
**PARENTING SKILLS OF IMPRISONED: IMPACT AND CONSEQUENCES
FOR HUMAN SECURITY**

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Abstract. The family is a basic society unit, which provides a sense of security, love and belonging for all its members, especially children. The responsibility for the development and upbringing of the children lies with the parents. However, in a situation when a parent is incarcerated for various reasons the threats for personal emotional security increase due to disruption of contacts with relatives which is typical consequence both for parents and children. The parent's stay in penitentiary isolation results in a significant weakening or breaking of the parental bond and contacts with the closest relatives. It is therefore stressed that maintaining contact with the family is important both for persons deprived of their liberty themselves and for their loved ones. Maintaining contact with the children is considered to be one of the most important protective factors against committing another offence and the consequent incarceration. Children brought up in families where one parent is in prison experience social and emotional disorders. Author stress that the separation of a parent and child as a consequence of parent incarceration lowers the level of self-esteem, self-acceptance, evokes a sense of shame and leads to social isolation of the child. In order to improve family relations and maintain contacts, the Prison Service should provide a number of programmes for incarcerated parents, whose main objective is to strengthen parenting skills.

Key words: incarcerated parents; children; human security; parenting skills

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1. Introduction

The family is a natural social and educational environment that shapes a young person. The strongest influence is seen in the first years of a child's life. The parents, through their behaviour, should set an example and be an authority for the child. Family members mutually influence each other. Therefore, disorders in the proper functioning of one member of the family cause difficulties in the functioning of other family members. Undoubtedly, one of such disorders is the parent's incarceration. In the case of dysfunctional families, parents relatively often manifest deficiencies, shortages of personal resources in the scope of the ability to name and express their emotions, communication skills, conflict resolution, coping with difficult and stressful situations. Consequently, they lead to inadequate reactions based on aggression, submissiveness or withdrawal (Nowak, 2016). The family performs a number of important functions necessary in the process of raising a child. Its main task is to provide for the basic needs of children, and the role of the parent is to take care of the child's proper development in both physical, mental and emotional aspects. Providing stability to the child, creating an atmosphere of security and building self-esteem in the child conditions its comprehensive and proper development, and allows the formation of socially desirable characteristics (Jankowska, 2015). In families with multiple problems (pathologies,

e.g. incarceration of one of the parents), children are at risk of “being impaired not only in terms of adaptation to social norms, but above all in terms of life skills and constructive coping in adult life. They experience chronic frustration at the lack of environmental conditions necessary to satisfy their basic needs and suffer from personality, functional and neurotic disorders that affect them” (Nowak, 2016, p. 31). The family as the basic social cell is supposed to provide the child with a sense of security, belonging, acceptance and lead to proper socialisation (Grygoruk, Dzierżanowski, Kiluk, 2009). Parents, as persons responsible for their children, should be the first to notice their children’s undesirable behaviour and minimise their developmental difficulties. Pathological phenomena that occur in the family (e.g. alcoholism, unemployment, violence) and parental inefficiency are the cause of difficulties in the child’s development and its improper socialisation. Creating an appropriate educational atmosphere for a child, giving it a sense of security, love and sense of belonging are extremely important parenting skills. Shaping positive patterns is reflected in the child’s behaviour. It is the parents who should take care of building lasting and positive relationships. It is important not only to maintain physical contact, but above emotional contact (Cudak, 2014, Niesyty, 2020, Phillips, Dettlaff, 2009). Family ties and relations between parents and children are extremely important, but sometimes these ties are loosened or broken for a variety of reasons. One such reason is the incarceration of one of the parents. The weakening of family ties can cause a sense of loneliness in the child, disrupt the correctness of relationships, and lead to the complete emotional breakdown of the family (Nowak, 2011; Prokosz, 2016, Raikes, 2016). The moment when either of the parents is incarcerated is difficult for everyone in the family. It has a negative impact on the functioning of the entire family system. Additionally, it limits or significantly prevents the performance of social roles (father, mother, partner). It also means that other family members have to take over the roles they perform (Knapik, Przybyła-Basista, 2015).

2. Parent in a correctional facility

According to the law in force in Poland and Article 87 § 1 of the Executive Penal Code, women serve prison sentences in separation from men. Statistics from the Central Board of Prison Service show that in 2019 there were 3,202 female and 74,564 male prisoners. There is no data indicating how many of these inmates (women and men) have children. In the case of men, having offspring does not condition the mode and manner of imprisonment against them. The situation is slightly different for convicted women who are mothers. The provisions of Article 87 §4 and §5 of the Executive Penal Code indicate that women can take a 24-hour-a-day and direct care of a child under 3 years of age. In order to implement this provision, there are two prison nurseries (Mother and Child Homes) in Poland in the Prison and Correctional Facility no. 1 in Grudziądz and in Krzywaniac. These Homes are organised in separate buildings and are separated from the pavilions for other women prisoners. The facilities are equipped with specially adapted rooms for children and mothers¹. In accordance with their purpose, Mother and Child Homes, in terms of their appearance and equipment, are supposed to create conditions as similar to home conditions as possible. Incarcerated mothers have at their disposal rooms with cots for children, rooms with toys and a room for preparing meals, as well as nursing care for children.

Pursuant to Article 87a § 1 of the Executive Penal Code², during the execution of a sentence against a convicted person having permanent custody of a child under 15 years of age, account shall be taken in particular of the need to initiate, maintain and strengthen their emotional bond with the children, fulfilment of alimony obligations and provision of material assistance to the children, as well as cooperation with educational care facilities where the children reside.

¹ Detailed rules concerning the procedure for admitting children of mothers deprived of liberty to Mother and Child Homes at indicated correctional facilities and detailed rules for the organisation and operation of these facilities are laid down in the Regulation of the Minister of Justice of 17 September 2003. The Minister of Justice shall define, by way of a regulation, the procedure for admitting children of mothers deprived of liberty to Mother and Child Homes at indicated correctional facilities and detailed rules for the organisation and operation of these facilities, taking into account the situations referred to in § 3-4, as well as the needs for securing the proper development of the child.

² According to this article §1 Women shall serve a sentence of imprisonment in separation from men. § 2. A convicted woman shall serve her sentence in a semi-open correctional institution, unless the degree of demoralisation or security considerations speak in favour of serving the sentence in a correctional institution of a different type. § 3. A pregnant or nursing woman shall be provided with specialist care. § 5.

§ 2. Prisoners who have permanent custody of children who are in educational care facilities should, as far as possible, be incarcerated in appropriate correctional facilities that are closest to the children's place of residence. The incarceration of a parent in a penal institution shall not be tantamount to the deprivation of parental rights (except when the incarceration is the result of child abuse or failure to fulfil parental responsibilities). In the case of a deprivation or suspension of parental authority, the child, at the request of the Guardianship Court, is referred to a foster family or an educational care facility (Kwieciński, 2012). The European Prison Rules clearly indicate that detained parents "shall be allowed to communicate as often as possible by letter, telephone or other forms of communication with their families, other persons and representatives of outside organisations and to receive visits from these persons" (Rule 24.1). In addition, "the arrangements for visits shall be such as to allow prisoners to maintain and develop family relationships in as normal a manner as possible" (Rule 24.4). In the process of rehabilitation and subsequent readaptation of parents who serve a custodial sentence, it is extremely important to strengthen the protective factors, namely the family and children. This enables both building and strengthening the sense of love, security and belonging in the children themselves, as well as building correct relations and strengthening parental competence and properly fulfilling social roles (Dąbrowska, Kusztal, 2019).

The literature emphasizes that the possibility of contacting the loved ones is extremely important in the process of rehabilitation and subsequent readaptation, especially in the case of incarcerated parents. This is why contact with the family is counted as correctional treatment alongside work or study. It is considered to play a significant role in the implementation of rehabilitation objectives and the execution of the imprisonment sentence (Kwieciński, 2012). The possibility of maintaining contact with the family is important both for persons deprived of their liberty themselves and for their loved ones (children, spouses, partners, parents). Maintaining contact with the loved ones is considered to be one of the most important protective factors against committing another offence and incarceration. A child whose parent is in prison and therefore does not fulfil his or her parental functions grows up in an incomplete (often dysfunctional) family, which in turn affects his or her functioning in the society. The incarceration of a parent results in a significant weakening or complete breaking of parent-child bonds. Moreover, it contributes to the emergence of conflicts within the family, lost sense of security and failure to meet material and emotional needs (Nowak 2020). Additionally, it contributes to the stigmatisation of the child in its closest environment. Hence the need to organise various meetings and workshops for imprisoned parents and their children. It is important that during such meetings the most natural, home-like conditions possible are created (Dąbrowska, Kusztal, 2019).

3. Psychosocial situation of children to imprisoned parents

The imprisonment of adults affects not only themselves but also their loved ones, including their children. It is estimated that every year around 312,000 children experience a situation of having a parent in prison, and around 17,000 women experience motherhood in isolation (Minson, 2019 after Domżalska, 2011). While the parent is in prison, the needs of the child are very often overlooked or not fully satisfied. In order to strengthen and improve the relationship between the parent in penitentiary isolation and their child, it is necessary to conduct and evaluate programmes aimed at improving family relations and parental competences, keep a detailed record of the number of children whose parent is serving a custodial sentence, as far as possible organise regular meetings between the parent and the child in places that will create an atmosphere of safety, organise assistance and support from a psychologist and therapist for the children and those closest to the imprisoned parent, and to conduct research among these children in order to develop appropriate support programmes. It is important to further develop and improve the programmes and activities already in place to improve relations and contacts between imprisoned parents and their children (Dzierżyńska-Breś, 2017, Badowska-Hodyr, 2019).

The incarceration of one parent is associated with the appearance of negative consequences in the development of the child. Children growing up in families in which one parent is imprisoned experience physical and emotional disorders (Prokosz, 2016, Johnson, Easterling, 2012). A parent's incarceration significantly limits opportunities for daily contact with the child and thus playing his or her social role as a mother/father or spouse/partner. The imprisonment of a parent means a change in the functioning of the whole family system. A child's awareness

that his or her parent is in prison results in insecurity, anxiety, frustration, anger and shame, especially in front of friends. Children brought up in such families often cause behavioural issues and have educational difficulties as regards learning and carrying out their school duties. The length of the parent's stay in penitentiary isolation and the lack of opportunities for regular meetings is of great importance for the occurrence of undesirable changes in the child's behaviour (Domžalska, 2011). The separation between parent and child as a consequence of the incarceration of the parent lowers the level of self-esteem, self-acceptance, evokes a sense of shame and leads to social isolation of the child. Lack of contact with the parent causes undesirable effects and impinges on the quality of the child's life (Knapik, Przybyła-Basista, 2015). Due to the nature and character of a penitentiary institution as a place, the programmes aimed at parents who serve prison sentences often take place without the participation of children. The lack of developed mechanisms and ways of working with children and their parents in prisons contributes to the disappearance and disintegration of family ties (Dzierżyńska-Breś, 2017).

In order to help children whose parents are serving prison sentences, not only programmes targeted at parents, but also courses and trainings for teachers and educators seem to be necessary. Their role, the support and understanding they show may be very helpful in the process of educating and socialising children of imprisoned parents. In this case, an important role is also played by the penitentiary staff who, to the extent of their possibilities and competences, should make sure that family relations are positive (Domžalska, 2011, Murray, Farrington, 2008).

4. Programmes for parents in correctional facilities

In Poland, the Prison Service runs a number of programmes for imprisoned parents. In cooperation with various institutions, they demonstrate how to be a responsible, loving or understanding parent. The programmes are addressed to both women and men prisoners. Maintaining or repairing the relations with the closest persons, including children, is one of the priorities of rehabilitation activities. In order for the actions to be effective it is extremely important to involve the imprisoned parents at the moment of their admission to the penitentiary institution. The family is considered to be a pillar for the projects that are carried out, hence so many programmes implemented by the Prison Service focus on the issues that are related to the family and its integration. The most popular programme, which is implemented in all penitentiary units in Poland, is the Duluth programme (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project of Duluth). It is targeted mainly at perpetrators of domestic violence and has a psycho-educational character. Its main goals refer to the increase in the perpetrator's awareness of what violence is, learning to recognize the signals that precede violent behaviour, learning to solve conflicts without using violence and aggression, expressing one's feelings, emotions or using the help of other people or institutions.

Now available on the Central Board of Prison Service website is a list of programmes that the Prison Service runs for imprisoned parents. The programmes focus on raising educational competences, developing social skills related to active listening, proper communication, expressing emotions, building and strengthening a sense of responsibility. In the case of parents who serve prison sentences it is equally important to implement activities which shape positive and socially desired social relations, strengthen parents' personal models and improve their parenting competences. The programmes are also aimed at making parents aware of threats that children are exposed to, e.g. self-mutilation, eating disorders, addiction to psychoactive substances or the Internet. Therefore, there is an emphasis laid on the importance of motivating and inspiring Prison Service employees to create and implement correctional-rehabilitation-readaptation programmes, which will be adapted to the needs of imprisoned parents in terms of raising and strengthening parental competences. The implemented programmes should be based on building and maintaining positive parent-child relations (Dąbrowska, Kuształ, Turczyk, 2020).

5. Conclusion

The exercise of parental functions in the case of imprisoned parents is associated with many difficulties and problems. Parents who do not have daily contact with their child need help and support in building proper relations, as well as knowledge and opportunities to gain experience with providing caring for their child. Especially in the case of women, being a mother affords a greater sense of belonging, responsibility (for herself

and her child), acceptance and love. The law that guarantees the child to stay with its mother in a correctional facility until the child is 3 years old allows for building a real parental bond, and at the same time contributes to the proper fulfilment of the mother's role after leaving prison (Matysiak-Błaszczuk, Włodarczyk, 2004). Maintaining contacts between the imprisoned parent, the child and the closest ones is one of the most important factors in the rehabilitation process. The inmate's awareness that there is someone who wants to meet, someone who is waiting, in a way facilitates the rehabilitation process and reinforces its effectiveness (Kurek, 2016). Building and maintaining family relationships should be the starting point in terms of constructing and implementing programmes for imprisoned parents. The literature indicates that imprisoned parents maintain contact with their children through the possibility of correspondence, phone calls and personal visits. The identified forms of contact induce a sense of strength, support, joy, but also fear, sadness and often shame in the detainees. Regular contact with children is extremely important as it helps them to cope with the difficult circumstances of being in prison, motivates them to change their behaviour and strengthens their sense of belonging and responsibility, not only for themselves but also for others. All the activities that the Prison Service undertakes with the inmates are aimed at preparing them for living at liberty. According to the recommendations of the delegates of the Committee of Ministers concerning children of imprisoned parents, it has been indicated that "measures to mitigate the adverse effects of parental imprisonment on children and on parental competence, and measures to ensure the protection of child development and to promote family reunification are a priority" (Badowska-Hodyr, 2020, p. 110). Parents who, for a variety of reasons, cannot be with their child on a daily basis need help and support, which should be tailored to the specific needs of both the imprisoned parents and their children. The proposed support should not refer to suggestions for certain solutions, but to concrete actions. This is why the classes held to improve parenting skills seem to be invaluable. The implemented programmes should be directed not only to the imprisoned parents, but also to their children, because only this mode of work will contribute to the betterment of family relations, and will yield positive results. It is also worth noting the lack of statistical data regarding imprisoned parents in the general prison population. Knowing the extent of this phenomenon would provide important information that could contribute to improving the quality of the implemented programmes and their effectiveness, as well as to the organisation of appropriate care and support.

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