

SOCIAL WORKER'S ACTIVITY IN THE PROCESS OF RE-SOCIALISATION IN THE PENAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

The article analyses theoretically the perspective of social work in the penal system. The penal system creates the conditions and opportunities for a successful reintegration of convicts into society. This system is being intensively developed and social work is becoming more and more important in order to help change the behaviour, attitudes and skills of prisoners so that they can successfully reintegrate into society after serving their sentences. This article discusses the place and role of social work in the penal system. The research aimed to find out what skills a social worker needs to have when working with prisoners in order to be able to help them successfully prepare for their reintegration back into society after imprisonment.

Keywords: convicted, social work, penal system, resocialization

INTRODUCTION

Resocialization is a complex and lengthy process. In the research community, the problems of the social services field have been the subject of a long-standing debate, one of the main subjects of which is the vulnerable group of prisoners and the need to ensure effective resocialization. The search is on for the most optimal ways and methods to achieve the intended objectives. The solution to this problem is closely linked to the fight against crime and recidivism. Kalatur, Levchenko & Myroniuk(2020) argue that addressing a wide range of societal social and practical activities not only to prevent and eradicate crime, but also to prevent social deviance in general. As changes take place in the penal system, the social worker is more and more often and deeply involved in the process of resocialization of convicts and the objectives of his work are being formulated. These objectives often vary from one institution to another and are not necessarily effective and conducive to the resocialization of prisoners. The question is therefore what is the place of the social worker in the penal system and what functions should he or she perform in order to ensure that the resocialization of convicts is effective and that recidivism does not occur?

METHODS

Theoretical analysis of the literature. Qualitative research - semi-structured interviews, content analysis of the data.

RESOCIALIZATION OF SENTENCED PRISONERS

Resocialization of prisoners is an important and complex task, the aim of which is to change the behaviour, attitudes and abilities of prisoners so that they can successfully reintegrate into society after serving their sentence. The process of resocialization is complex and multifaceted, involving education, vocational rehabilitation, psychological support, social integration and many other activities. Sakalauskas, Čepas, Nikartas, Ūselė (2012) argue that people who have served their sentences in prison and have a criminal record are among the most vulnerable groups and are socially excluded. One of the most relevant ways of helping to improve the reintegration of convicted persons and persons returning from prison into society is to address the need for social services (education, vocational training,

employment, housing) that meet the needs of the aforementioned group of persons, thereby promoting their independence and autonomy.

Taking into account the results of NUEMBO surveys carried out regularly in 42 countries, the crime rate index provided by the different countries looks at aspects such as a country's overall level of crime against the person and their property, the population's sense of safety on the street, and others. Lithuania ranks 22nd with a crime index of 33.3, 26th with a safety index of 66.7. Compared to other EU countries, Lithuania's crime index is lower than average, but in 2019-2023, there is an increase in the crime rate in our country and an increase in the number of repeat offences (Department of Statistics of the Republic of Lithuania, 2023), which suggests that the resocialization process in the penitentiary system is not going on sufficiently well and that this is leading to a tendency for people who have served their sentences to re-offend. Crime as a social phenomenon is one of the most sensitive problems in today's society, which threatens not only the safety of individuals, but also the social, economic and cultural development of society (Eismontaitė, A., Beconytė, G., 2011).

Dünkel, F., Pruin, I., Storgaard, A., & Weber, J. (2018) state that there is a growing debate at policy level on how to improve a person's transition from prison to life in society. Pre-release and resettlement practices are being discussed around the world in order to reduce the negative effects of incarceration and reoffending. Many European countries are reforming and developing strategies to improve release processes and reintegration. One reason for this development is that the era of 'mass incarceration' (Garland, 2001) in the US mirrored the era of mass release: almost all incarcerated offenders have to be released at the end of their (time-limited) prison sentences, making the issue of resettlement of prisoners more important from a quantitative perspective. This has led to new research, followed by the need to redesign transitional structures and schemes (Petersilia, 2004; Travis, 2005). Thus, the issue of prisoner resettlement has been placed on the political agenda and has become a focus of research. Although Europe has not faced the situations that the US has faced, some European countries (e.g. Belgium, England, the Netherlands and Spain, (Dünkel, 2017a) and the problems associated with prison overcrowding have led to European discussions on how to better structure and develop the concept of prison resettlement. (Dünkel, F., Pruin, I., Storgaard, A., & Weber, J., 2018)

Deprivation of liberty may not be intended to cause permanent harm, but it is a deliberate judicial infliction of pain, and it is from this paradox that the main problems of prisoner resettlement (or what some call 'return') stem. Indeed, the impact of imprisonment can have many unintended consequences and, because of the powerful social environment, undermine the chances of successful resettlement. It follows, therefore, that reducing the damage caused by imprisonment and the problems faced by prisoners is essential if they are to lead a constructive life free of crime and if society is to be protected.

Liukinevičienė, Mikalauskas (2018) argue that the problem of resocialization of convicted prisoners is a very topical issue in many countries. Chigrinets (2019), Almeida, Morandi & Aires (2022) researchers acknowledge that the resocialization of convicts should not be implemented after they have served their sentence, but during the period of their sentence. Liukinevičienė, Mikalauskas (2018) emphasise that prison is not the most appropriate place for a person's social integration into society, and that these institutions today have very high responsibilities, as they are no longer just places of serving a sentence, but rather places of preparation for a person's integration into society and for the goal of being crime-free in future. This approach is based on an analysis of the resocialization systems for convicted persons in various countries and their effectiveness. In all these countries, the resocialization of convicted persons is a complex process that starts when the prisoner enters the prison and continues throughout the period of imprisonment and integration into society. Resocialization is "the process by which individuals learn to re-adapt to society. The term derives from socialization, which involves learning the norms, values and orientations of society, is a crucial process in the development of an individual's personality, and involves the acquisition of behaviour, thinking styles, feelings, knowledge, motivation and value orientations transmitted through the social environment. The aims of socialization are the acquisition of intellectual abilities and self-confidence, achievement motivation, the formation of conscience, conflict resolution and solidarity. The concept of resocialization is used to stress the need for individuals to relearn these aspects of social life. Resocialization should be seen as a lifelong process which is an essential component of socialization." (Sakalauskas, 2017). In the process of resocialization

of convicts, not only prison staff play an important role, but also social workers, who are increasingly being integrated into the process of resocialization of convicts. Although this is a relatively new practice in Lithuania, it has proved to be fully successful in Germany and England. In these countries, social workers' services have been set up in prisons and external specialists have been brought in. They form individual professional relationships with prisoners and provide comprehensive support throughout the resocialization process. Social workers play a variety of professional roles in the resocialization process of prisoners. It is relevant that social workers are involved in the resocialization process of convicts in Lithuanian prisons, in order to improve it and increase its effectiveness, and to individualize the process according to the needs of the convicts. Social workers in prisons need to have professional skills and competences in order to be able to provide effective support to prisoners, manage conflicts and crises, comply with ethical and legal standards, and cooperate with other social workers and other institutions providing social services to prisoners in prison. This helps to ensure effective and quality social work in prisons and contributes to the reintegration of prisoners into society. The role of the social worker in the penitentiary system is very important and multifaceted. It can play a variety of roles in order to ensure the effective execution of sentences and to help individuals reintegrate into society. The social worker can be a facilitator and counsellor, an information provider, a risk assessor and intervention designer, a reassurer and coordinator, an advocate and community organizer. In these roles, he or she can provide individual support, plan the resocialization process, enforce sentences, teach skills, build links with the community, resolve conflicts, assist in crisis management and organize meaningful leisure activities. Through all these roles, the social worker aims to help the prisoner to adjust to life after sentence, to acquire new skills, values and patterns of behaviour and to integrate into society.

The Council of Europe's Recommendation on the resocialization of prisoners (Recommendation Rec(2006)2) states that "resocialization should be a long-term process aimed at helping prisoners to rebuild their lives and integrate into society after release from prison". This Recommendation stresses that resocialization must include not only vocational training and education, but also psychological and social support in order to enable prisoners to achieve successful reintegration into society. Many prisoners face difficulties in their attempts to reintegrate into society after release, and the conditions they face after release often lead to re-offending. Poor relationships with families, as well as with military systems, have been shown to contribute to the difficulties faced by prisoners after release and to the failure of their rehabilitation and reintegration processes. (Chikadzi, 2017) In order to better understand the problems of resocialization of convicted persons, it is important that the needs of the convicted person are taken into account.

The main objectives of resocialization are to help the prisoner reintegrate back into society, to help regain lost social skills and to reduce recidivism. The main principles of resocialization are to educate, motivate, transform and guide prisoners in the right direction, so that when they return from prison to society, they have a basic knowledge of the possibilities of life in society and are not tempted to re-offend. In order for the resocialization process to run smoothly and for the inmates themselves to be ready for it, it is important that they are motivated, that they are willing to participate in the resocialization programs and that they take the initiative to change their way of life. The competence of the professional in working with the inmate is also essential for positive resocialization. Inadequate training of the professional may be one of the factors contributing to unsuccessful resocialization. It is not only the motivation of the convicted person that is important, but also the capacity of the prison to achieve the objectives of resocialization, which are focused on the reduction of offences, the education of the convicted person and the social rehabilitation of prisoners in prisons.

SOCIAL WORKER IN PRISON

The system of prison sentencing in Lithuania is designed to ensure that convicted prisoners are punished in proportion to the crimes they have committed and that they receive the support they need to reintegrate successfully into society. The penal system places a strong emphasis on rehabilitation in order to reduce recidivism rates and promote public safety.

In order to stabilize these processes and to improve the integration of convicts into society in Lithuania, from 2021 onwards, the reform of the penitentiary system will merge all penitentiary institutions into a single one, creating the Prison Service of the Republic of Lithuania, whose subdivisions are the prisons of Alytus, Kaunas, Marijampolė, Panevėžys, Pravieniškės 1, Pravieniškės 2, Šiauliai, and Vilnius, the activities of which are organised and administered by the Prison Service.

Following the reform of the penal system in 2021, prisons have been staffed by social workers, whose main function is to help the prisoner prepare for leaving prison and for the rest of his/her sentence in or out of the prison and for life in society.

The social worker in the prison passes on the information about the prisoner's integration into society to the municipality to which the prisoner plans to return.

New model for the social integration of people serving sentences from 2021

Social worker in prison	Social worker working for a municipality or NGO
Responsible for the first phase of integration.	Responsible for the second phase of integration.
Preparation for future integration starts 1 year before the end of the sentence or parole.	Municipalities start preparing for integration at least 6 months before the end of the sentence or permanent release, i.e. when the information is received from the correctional institution.
- Familiar with behavioural assessment. - Consider moving the person to a halfway house, providing short-term outings, etc. - Action is started to ensure that the person in detention has a place to live, employment, addiction treatment, restoration of relations with relatives, social support, and the ability to manage their debts. - Maintains contact with the municipality to which the prisoner plans to return, or other institutions and NGOs that may be able to help. - Maintains contact with the municipality to which the prisoner is planning to return, or with other institutions and NGOs that can help. - Mediates between the convicted person and the municipality or non-governmental organizations. - Contacts the inmate's relatives, if they wish. - Manages the identity documents of convicted persons. - At least 6 months before the end of the sentence or parole, informs the municipality of the person who will return to the municipality and who will need services.	- The municipality appoints a specific social worker or NGO to be responsible for the person's integration. - The municipal or NGO social worker contacts the prison social worker to find out about the prisoner's needs. - A plan is drawn up to implement the necessary measures, and services or support are initiated. - An escort service is provided in the free zone, informing and advising the person about the assistance and services available in the municipality. - Help with health, psychological, legal and financial problems. - Help to find a place to live, a job or register with the Employment Service. - When a person needs complex services, they can be provided for up to 12 months in a crisis centre.

Table 1 is based on information available on the website of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania <<https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/bausme-atlikusius-zmones-i-gyvenimalaisveje-lydes-socialiniai-darbuotojai-ir-nevyriausybes-organizacijas?lang=lt>>

Resocialization is important in prisons because it helps to restore the social, psychological and emotional self-awareness of prisoners. It is a process aimed at reintegrating prisoners back into society so that they can acquire the various skills and knowledge they need to reintegrate successfully into society and avoid re-offending. The resocialization process usually takes place through various events that help to fill leisure time. Participants learn various practical skills such as technological and social skills. These events help to build social ties that the inmates will be able to use when they are released into society.

The Ministry of Social Security and Labor, together with the Ministry of Justice, has developed a new integration-accompaniment model to increase the contribution of social workers in the resocialization process, as according to the Ministry of Social Security, almost two-thirds of ex-convicts return to correctional institutions, which is one of the lowest rates in the EU. Therefore, the project is expected to yield good results and reduce the number of repeat offenders. The joint work between the penitentiary system and social assistance will help people to better integrate into society and start a new life.

Based on 8 October 2020. The municipal administration appoints a social worker or an NGO representative to the social services institution for persons released from the penitentiary institution, and provides an escort service to the social integration plan drawn up in the institution, which is in line with the person's social needs, according to the Order of 8 August 2020 on "Approval of the procedure for the social integration of persons released from correctional institutions"; providing information, counselling, mediation and representation and other general social services; assisting in solving health, employment, residence, debt and other social, legal and psychological problems; providing information and mediation on the receipt of cash social assistance, other social services and other targeted assistance. Social work here deals with complex and ambiguous situations for which there are no known, predetermined solutions, but which require the active use of knowledge, skills and values.

EMPIRICAL PART

A qualitative study was carried out between January and April 2023 - semi-structured interviews. The content analysis method was used to analyse the survey data. The participants were social workers working in the penitentiary system.

The study aimed to find out what skills a social worker needs to have when working with prisoners in order to help them successfully prepare for their return from prison to society.

According to the results of the survey, the category "Skills of a social worker" consisted of four sub-categories: communication, problem solving, empathy, sensitivity, tolerance.

Informants state that a social worker needs to have **communication skills** when building a professional relationship with a convict. The social workers who participated in the study mentioned that a social worker "*must be skilled in communicating with service recipients*"(1) "*to establish a connection with a person*"(2), "*to create a strong bond*"(4); "*to gain a person's trust*"(5), "*to promote useful interaction with the convicted person*"(7), "*to understand and know how to create a good climate in counselling sessions*"(9), communication skills are important for building a professional relationship in a professional field of work. As Johnson states, "the relationship is often described as a 'good connection' with the client" (2001). In the context of social work, the professional and the client are in constant interaction. As Večkienė and Eidukevičiūtė state, "the professional relationship that a social worker builds with a client is understood to be self-evident" (2016). Johnson (2001) describes the professional relationship as the pursuit of a common intended goal, in which the social worker pays attention to the interests of his/her client by displaying his/her professional knowledge, following a code of ethics, and using special skills. The client already has a professional relationship of one kind or another with the professional when he or she contacts the professional. The quality of the relationship not only determines the client's involvement in the dialogue with the professional, but also the changes after the relationship has ended (Večkienė & Eidukevičienė, 2016). The quality of the relationship with the professional is one of the main reasons for a happy client in social work (Jasaitė, 2008).

To sum up, a social worker without communication skills, without the client's trust, without establishing a connection, without taking the client's interests into account, will not be able to establish a proper professional connection in his/her professional field.

Informants state that a social worker must have **problem-solving skills** in order to build a professional relationship with a convict. *"the feeling of security consists not only of listening and accepting, but also of knowing how to solve problems"*(6), *"I think not, because the workload is actually too high compared to what it should be in order to achieve a better quality of service"*(4), *"can't hesitate or doubt"*(2), *"solves all the client's problems in a quick and orderly manner"*(5), *"then who will do the work if they don't help the person"*(1). The social worker must *"help the person to find the most appropriate solutions to his problems"*. (3).

A sense of security is important for every client, not only because of the environment in which they work, but also because of the professional with whom they interact. Listening and understanding each other is one part of creating a sense of security. The interaction between the professional and the client is based on listening and acceptance of otherness, which allows both the client and the professional to mutually change (Kiaunytė & Puidokienė, 2011). Also a sense of security consists not only of listening and acceptance, but at the same time a sense of trust. According to Žydžiūnaitė and Crisafulli (2012), *"the professional relationship with the client indicates the client's trusting behaviour"*. As Sakalauskas (2015) states *"... for any counselling client, it is crucial to first establish a relationship with a single point of contact whom he or she can trust and turn to for a wide range of issues"*. Susenoa and Pinningtonb (2017) also argue that the relationship between the professional and the client is strengthened when the client begins to trust the professional. Johnson (2001) argues that the worker, together with the client, creates an atmosphere of trust, so that until the client feels the professional's care, understanding and experience, the relationship is very weak.

Informants state that the social worker must have **empathy skills** when interacting with the client, that it is very important for the social worker to be respectful and patient when working with the client, that the social worker *should "listen to the client's needs and not lie"* (5), and that *"the attitude towards convicted persons is slowly changing, but still not as fast as one would like"* (3), *"a person who has made a mistake or a series of mistakes, about that stereotype, cannot carry it with him or her, the social worker must have the desire to help the person, that's the nature of a social worker"* (4).

Respect for each other plays an important role in the professional relationship with the client. The social worker's respect for the client builds a relationship of trust, which enables the client to make decisions independently, influence the social work process and make full use of the resources in the environment (Makštutytė & Vaškevičiūtė, 2011).

Informants say that in order to work with clients, a social worker must be **tolerant** towards the client. *"I think first of all the social worker should be maybe tolerant because this is such a difficult group of clients."*(2) *"Everybody has made a mistake, so we can't judge because we come to their rescue."*(4) *"The social worker is the main person who works with the convicted person and who goes for the convict."* (6).

It is very important to mention that it is essential to listen to the needs and wishes of the client. Kiaunytė and Ruškus (2010) argue that unmet client expectations can lead to tensions between the social worker and the client, and sometimes even the institution. According to Johnson (2003), social workers are often guided by their own knowledge as professionals and identify needs that may not be acceptable to the client, which is why it is always necessary to listen to the client. The social worker must be objective and understand not only the client's feelings, but also control his/her own reactions and impulses (Johnson, 2001).

DISCUSSION

Every professional develops a professional relationship with his/her client. A sense of trust, professionalism and mutual motivation are important for a good relationship. The professional must take an objective view of the client and the client's interests. In Lithuania, the organisation of resocialisation in prisons is regulated by the Penal Enforcement Code. The objectives of resocialization of convicts in Lithuania are to reduce the risk of inmates' willingness to challenge, to motivate inmates to change other problems, to compensate the victims, and there are also large cases that shape the problems of domestic problems, the psychology of imprisonment informs the staff's attitudes towards the inmates, the problems of social adaptation, and the means of information and information. Foreign resocialisation is carried out with the active cooperation of governmental and other organisations.

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