

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATING IN REINTEGRATION ACTIVITIES OF THOSE WHO ARE PART OF RISK CATEGORIES

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Abstract: Based on Harlow's (2003) theory that people who were deprived of their liberty as members of society are less educated than the general population, statistics show that 40% of state and federal prisoners do not meet the minimum schooling requirements, only 11% of them attended college compared to the general population in the United States, where the rate is 48% (Harlow, 2003) and 68% do not have a high school diploma (Pollock, 2004). Incarcerated people not only suffer from the lack academic skills, but also from the lack the professional skills that are necessary to properly fit into the workforce, just as these professional skills are needed in order to have a successful life, for themselves and for their families as well. From the perspective of reintegration and support, the state, through the provisions offered to penitentiary units, makes available to those who are deprived of their liberty various professional, educational and therapeutic programs designed to help detainees achieve minimum educational standards.

Keywords: reintegration activities, interventions, academic deficiencies, support, social reintegration

Introduction

The most important part in the development of a community, as well as the safety of its citizens, is their social development, an education being the basis for crime prevention among the citizens of a state. Most deviant behaviors are due to deficiencies found in strengthening the educational process, and those who end up in prisons suffer from a low level of culture, most have a background of disorganized or poor families, they do not own a house and suffer from different addictions (such as alcohol, drugs, others). As a result, if those who are deprived of their liberty are not being helped, during detention, to become useful members of society, the punishment they serve has no value or justification.

Social deviance can be controlled both by formal methods (laws, legislative punishments) and also by informal methods (promotion of social values, punishments, rewards, criticism, ridiculisation and others). The ideology of prison treatment strongly affirmed the idea that people, and therefore delinquents as well, represent values for society. All prison systems in any country seek to improve the human condition of those held in custody, providing them with knowledge, treating them for various physical and mental disorders, and developing their skills for an honest way of making a living after their release.

Those who are deprived of their liberty can be classified in various ways: men and women, adults and minors, repeat offenders or those with no criminal record, with or without a family, with a high or a low level of culture, Romanians and foreigners, able

to work or unfit for work, with a background in urban or rural areas and many others. As a result, their educational, psychological, social and therapeutical needs are enormous. Adding the fact that many of them are being abandoned by their families and do not have the slightest possibility of supporting themselves after their release from prison, we can see the complete picture of what the educational staff and the specialists who try to understand human nature have to adjust, amplify, treat, shape concerning the detainees.

The issue of professional integration of the disadvantaged categories can only be a challenging one, because being employes is an essential conduct of a dignified life, even of a safe way of living. Disadvantaged categories, those who are at risk of exclusion from the labor market, especially those who were deprived of their liberty face this difficult issue. The situation of former inmates is difficult, in addition to the tough situation of the labor market, they must also face the reluctance and reticence of society to accept them and give them another chance.

The programs offered by the administration of a penitentiary can be classified into educational programs, vocational training programs and therapeutical programs. Many times the cultural-educational and the religious-moral activities intertwine, they complete each other and open new horizons as far as the recovery and resocialization of detainees goes. The purpose of these programs is the same: to help detainees think and behave in a socially acceptable way so that they do not relapse.

Theoretical Perspectives

Unlike the “retributive” paradigm of justice, one of the concepts of restorative justice can be summarized as follows: “as far as possible, the justice process should involve victims, offenders and community members in an effort to identify mutual needs, obligations and solutions” (Gordon Bazemore, 2001). Understanding a correctional program depends largely on the vision on the role of the penitentiary institution in the community and, of course, the reasons behind the crimes. According to Professor James McGuire from the University of Liverpool, England, “in order to achieve a change in behavior, it is necessary to take a constructive approach, meaning that we need to moderate unwanted behaviors by applying a method focused on positive and technical reinforcement of repertoire growth” (Neamțu, G., 2003). Based on the “What works” tradition in rehabilitation, Levrant et al. (1999), Bazemore (1998), Crowe (1998) suggested five essential elements of rehabilitation creating a networking: the first one refers to “victim-centered restorative rehabilitation”, the following two elements suggest that: “the treatment is not considered as a right, but as part of the responsibility towards victims and the community, as a form of social exchange” and “the treatment is contextualized focusing on integration and the creation or strengthening of social ties, rather than isolation”.

Finally, the last two elements refer to interventions: they “are adapted to the personal profiles and characteristics of the individual” and “interventions are designed to identify and change the criminogenic needs of criminals”. For the present paper, the relevant element suggested by Levrant et al. (1999), Bazemore (1998), Crowe (1998)

argues that “treatment is contextualized, focusing on integration and the creation or strengthening of social ties, rather than isolation”, this being an extension of the concept of restorative justice. “As far as possible, the justice process should involve victims, offenders and members of the community in an effort to identify each other's needs, obligations and solutions.”

The detainees are people who are imprisoned, awaiting trial or who are convicted of one crime or another for the purpose of reform and rehabilitation. They are a part of the whole society and whenever they are being released, they return to society. If they are not well educated and do not demonstrate productivity skills while in custody, many of them may remain socially unadjusted and dangerous (Animasahun, 2002).

Professional interventions are diverse and consist of programs that engage the offender in paid jobs inside the community, they focus on training the detainees for specific jobs, helping inmates to obtain a college degree or a vocational education, and teach them to seek job skills both in and out of prison (Bouffard et al, 2000). For the offenders, the long-term effectiveness of professional interventions is measured not only in terms of career outcomes, such as employment, but also in terms of how interventions translate into returning less and less to criminal behaviors, also known as *recidivism* (Redcross, Bloom et al, 2009). The fact that professional programs have some limitations has led criminal justice experts to say that there is still a great need to develop effective interventions for criminals, especially quality professional interventions based on the establishment of principles of effectiveness. (Petersilia, 2004).

Educational training usually consists in standard or special educational programs; it was associated with positive results in two out of three studies discussed by Lipton et al. (1990). Gottschalk et al. (1987) have reported a positive result for one third of all programs in which educational training was part of, although not necessarily “the basic or primary intervention”. Harlow (2003) shows that those deprived of liberty among members of society are less educated than the general population, statistics showing that 40% of state and federal prisoners do not meet the minimum requirements for schooling, only 11% of them attended college, compared with the general population in the US, where the rate is 48% (Harlow, 2003) and 68% of them do not have a high school diploma (Pollock, 2004). The above-mentioned statistics show the results of this deficiency and how important educational programs are to be provided to people deprived of their liberty.

Work experience programs were associated with positive outcomes at a rate of about one in three; such operations that were found in the data presented by Lab and Whitehead (1988), Genevie et al. (1986) considered the work-study relationship as the most promising or successful approaches, and Lipsey (1992) considered employment to be the most powerful means of intervention concerning the legal system, although its sample of studies was rather small in this case.

Graziano and Mooney (1984) concluded that, despite the shortcomings of the research and the few existing experimental studies on recidivism, family intervention

was “the most promising approach” of all, at least when behavioral programming was used. Growing evidence show that religious involvement can reduce the risks of a wide range of delinquent behaviors, including both minor and serious forms of criminal behavior (Evans et al. 1996). Baier and Wright (2001) showed that religious faith and behavior exert a deterrent effect on criminal behavior, and Johnson et al. (2000) found that individual religiosity helped at-risk youth, such as those living in poor areas of Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago, to escape drug use and other illegal activities.

Methodology

The research methodology was made by conducting semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. 30 subjects participated in it, having diverse roles, as social workers, medical staff, military staff, psychologists, priests from different cults, missionaries, former deprived of liberty people. Data processing follows the specialized canons in terms of qualitative data processing. The research is based on the idea of professional and educational deficiencies among inmates and how important they are to provide them with such strenghts. The analysis of the interviews was performed based on the grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), with the help of the specialized software *Atlas.ti*. The audio interviews were transcribed, and then coded and successively grouped into broader concepts to describe the social phenomenon that was being studied.

Results

The state, through the reinsurance offered to penitentiary units, makes available – for those deprived of their liberty – various professional educational and therapeutic programs designed to help the detainees reach minimum educational standards. The professional, cultural-educational and moral-religious interventions are intertwined, completing each other, opening new horizons in the recovery and resocialization of the detainees. The link between the support and social reintegration is charity. A principle of charity is the result of actions taken, of formed beliefs (helping one's fellow man, proving the love of one's neighbor, and others), and the second principle lies in the need of the one who analyzes the phenomenon to find the meaning of individual behaviors and their origins. The purpose of these programs is the same: to help detainees think and behave in a socially acceptable way so that they do not relapse.

Support

Unfortunately, in penitentiaries and in the penitentiary hospitals – because this is what we are now discussing – the resources are quite limited, but it is a beginning for it all, a beneficial beginning and a quite well developed one; detainees are being provided with various informational materials, the hospital library has a lot of religious books, even the Bible, there is also the possibility to participate every Sunday in religious services officiated by the chaplain or during the week in various meetings of different cults. Even if this aspect is not so well developed yet, it is clear that it is improving day by day (*subject 7, medical personnel*).

Given the fact that, from the perspective of military personnel, the resources in the detention unit are quite limited, a beneficial partnership is that between a penitentiary and a public library, the actions being oriented in order to use information and cultural-educational actions developed by libraries, in facilitating the intervention of the penitentiary staff in the sphere of psycho-social assistance of persons deprived of liberty. Comparing the roles of the two entities mentioned, we can refer to Giddens' statement that "the principle underlying the penitentiary system is to improve the individual, in order for him to play an appropriate role in society" (Giddens, 2001) and that of Regneală, who says that "libraries have always fulfilled an educational role" (Regneală, 2001); this way, each institution brings its own contribution to the common goal that is the development of individuals.

If we refer to material resources, we allocated a budget and received various sponsorships from various donations, for religious objects, for the modernization of the chapel, for outdoor activities sound systems, in order to be able to hear the church choir from outside and so on. These are, of course, only part of the material endowment (*subject 8, military personnel*).

One of the social-human values is charity – the willingness to help others, springing from an intrinsic motivation, rooted in altruistic feelings. In the planning of actions for the purpose of social reintegration, a significant role is played by the ability to influence words and deeds. The effect obtained consists in "the combined development of an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of conviction" (Béra M., Lamy Y., 2008). In addition to these axiological effects of the cultural act, which occur at the level of the individual or the group, there are other effects, such as emotional and physiological, psychological and identity, cognitive ones.

The most common resources at hand in the penitentiary are books, mainly Christian books. Through books that detainees can take from the penitentiary library, books that they can receive by visiting family members, friends or the chaplain himself, they can read them and discover Christian rules, they discover the right path and eventually follow and do exactly what they learned for the better future of their lives. The second resource consists in films that could, of course, be presented to a smaller number of detainees at a time, because the system is not allowed to gather a large mass of detainees in a certain place, the risk would be much too high. Movies could be a quick and concise way to present religion and its benefits briefly. The third resource could be the workshops: although they happen, but quite rarely, because it is still a risk to bring strangers near the detainees, certain people who have a problematic past, who did time, through chaplain priest – regardless of religion – detainees realized the mistake they had made, they realized how they could fix a small part of their mistake, how to get back on track, how to help the family they possibly damaged by theft, robbery, burglary, and they themselves are now priests or part of certain religious denominations and go to preach to other detainees, and to other disadvantaged and fallen people about how they got back on the right path and how religion helped them realize the mistakes they had made (*topic 6, military personnel*).

Military personnel also emphasize the importance of keeping contact with the outside world. Recent studies have highlighted the positive effects of prison visits on the social reintegration of those deprived of their liberty. Described by Codd (2007) as the main method the detainees maintain contact with social support circles, prison visits have been associated with a reduction in the recidivism rate in both government reports and the specialty literature (La Vigne et al., 2005; Bales & Mears, 2008; Mears et al., 2012; Duwe & Clark, 2012; Cochran, 2014; MoJ, 2017). Explanations of the positive effects of prison visits on the social reintegration of detainees refer to the role of visits in maintaining supportive social relationships and the importance of these relationships in overcoming reintegration difficulties, such as unemployment or economic problems.

After all the work we put in there, we feel sorry for the detainees; just this week someone called for me because they don't have enough food. Just this week and two weeks ago I took them two trucks loaded with food, packages, milk, clothes and they were happy. Especially now, with this pandemic, the power of supply and the budgets have decreased. We try to help them, but especially those who seek God. I don't differentiate between them, as I said, everyone is free to do what they want, but those who come to our programs and we see that they are changed people, they have started to reconnect with the family, with their wife, with their children, we try to help them first, including their families, and after they get out, of course, as I said earlier, we help them reintegrate into society (*subject 21, missionary*).

Missionary priests and volunteers who work in the detention unit strongly support the reintegration process through the moral and material contribution they bring. In Romania, churches, other places of worship, volunteers and NGOs are the few institutions that remain in close proximity to most people deprived of their liberty and also to their families. This is valid for disadvantaged communities, and these religious institutions have the potential to play an important role in promoting the health and well-being of those they serve.

The only material support needed is the procurement of the Bible. Furthermore, through religious activities, the detainee should be encouraged to use their quiet times for Bible reading and prayers (*subject 25, Reformed priest*).

Moral-religious interventions on the individual may engage him in actions to stop the criminal behavior, but it must also involve his conscious decision to engage in this action. Religious interventions are the factor that can create a soul connection between the individual in difficulty and those around him, they can help him know himself better, recognize his mistakes and be involved in his own process of re-education and social reintegration.

The main resource is love. If you embrace someone with love and do not focus on his wrong deed, then the person will approach the one who speaks to him, who wants the best for him, will open up, will be somehow shaped by the words and exhortations received and from there he will be heading for the next step. Holy Scripture is the most beneficial mirror in which we can look and see what we are, the word of the Lord, which is life-giving, can actually change our destiny (*subject 20, former prisoner*).

As Tolstoy wrote, “human beings cannot be managed without love”; Christian paradigms support his assertion that human relationships are fundamental. Tolstoy suggests that justice must be redefined in new terms, if not explicitly in the language of love, then in the language of peace and respect. The deepest roots of Western theology, found in the Bible, are indeed fully compatible with the new approaches to peace in criminal justice.

The Social Reintegration

There is a close link between the religious phenomenon and the activity of prison staff, because it is a way of social reintegration and essentially of re-education of detainees, through religion (*subject 13, military personnel*).

From a reintegration perspective, the beneficial relationship between behaviors and outcomes is not simply a function of coercing religion or what is discouraged by moral laws, such as a delinquent behavior, but also by what encourages, namely, the promotion of behaviors that can lead to well-being, educational and social achievements. Empirical studies addressing religious interventions in prison treatment report a significant beneficial relationship between religion and some measure against crime. The increased religiosity is associated with a reduced likelihood of committing criminal acts.

One problem I face is the lack of housing for detainees after their release. An alternative is the night shelter, but this option is not agreed upon very often. Thus, some religious organizations provide shelter (and even employment) after the release, a viable (and approved) alternative for some detainees. Also, some religious organizations offer a hot meal a day – not necessarily for those released from prison – but gladly received by them (*subject 4, social worker*).

As social workers point out, employment difficulties are related to the lack of cooperation networks with community centers to mobilize all necessary resources, the low availability of the community to accept them, the reluctance of employers to give them a chance, often a missing family is added into all this. The professional integration of former detainees becomes a problem, all the more so as the number of jobs decreases and employment opportunities are limited even for professionally trained people.

Religious activity in the penitentiary can help detainees reintegrate into society as long as they have actually converted to it. Of course, there is a risk of stigmatisation in the society: the mark of “detainees” will be labeled unto them with or without their will. As long as they have changed their way of being, thinking, acting and they will prove it, I believe that each of us has the right to a second chance (*subject 22, Greek Catholic priest*).

Easton (2011) shows that contemporary society develops hostile attitudes and also a considerable lack of sympathy for criminals, compared to 20 years ago, and the results of Muraru's (2013) research indicated a significant, weak and negative relationship between morality and attitude towards criminals, in a research conducted on 120 subjects – adolescents and adults. Relational needs are essential elements that raise the quality of life and present a sense of personal interrelationship. The continuous absence of relational needs can manifest itself as frustration, aggression or anger

(Erskine, 1995). The involvement of the Church must take place both at the level of the liberated former detainee and also inside his family circle and friends, those who can participate and help emotionally during this critical period.

Through the activities carried out by the priest, he brings the detainee, the person formerly deprived of liberty, a certain state of self worth and trust. The priest teaches him through the activities he carries out how to approach certain discussions, how to stand up before an employer when he wants to get a job, how to speak, not to have uncontrolled gestures, not to have uncontrolled mimic, the clothing they must wear and other details. Then the priest, as I said before, if he can afford it or if he has sufficient relations among the civilians, can intervene with certain work places, offering a period of trial to the released person, so that he can perform a certain job and if he succeeds in convincing through his actions, the released person may be employed for an indefinite period of time (*subject 23, Orthodox priest*).

Through the collaboration between the chaplain of the penitentiary unit and other chaplains representing other religious denominations, the whole process of preparation for release is supported by moral and material input. Those deprived of liberty who have obtained in the penitentiary a moral and psychological training necessary for the post-release period and have not lost their social interaction skills can return quite quickly and successfully to the new environment, to assimilate new social roles. The success of the social adaptation of the released people depends on the social entourage they will reach, on those groups in which they will have to fulfill their social roles and functions.

"The first problem I ran into was that I couldn't find a job, because employers ask you for a criminal record and once you have a criminal record, everyone finds all sorts of tricks and reasons not to hire you: either the job was already taken or they don't need someone on that position anymore; there were a few employers who told me their reason directly, but many of them beat around the bush and because of this it was and still is very difficult for me to find a steady job, because everyone asks for a criminal record. And now, for example, I'm out of work and looking for a new job myself; because of the criminal record I can't get a job; even if at the interviews they are very happy or satisfied with me and my performance, with what I communicate to them, when they ask me for my documents and tell me that they also need a criminal record and I tell them my situation, they tell me *we will contact you* and forget to call ever again. Basically this is the thing about jobs. Otherwise, I have no difficulty in going on, because God has arranged everything to be as it is. But this is the only problem, finding a job: people are always wondering why you spent so many years in prisons and think that once you were inside, you'll somehow get back there. Precisely for this reason, many people crack when they see that everyone rejects them once, twice, three times, in the end... I was lucky that the people of the *Lord's Army* helped me and I was able to take it from zero all over again, but those who have no support, no help and no one to hire them, being poor, hungry, it pushes them to do certain bad things they did in the past, all over again..." (*subject 16, former prisoner*). As mentioned earlier, society's attitude towards these people is a factor of major importance in their successful reintegration or in the failure

of reintegration and them committing new crimes. NGOs and volunteers are a real support for people deprived of their liberty and also for their families. The intervention of the church and the community they belong to is important in supporting them to find a job, a house, and so the possibility of a recidivism decrease considerably.

Conclusions, Discussions

Given the fact that the penitentiary units have limited resources, the cultural-educational partnerships agreed with various public institutions prove to be extremely useful. Detainees, if they are not well educated and do not demonstrate productivity skills while in the custody of the prison administration, many of them may remain unadjusted and dangerous to the outside world (Animasahun, 2002). In addition to the axiological effects of the cultural act, which occur at the level of individual or the whole group, there are other effects, mainly emotional and physiological, psychological and cognitive.

By maintaining contact with social support circles (Codd, 2007), prison visits are associated with a reduction in the recidivism rate in both government reports and literature (La Vigne et al., 2005; Bales & Mears, 2008; Mears et al., 2012; Duwe & Clark, 2012; Cochran, 2014; MoJ, 2017), because they are extremely useful in overcoming reintegration difficulties, such as unemployment or economic problems. Professional interventions engage the offender in paid work inside the community, focusing on trainings for certain jobs, helping detainees obtain a university degree or a vocational education, and teaching them to look for work skills both in prison and outside.

Because professional programs have certain limitations (Petersilia, 2004), churches, volunteers, and NGOs are the few institutions that remain in close proximity to most people formerly deprived of their liberty and also to their families, greatly helping disadvantaged communities with the potential to play an important role in promoting the health and well-being of those they serve.

Johnson et al. (2000) show that individual religiosity helps at-risk youth, such as those living in poor areas, to get rid of drug use and to keep from engaging in other illegal activities. Baier and Wright (2001) have shown that faith and religious behavior have a discouraging effect on criminal behavior. Educational programs are associated with positive outcomes by Lipton et al. (1990) and Gottschalk et al. (1987), the success of the social adaptation of the former prisoners depends on the social entourage they will reach after the liberation or those groups in which they will have to fulfill their social roles and functions.

Tolstoy's stated that "human beings cannot be handles without love", and the fact that relationships are fundamental for the wellbeing of any human align with the research of Graziano and Mooney (1984), who concluded that despite the shortcomings of the research and the few experimental studies on recidivism, family intervention was "the most promising approach" of all. If Easton (2011) and Muraru (2013) indicate that the contemporary society develops hostile attitudes towards a former prisoner, a considerable lack of sympathy for criminals and a significant cold relationship with

them, social workers point out that employment difficulties are related to the lack of cooperation networks, with community centers mobilizing all the necessary resources, the low availability of the community to accept them, the reluctance of employers to give them a chance, often added the a family missing from their lives. Prisoners who have obtained in the penitentiary a moral and psychological training necessary for the time after their release and those who have lost their interactions with society can return quite quickly and successfully to the new environment.

Growing evidence shows that religious involvement in their lives can reduce the risks of a wide range of delinquent behaviors, including both minor and serious forms of criminal behavior (Evans et al., 1996; Baier & Wright, 2001). NGOs and volunteers are a real support for people formerly deprived of their liberty and for their families. The intervention of the church community they belong to is also important in supporting them finding a job.

Empirical studies addressing professional, educational and religious interventions in prison treatment show that detainees who regularly participate in professional, educational and moral activities led by chaplains and volunteers are less likely to commit new offenses after their release from prison, at the same time giving them the possibility of finding a job, a house. Given that this research emphasizes the importance of participation in reintegration activities, future studies would be needed with the topic of investigating the effectiveness of Romanian NGOs in terms of support provided to former prisoners who are looking for employment.

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