

The Role of Psychosocial Programs Carried out in the Penitentiary Environment

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Abstract: Through this article I would like to draw attention to the usefulness and necessity of going through the psychosocial assistance programs, through the multiple advantages offered both to the detainees and to the society. This article aims to highlight the limits of these programs that can improve the lives of detainees and free society

Keywords: Programs; detained; penitentiary; psychosocial reintegration

Throughout the detention a continuous process takes place regarding the detention of the prisoners, following that the obtained data will be permanently controlled and enriched, so that the re-education strategy developed can be reoriented according to the new aspects that intervene. The process of knowing the detainee must be interdisciplinary in nature, using psychological, psycho-sociological, medical, legal, etc. methods. Thus, the data obtained should cover as wide a sphere as possible the delinquent evolution of the detainee, his detention behavior and the elements that shape his later evolution.

The activity of knowing the detainee ends with a psychiatric diagnosis (psycho-behavioral profile), which highlights both the positive aspects of his personality, as well as the negative aspects with the measures (methods) that are required to be changed, as well as the possibilities for effective participation of the prisoner at his own re-education. The assistance given to the prisoners is materialized in the

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development of intervention programs focused on the criminogenic needs of the offenders and in supporting the client in order to satisfy the social needs (education, vocational training, work place, housing, leisure time), psychological, medical or legal. Thus, psychosocial assistance programs are understood to mean a series of interventions structured over a certain period of time that result in the change of attitudes, beliefs and behavior of the assisted persons, and not least the change of their social circumstances

The activities carried out in the penitentiary for the social reintegration of the convicts are aimed at the social reintegration of the persons sentenced to prison sentences. Following the same line of paying particular attention to the educational activity of the convicts, three main objectives are pursued:

- keeping prisoners busy as long as possible;
- improving the quality of life in detention;
- obtaining something useful such as skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, social behaviors.

The socio-educational activity aims to mitigate the negative influence of the deprivation of liberty on the personality of the prisoners, to identify and develop the skills and abilities that allow them to integrate into a normal social life after leaving the penitentiary. The objectives of this activity refer to the adaptation to institutionalized life, school and professional training, moral support, behavioral rehabilitation and cultivation of self-respect, the development of the means of expression and the ability to communicate with others, assistance and monitoring for the socio-professional reintegration, after being released.

Recommendation no. r (89) 12 of the committee of ministers of the Member States on education (adopted by the committee of ministers on October 13, 1989, at the 429th meeting of the deputy ministers) states: “all detainees must have access in education: this should include basic education, vocational training, creative and cultural activities, physical education and sport, social education and the possibility of attending a library.”¹

¹ Recommendation no. r (89) 12 of the committee of ministers of the Member States on education (adopted by the committee of ministers on October 13, 1989, at the 429th meeting of the deputy ministers).

The criminal sanction has no other role than to fix an individual in an institution, as a result of the violation of a legislative framework. The educational function of the prison institution can only be accomplished through assistance aimed at: improving school knowledge, optimizing social skills, increasing physical skills, discovering or developing individual skills, creating a motivational mechanism that will cause the individual to - and change and correct their criminal behavior. The regulation on the conditions for organizing and conducting educational Show mor Show less¹, cultural, therapeutic, psychological counseling and social assistance activities in penitentiaries defines education programs, psychological assistance and social assistance as: structured actions, consisting of all activities that use specific methods and techniques to every field of intervention, oriented to compensate for the identified needs or risks, from the perspective of the criminal behavior.

The activities of education, psychological and social assistance represent semi-structured approaches such as evaluation, counseling and information, oriented to knowledge, self-knowledge, personal development, aptitude, vocational stimulation, leisure or creation.

The recovery programs and activities are addressed to all persons in detention, being adapted to the specific periods of the execution-criminal route, the age of the prisoners, their capacity for development and understanding, the individual educational, psychological and social assistance needs of each person in detention². The knowledge of the prisoners is a necessary and obligatory activity both for the individual planning of the execution of the sentence and for an educational intervention adapted to the needs and requirements arising from the personality and the behavioral evolution of the prisoners. The knowledge starts from the moment of being integrated in the penitentiary and is carried out throughout the execution of the sentence, being realized by the social worker, psychologist and other professional staff.

¹ Order no. 1322/2017 for the approval of the Regulation on the organization and conduct of educational activities and programs, of psychological assistance and social assistance from the places of detention subordinated to the National Prison Administration.

² Order no. 1322/2017 for the approval of the Regulation on the organization and conduct of educational activities and programs, of psychological assistance and social assistance from the places of detention subordinated to the National Prison Administration.

The knowledge of each prisoner, definitively condemned, materializes in a file of education and psycho-social assistance that includes:

- ✓ personal data on age, marital status, profession, family situation, livelihood, background;
- ✓ detailed presentation of the deed, with possible extracts from the indictment or from the final sentence;
- ✓ an investigation of the individual's personality;
- ✓ the main notes of a nature to allow the orientation and planning of the execution of the punishment;
- ✓ a note on conduct in detention;
- ✓ the conclusions based on the interview conducted with the detainee.

The file of education and psychosocial assistance accompanies the detainee throughout the execution of the sentence and will be managed by the Social Reintegration Service of the unit.

The design and development of the educational programs will be carried out mainly through the following types of activities: exhibitions, individual and collective talks, debates, case studies, organization of technical-applicative and artistic circles, study of individual reading, elaboration of different documentary materials, themes, conception, realization and presentation of some publicity materials specific to the penitentiary settlement, educational valorization of the prisoners' exercise of the right to information, as well as through other appropriate activities.

James McGuire (2000, p. 6), professor at the University of Liverpool, England, gives us some definitions on educational programs: the first conceives the programs as a set of activities with a precise objective and involving a number of interrelated elements; the second definition conceives them as a planned series of learning opportunities for detainees with the general purpose of reducing their risk of recidivism.

An interesting point of view proposes D.L. MacKenzie that classifies the interventions in the criminal field into six categories according to the anticipated effects:

1. *neutralization*: to reduce the offender's ability to commit another crime;
2. *deterrence*: punishments have unpleasant effects that can cause offenders to give up crimes;
3. *readaptation*: the offender participates in programs that change his / her thinking, feelings and behavior;
4. *community control measures*: through supervision and other similar measures, the offender is prevented from participating in criminal projects;
5. *discipline and stimulation structure*: refers to physical and sometimes mental activities, designed to positively influence the person's attitudes;
6. *Rehabilitation and control measures*: involves a combination of methods of treatment, supervision and restriction of freedom, so that the person is forced to comply with the rules. (Florian, 2003, pp. 73,74)

The programs of social rehabilitation aim to improve the professional and psychosocial situation of the prisoners. This implies, where it is possible to return them to the roles occupied before incarceration. The social worker is best qualified to assist this process and can play an important role in many individual cases. The field of psychological assistance and social assistance includes all the specific steps, which aim to provide qualified support for solving the psychological and social problems of persons deprived of liberty during the execution of the sentence, in order to prepare them for reintegration into the community. The role of the psychological assistance and social assistance approaches aims to identify the needs, the risks of developing maladaptive behaviors, as well as the particularization of the interventions according to the specificity of each category of persons deprived of their liberty.

The general psychological assistance program represents the structured approach that aims to develop the skills, the pro-social attitudes, the resolving abilities or the reinforcement of the acquired behaviors within the specific psychological assistance programs, in order to increase the chances of social reintegration. The knowledge of the personality of the repeat offender constitutes the basis of the measures that are taken to achieve the effective prevention of deviant behavior. The behavioral attitude of those who commit antisocial acts is in close relation with the educational,

formative environment, with the individual and environmental psychosocial factors that keep the relapse.

Limits of psychosocial reintegration programs

1. Personnel deficit - Due to this shortage of staff, which characterizes the entire Romanian penitentiary system, the programs of education and psychosocial intervention, whose main purpose is social reintegration and reducing the risk of recidivism, are often left in the background, the penitentiary specialists being especially concerned with solving the problems of the problem. Given that there are only 2-3 psychologists in a penitentiary, you have to intervene in all areas, with all detainees, be they drug addicts, or with personality disorders, or sexual abusers, or people with violent or young behaviors, or elders, etc. It is difficult to obtain long-awaited results in terms of rehabilitation of these persons and prevention of recurrence.

2. The high level of bureaucracy, which greatly limits the time allocated to actual work with detainees by staff, and thus insufficient. From the interviews conducted with the specialists it was found that, on average, three hours a day are reserved by psychologists and social workers from penitentiaries to complete the various acts that make up the files of education and psychosocial intervention of persons deprived of their liberty. It should also be mentioned that in the days when the commissions of parole and individualization of the regime of punishment execution take place, the activity of the education and psychosocial assistance service is, if not blocked, very limited.

3. The absence of unitary standards of application of the programs, with consequences when the prisoner is transferred from one section to another or, more difficult, to another penitentiary.

Although there is a certain continuity to literacy and schooling courses, the same is not the case for educational and psychosocial programs, because not all detention units carry out the same types of intervention. However, as some of the interviewees show, the desire for continuity of interventions is difficult to attain, because once they arrive at another prison or detention unit, it is impossible for newcomers to be immediately admitted to psychotherapy or counseling programs they were registered in the unit from which they left, as long as the groups of participants are already formed. Another equally important aspect, caused also by the non-uniformity of the

working procedures, is the so-called phenomenon of “penitentiary tourism”, of the migration of prisoners from one unit to another. They resort to different fictitious judicial affairs to go to those penitentiaries where the parole commission is more permissive.

4. The mentality of the personnel of the supervision and guard service, which does not understand the role of psychotherapy and of the other reintegration programs and, consequently, is considered absolved of any responsibility in this regard. Given that the person deprived of liberty works with me, the psychologist, one hour a day, with the supervisor, stays 24 hours a day. And if I try to tell him that it is okay to communicate assertively, not to be violent neither verbally nor physically, and the supervisor goes and insults him or provokes him, because he is upset, all my process of going reshaping his personality fails.

5. The impossibility of repeating a program. According to ORDER 1322/2017 for the approval of the Regulation on the organization and conduct of educational activities, psychological and social assistance programs in the places of detention subordinated to the National Administration of Penitentiaries, it provides the following aspect: any detainee can participate only once during execution of the sentence, regardless of the duration of the sentence.

6. Pursuit of benefits. Many detainees say they are participating in rehabilitation programs conducted in the penitentiary for a number of benefits such as: to receive evidence, to revoke some disciplinary measures or to guarantee that they will not be delayed, another benefit felt especially in the prisoners of the closed regime is to get out of the room, to eliminate the boredom, the monotony, the daily routine and to make the time pass easier. Few, however, consider that they are learning or acquire anything.

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