "human factor," understood as professional and well-trained personnel working in direct contact with inmates, is the most important element of an active security system (Smit, Snacken, 2009).

The concept of dynamic security was introduced into the penitentiary environment in the mid-1980s by Ian Dunbar, a reformer of the British prison system. In practice, it meant the constant presence of staff in the environment of inmates, engaging in conversations with them, listening to what they have to



Ochrona zewnętrzna – External security; Ochrona wewnętrzna – Internal security; Ochrona fizyczna (statyczna) – Physical (static) security; Ochrona dynamiczna – Dynamic security; Procedury ochronne – Security procedures; Środki techniczne (statyczne) Techical (static) measures

Fig. 1. Dynamic security in the security structure of the penitentiary unit
Source: (Poklek, Chojnacka 2017, p. 67).

say, and sensing the atmosphere prevailing in the prison, supported by appropriate intelligence – risk assessment (Drake, 2012). Physical and technical security measures are referred to as passive security measures that alone will not prevent escapes, riots, or other extraordinary events unless accompanied by protective measures guaranteed by *alert staff* familiar with the inmates under their care and control. The standards outlined in the European Prison Rules are based precisely on the concept of dynamic security, which pertains to ensuring societal *security* and *safety* within the prison (Poklek, Chojnacka, 2017). Dunbar concluded that prison guards should not limit themselves to passively observing and monitoring inmates to react promptly to negative behaviors. Instead, they should engage in conversations and interactions with inmates, thus actively preventing incidents before they occur and escalate. The advantage of dynamic security over static

barriers lies in the early detection of dangers by personnel who are aware of threats and sensitive to behaviors deviating from the norm, and more importantly, engaged in actively seeking threat signals at their early stages (Coyle, 2009). Positive contacts and established relationships between officers and inmates prevent incidents and enable staff to gather current information about what is happening in the prison, reducing the risk of events. They also facilitate dialogue and the negotiation process during an incident and contribute to restoring order more quickly after an occurrence (Mecwaldowski, Poklek, 2020). However, the prerequisite for positive relationships between inmates and officers is the communication skills of the staff and their sensitivity to alarming signals (Stańdo-Kawecka, 2015). In such a protection system, there is a balance between positive relationships with inmates and disciplining and imposing consequences for their rule violations.

The dictionary definition of the concept of the educational atmosphere refers to the prevailing mood among the wards and the nature of relationships between caregivers and wards in a given institution (Kupisiewicz, Kupisiewicz, 2009). In the context of a correctional facility, the atmosphere relates to the conditions within the penitentiary unit, which, during the pursuit of the institution's goals, are based on trust and mutual respect for both inmates and penitentiary staff, as well as goodwill in enforcing duties and discipline. Therefore, it is essential to maintain a balance between discipline and firm boundary setting and a humane approach in interpersonal relationships. It is worth emphasizing that all individuals working in direct contact with incarcerated individuals bear responsibility for creating the proper educational atmosphere in the prison, in line with their assigned tasks (security, penitentiary, quartermaster, records, etc.). This requires the entire staff to possess knowledge about the prison population and an understanding of the relationships prevailing in the prison environment. This understanding contributes to interpreting the reactions of inmates correctly and anticipating the possibility of them posing a specific threat. Every interaction between an officer and an inmate should be based on a humanitarian, respectful, and dignified treatment, as only then will it strengthen positive relationships, forming the foundation for creating an appropriate atmosphere and, consequently, dynamic security. A negative attitude of the staff towards inmates affects the social climate of the institution, is sensed by the inmates, leading to additional tensions, mistrust, reluctance in interactions, demanding and barratry attitudes, feelings of injustice, and victimization. In extreme cases, a prisoner may seek indirect revenge, such as filing a complaint with the relevant institution or direct retaliation in the form of verbal or physical aggression against the officer.

The educator, based on the applicable laws and procedures in the prison, should create conditions that enable the proper course of interventions and the rehabilitation process. This includes respecting methodological recommendations, applying varied methods and techniques of interventions, and fulfilling

resocialization functions. According to the regulations, shaping the atmosphere is the duty of the educator and involves a range of activities, such as maintaining educational contacts and encouraging family contacts, initiating external social contacts with entities supporting rehabilitation and assisting inmates, preventing demoralization and progressive pathology, subculture manifestations, intra-prison violence, aggression, and self-aggression, as well as addictions. Other activities include introducing socially accepted activities, self-control, and self-discipline; motivating individuals to implement an individual program and actively participate in the rehabilitation process; inspecting the accommodations, education, work, and recreational places of the convicts; organizing individual and group activities to stimulate desirable activity; indicating accepted ways of resolving difficult situations – modeling appropriate behavior; supporting the right decisions made by the convicted individual; enforcing duties, exercising control and supervision – instilling responsibility; reinforcing and consolidating desirable behaviors – rewarding, and correcting and eliminating negative behaviors – punishing (Poklek, 2013).

The authority exercised by the prison administration translates into the quality of relationships within the correctional facility and, consequently, into the climate of the institution. The discretionary power in a prison arises from various premises, sometimes vaguely defined, such as the power of coercion, involving the use of segregation, searches, disciplinary systems; the power of reward, encompassing the distribution of privileges, favored work assignments, positive documentation assessments; formal authority arising from legal provisions; "exchange" power linked to an informal reward system, instrumental adjustment, or even exploiting the inmate-officer relationship. Moreover, the level of authority is influenced by the characteristics and traits of the officer, such as their expert or "professional" privileges, including competence and experience, as well as personal respect or authority translating into the way officers work with inmates and their leadership skills (Liebling, Price, Schefer, 2011). The impact of institutional authority on order, discipline, and the possibility of achieving goals, therefore, results from the regulation of privileges, enforcing duties, the possibility of regulation-based rewards and punishments, the ability to use legal instruments of power, including direct coercion. It may also, though more challenging, stem from personal authority and the ability to non-invasively maintain order and security through a kind of discretion in treating prisoners (Kolind, 2015).

Challenges in building an educational atmosphere

Shaping the environment and educational atmosphere in conditions of prison isolation is challenging due to the specific features of total institutions (Goffman, 2011), deprivation of inmates' essential needs (Mazur, 2008), dehumanization processes in interpersonal relations (Ciosek, 1996), demoralization, and the psy-

chophysical properties of inmates (Poklek, 2010), as well as conflict interactions between incarcerated individuals and staff (Ciosek, 2007, Machel, 2006), and antagonisms among officers in different service departments with distinct tasks such as security and penitentiary duties (Poklek, 2006).

In the prison environment, an atmosphere of mutual distrust prevails, affecting both the group of inmates and the inmates towards the penitentiary staff, and vice versa. Unwritten rules contribute to this, including violence and exploitation (among inmates), maintaining the status quo and relative solidarity in inmate-staff relationships (Kosewski, 1977). Additional difficulties in shaping optimal penitentiary interventions may arise from inmates' reactions to isolation (instrumental, protest-forcing, habitual, breakdown behaviors), occurring with varying intensity depending on the phase of imprisonment or situational influences (Poklek, 2018). Furthermore, the adaptive strategy employed by inmates (tactics of rebellion, withdrawal, settling in, conversion, cold calculation), permeated with mutual dislike or manipulative behaviors, does not favor genuine educational interactions (Żywicka, 1996). However, the most significant challenge in shaping an educational atmosphere is the overlap of informal structures described widely in the literature as prison or criminal subculture, secret or second prison life (Kolęda, 1995, Moczydłowski, 2002, Przybyliński, 2005, Szaszkiewicz, 1997, Żywucka-Kozłowska, 2007), as well as the infiltration of psychoactive substances, psychotropic drugs, alcohol, medications, and other mood and psychomotor-altering substances onto the prison premises (Wojciechowski, Ostrowski, 2011). It happens that officers consciously avoid closer relationships with inmates due to fears of corruption or being accused of illegal contacts, which may be perceived by prisoners as excessive distance, superficiality, and shallowness in relationships (Crewe, Liebling, Hulley, 2015). This could also be a result of a literal interpretation of the Act of April 9, 2010, on the Prison Service, where in Article 28 § 2, it is stated, "Officers and employees are prohibited from maintaining contacts with persons deprived of liberty other than those arising from official duties."

The varied approach to prisoners in each prison can have both positive and negative consequences. It stems from the belief that the "prison world is not black and white" and the fact that it is not realistically possible to implement all procedures from the regulations. Therefore, one must act within certain frameworks with some margin of freedom and individualized adaptation. The direct result is the use of discretionary power by officers (Bennett, 2016). The way personnel exercise power can influence the atmosphere in the prison—either towards harmonizing relationships, cooperation, and trust or conflict, suspicion, and mutual dislike. Research by Michael J. Gilbert (1997) suggests that personnel, in the context of using discretionary power, can adopt various working styles towards inmates. According to this author, the following attitudes of personnel may be observed:

— "professional" – open, cooperative, willing to make exceptions to the rules in justified cases, but ultimately ready to use force as a last resort when necessary;
— "reciprocating" – willing to help, conciliatory, but without a readiness to use formal authority and force even when necessary;
— "enforcer" – procedural, following the rules, not making exceptions, seeking violations, lacking empathy, reacting quickly with anger, abusing force and power.
— "avoidant" – avoiding direct contact with inmates, "not noticing" rule violations to avoid confrontation, shifting responsibility to others.

It is evident that some of the described working styles will not foster an educational atmosphere and the building of relationships, which, in turn, would be the basis for implementing dynamic security.

Factors conducive to the formation of the educational atmosphere

Since all elements of the penitentiary system influence the shaping of the atmosphere in the prison, it is necessary to begin by creating appropriate socio-material conditions. When the state, in the majesty of the law, takes away a person's freedom, it assumes responsibility for their dignified existence. International agreements and ratified conventions setting standards for dealing with prisoners (Szymanowski, 2011) oblige it to do so. Therefore, the rights of inmates to adequate living space in their cells, nutrition and clothing, maintenance of hygiene and health, access to fresh air and exercise, etc., must be ensured. Any deficiencies in these areas are felt even more acutely in conditions of isolation than in freedom and cause genuine suffering, affecting the atmosphere and safety in the unit (Waligóra, 1984). Collaboration, especially between the penitentiary and security department, and the quartermaster and health services, plays a significant role in this regard.

It is important to remember that in conditions of prison isolation, individuals characterized by negative attitudes towards social norms and values, often demoralized, addicted, exhibiting personality or behavioral disorders, are present. Their stay in prison can exacerbate existing irregularities or contribute to the emergence of new disorders. This can be a cause of conflicts and aggression, exploitation of physically and mentally weaker inmates by dominant ones. Therefore, the proper placement of inmates in living cells, recreational and bathing groups, as well as other activity groups (recreational activities, interest groups, group meetings, rehabilitation programs, etc.), comes to the forefront. In this regard, extensive cooperation between the educator, the unit officer, and other officers in the security department must take place. Continuous correction

of inappropriate behaviors and the shaping of socially accepted attitudes are also essential. To achieve this, the educator should engage in individual conversations with inmates as frequently as possible, visit living cells and places where inmates stay, and organize group activities. Through these actions, the educator could positively influence the inmates and detect signals indicating a threat to their personal safety. During such meetings, all methods of influence (personal, situational, and group) can be applied, which can ultimately improve mutual relationships both among inmates in the educational group and shape the proper educational atmosphere.

The lack of movement and limited leisure activity in isolation conditions contribute to the build-up of tension, and a routine and monotonous daily schedule may lead prisoners to fill their excess time in unacceptable ways (illegal contacts, gambling, destruction of accommodation equipment, etc.), resulting in various forms of aggression such as self-aggression, aggression directed at fellow inmates, or officers (Poklek, 2008). To minimize the negative effects of the deprivation character of the prison, inmates, especially in closed-type facilities, should be allowed to engage in various forms of activity and spend as much time as possible outside their living cells. To achieve this, employment, education, cultural-educational and sports activities, artistic creativity, and external contacts with entities involved in rehabilitation and assistance to inmates (churches and religious associations, foundations and associations, non-governmental organizations, etc.) are utilized. In the implementation of these initiatives, in addition to the security and penitentiary department, the employment department of inmates and external individuals also play a role.

Considering the educational atmosphere as a necessary condition for the implementation of penitentiary interventions in the prison, mutual relationships among inmates and between inmates and individuals conducting penitentiary interventions are shaped. These relationships ensure individual safety and order in the unit while influencing the effectiveness of the interventions conducted. Unfortunately, without proper individual diagnosis and knowledge of the inmates' environment, shaping these relationships and creating the right atmosphere is not possible. Individual diagnosis is continuous and includes personality studies (Poklek, 2017), while the inmates' environment is understood by determining the social roles (environmental) they play in the prison, the structures and group processes present in the inmate community, and their transformations, threats to the proper conduct of interventions, and unit safety. These issues are regulated by the Regulation of the Minister of Justice of August 14, 2003, regarding the methods of conducting penitentiary interventions in prisons and pre-trial detention centers.

Phenomena associated with the second life require every officer and staff member to undertake preventive actions contributing to minimizing the negative impact of the criminal subculture on penitentiary interventions and the functioning

of the unit. These actions, described in the Regulation of the Minister of Justice of October 17, 2016, regarding the methods of protecting organizational units of the Prison Service, involve observing behaviors and relationships in the inmate environment, recognizing subculture structures and the participation of inmates in them, identifying the atmosphere and moods among inmates, and intentions jeopardizing the security of the penitentiary unit. Therefore, it is necessary to observe inmates' behaviors during their daily situations: meal intake, activity in the living cell, order, cultural and educational activities, etc. Concern should be raised about manifestations of dominance by some inmates over others, assigning cleaning duties out of order, forcing servitude, isolating from shared meals, mocking and harassing, taking personal belongings, or hindering contact with educators and other officers, etc. Group roles directly influencing the educational atmosphere that should be particularly noted include dominating inmates (so-called leaders) and their helpers (so-called soldiers), as well as supporting inmates (so-called grey eminence). While it is easy to identify "soldiers" due to aggressive behaviors and violations of regulations, it is more challenging to establish the presence of a "leader" or, even more so, "grey eminence" since they do not engage visibly but often stand behind disciplinary incidents. Another group role that the educator should quickly identify is the role of the victim (the so-called victimized) – an inmate who is subjected to harassment, exploitation, abuse, or other forms of aggression. This role may be assigned to inmates for various reasons: due to the nature of the committed crime (sexual crimes with children, cruelty, or manifestations of deviance), psycho-physical conditions (physical disability, mental impairment, weak psychological structure, etc., victimization traits), sexual orientation, cooperation with law enforcement during an investigation, collaboration with prison administration, defiance of subcultural norms and exclusion from the group, or unpaid debts (Snopek, 2012). Recognizing the group structure and its transformations, identifying dynamically changing group roles, the struggle for influence, and mutual combat among dominating inmates require constant monitoring of the level of consolidation of informal structures, which is possible only with the cooperation of representatives of all service departments.

Another issue directly affecting the educational atmosphere and penitentiary interventions is the infiltration of drugs into the penitentiary unit and their trade among inmates. According to the Directive No. 3 of the Director-General of the Prison Service dated January 13, 2016, amending the directive on preventing the entry of intoxicating substances and their circulation in prisons and pre-trial detention centers, preventive measures should involve observing behaviors, paying attention to conversations indicating the possibility of using or distributing intoxicating and psychotropic substances among inmates, controlling inmates returning from places outside the prison (passes, breaks, external employment, activities off-site), controlling packages and postal parcels for them, paying attention to external individuals, etc. (Jaworski, 2006). The educator or

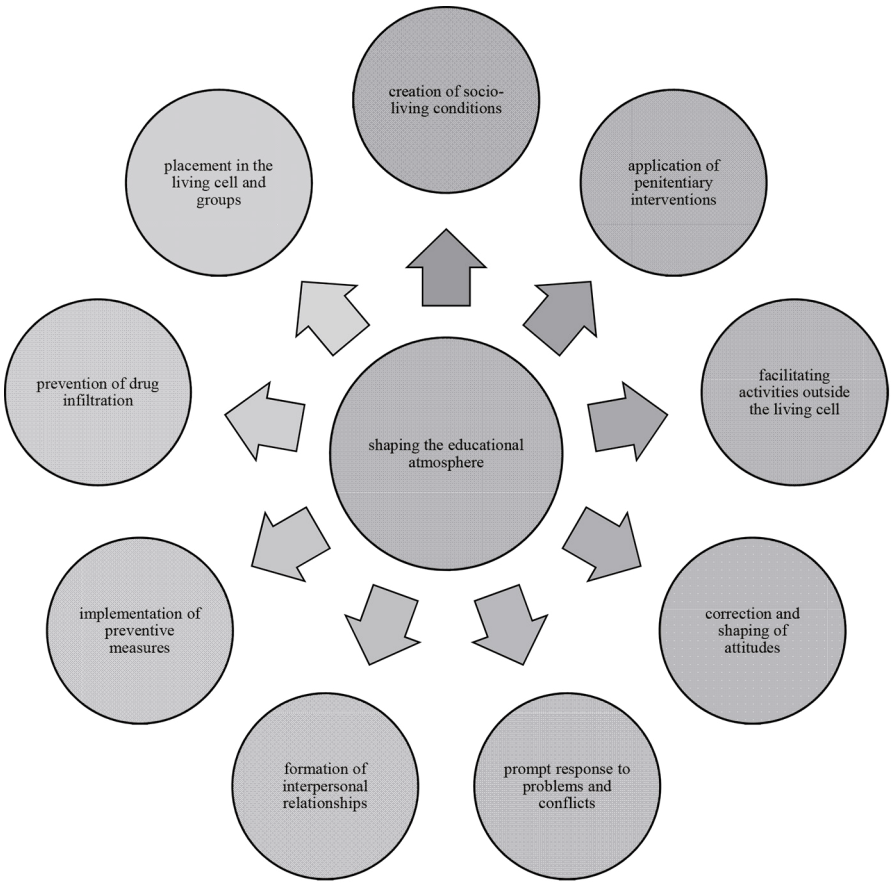


Fig. 2. Factors shaping the educational atmosphere in a penitentiary unit
Source: the author's own study.

psychologist plays a significant role in identifying individuals addicted to or using drugs in the past, or associated with the drug environment through personality studies. During educational or psycho-corrective conversations, information about conflicts, inmates' debts, and other personal safety threats arising from drug transfer on and within the prison premises can be obtained, which should be promptly communicated to the designated officer.

Additionally, the educator, in collaboration with the unit officer and other officers, promptly responds to emerging problems and conflicts among inmates, providing relevant information to the concerned inmates. In justified cases, they may make appropriate relocations in living cells, and even with the approval of the residential unit management. In the event of a breach of order and discipline and the preparation of a disciplinary proposal, the educator engages in a conversation

with the inmate, establishes the facts, and proposes further actions. In summary, as mentioned earlier, shaping the educational atmosphere involves the educator, in collaboration with other officers, undertaking actions presented in the diagram below. At the same time, clear boundaries of conduct, derived from societal norms and legal regulations, should be set for the inmates, and in case of violations, appropriate disciplinary consequences should be imposed.

Conclusions

Analyzing the legal conditions of the educational atmosphere in a penitentiary, one can conclude that there are formal conditions for its shaping, thus creating a foundation for implementing dynamic security in penitentiary units. Unfortunately, there are also organizational and mental barriers to building proper relationships between staff and inmates. In the current penitentiary system, the work of educators, despite formal duties related to penitentiary interventions, often boils down to administrative tasks, involving the production of numerous documents placed in the computer system instead of direct contact with the inmates. This has led to educators being evaluated on timely data entry into the Central Database of Persons Deprived of Liberty rather than on typical pedagogical and resocialization work. Considering the workload and the still too high number of inmates assigned to one educator, even if they wanted to, they are unable to dedicate sufficient time to contact beyond mandatory conversations.

In terms of mental barriers, attention must be paid to attitudes consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components influencing the perception and treatment of others, thereby affecting their behavior. If officers harbor negative thoughts about inmates (cognitive component), they will nurture negative feelings towards them (emotional component), influencing their treatment (behavioral component). This, in turn, does not contribute to a positive atmosphere, proper relationships, and professional interactions between staff and inmates. It may also lead to officers abusing their authoritative position, exceeding their powers, resulting in tensions and, in extreme cases, assaults on officers or self-harm by inmates (Poklek, 2022).

The use of discretionary power and selective law enforcement can be an effective means through which officers maintain order, legitimacy, and lawfulness, establishing positive relationships with inmates (Liebling, 2011). Unfortunately, not everyone is aware of this, and some focus primarily on safety and security matters, neglecting or giving little importance to establishing and maintaining professional interpersonal contacts with inmates. This problem arises because issues of risk and threats in prisons are viewed from a protective perspective, while the fundamental elements of dynamic security have a socio-pedagogical character (Szczepaniak, 2022). Officers, for various reasons, fear personal emotional involvement in the

process of inmate rehabilitation, thus hiding behind legal regulations under the guise of "official contacts" (Sobczyszyn, Jeziorański, 2019).

All actions discussed in this study by staff members have an impact not only on individual inmates but also on the educational atmosphere in the unit and the entire institution. Therefore, they should be conducted professionally, with an understanding of both legal regulations and psychosocial mechanisms of social influence (Nowacki, 2010), while respecting the dignity and justice, adhering to the principles of institutional legality, and the responsibility of the inmate. This will be the basis for creating the necessary conditions for the implementation of dynamic security, whose application stems directly from the European Prison Rules (Recommendation No. 51.2 in the English version of the EPR contains the term "dynamic security" understood as complementing physical barriers and other technical means).

In conclusion, it is necessary to recall a recommendation formulated over 10 years ago during survey research on international standards of inmate treatment in the awareness of prison staff, conducted among officers of the Prison Service participating in professional training: *In the future, research should be conducted on the desired, expected, and actual relationships between prison staff and inmates, on the system of shaping the proper sense of role and social mission, and the level of professional ethics of the staff...* (Łapiński, Poklek, 2010, p. 183).

Unfortunately, the future has become the present, the then-present is history, and the proposed direction of research has not been undertaken, to the detriment of the penitentiary system and the education of officers in building relationships between staff and inmates, shaping a conducive educational atmosphere, and adhering to the principles of dynamic security.

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