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**(UN)SAFE LIFE PLANS OF THE INCARCERATED
IN THE CONTEXT OF RECIDIVISM**

**(NIE)BEZPIECZNE PLANY ŻYCIOWE OSÓB
SKAZANYCH NA KARĘ POZBAWIENIA WOLNOŚCI
W KONTEKŚCIE ZJAWISKA POWROTNOŚCI DO
PRZESTĘPSTWA**

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Streszczenie

Bazując na założeniach personalistyczno-egzystencjalnej koncepcji poczucia jakości życia, Autorzy artykułu poruszają zagadnienie odnoszące się do projektowania życia na wolności przez osoby osadzone, wielokrotnie skazane na karę izolacji więziennej. W artykule zostały zaprezentowane wyniki badania ukierunkowanego na próbę rozpoznania planów życiowych recydywistów penitencjarnych w zestawieniu z faktyczną ich realizacją, czyniąc z tej kwestii istotną determinantę procesu readaptacji społecznej oraz wyznacznik dążeń do zmiany ich dotychczasowego, przestępczego stylu życia. W badaniu uczestniczyło 245 recydywistów penitencjarnych. Zastosowano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego i odpowiadającą jej technikę wywiadu skategoryzowanego oraz

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narracyjnego w formie pisemnej. Posłużono się także metodą analizy dokumentów z wykorzystaniem techniki analizy treści będących źródłem wiedzy o planach życiowych osób badanych po zakończeniu kary izolacji więziennej oraz o rozbieżnościach pomiędzy wyobrażeniami a zastaną na wolności rzeczywistością i związanym z tym poczuciem jakości życia. Wyniki badania świadczą o dużych rozbieżnościach pomiędzy postrzeganiem przez badanych recydywistów swojego funkcjonowania na wolności a faktyczną realizacją przyjętych przez nich planów życiowych. Daje to podstawy do przyjęcia tezy, że przedmiotowa rozbieżność znacznie obniża poczucie jakości życia byłych więźniów, jest czynnikiem ryzyka i prowadzi do powrotności do przestępstwa.

Słowa kluczowe: powrotność do przestępstwa, recydywa, plany życiowe, jakość życia

Abstract:

Based on the assumptions of the personalistic-existential concept of the sense of the quality of life, the authors of the article address the issue of the planning of life outside by prisoners who have been repeatedly sentenced to prison isolation. The article presents the results of a study aimed at comparing the life plans of penitentiary recidivists with how these plans are actually put into effect, treating this matter as an important determinant of the process of social readaptation and an indicator of a prisoner's efforts to change their hitherto criminal lifestyle. 245 penitentiary recidivists participated in the study that used the diagnostic survey method along with the corresponding technique of a categorised and narrative interview, in written form. These documents were subject to the content analysis technique, which gave insight into the life plans of the respondents after the end of prison isolation, the discrepancies between expectations and reality, and their effect on the sense of the quality of life. The results of the study show large differences between how the recidivists expected to function outside of prison and how their plans actually unfolded. This gives grounds for stating that the discrepancy identified significantly reduces the sense of the quality of life among former prisoners, and is a risk factor that may lead to recidivism.

Keywords: return to crime, recidivism, life plans, quality of life

Introduction

The phenomenon of return to crime is defined by both Poland and other European Union Member States on the basis of their national legislation. It is studied on the basis of various methodologies and statistics are compiled following the adopted criteria. In the existing statistical studies of the EU countries, return to crime is defined in different ways, but most often as the percentage of persons: re-convicted out of the total number of legally convicted persons, committing a criminal offence under conditions of recidivism or once again serving a prison sentence out of the total number of prisoners. One should emphasise that the results of scientific research and statistical data collected by national institutions are not always disclosed to the public. Despite the heterogeneous ways of capturing and identifying recidivism, the phenomenon is universal. It reflects the ineffectiveness of the punishment imposed in the past, the readaptive failure of former prisoners, a bad resocialisation prognosis or the inadequacy of the catalogue of crime-reducing measures to meet current needs.

Contemporary research on this extremely important social issue is being conducted by a number of Polish researchers, representatives of various fields and disciplines. The crime prevention is the area of interest of psychologists, resocialisation educators, lawyers and sociologists, among others. They try to identify risk factors and protective factors, seeking them in external conditions by analysing the living environment of people who have been convicted of crime³. The study includes the forms, methods and measures of penitentiary work in terms of the effectiveness of the interventions⁴ applied and the organisation and effectiveness of systemic and non-systemic post-penitentiary assistance⁵.

³ B.M. Nowak, *(Nie)skazani na wykluczenie. Od patologii do normy zachowań społecznych*, Warszawa 2020; B.M. Nowak, *Rodzina w kryzysie. Studium resocjalizacyjne*, Warszawa 2011; R. Szczepanik, *Stawanie się recydywistą. Kariery instytucjonalne osób powracających do przestępczości*, Łódź 2015.

⁴ G. Szczygieł, *Spoleczna readaptacja skazanych w polskim systemie penitencjarnym*, Białystok 2002; T. Bulenda, R. Musidłowski (red.), *System penitencjarny i postpenitencjarny w Polsce*, Warszawa 2003.

⁵ B.M. Nowak, *Praca szansą skazanych na pomyślną reintegrację społeczną. Postawy pracodawców wobec ekswiężniów poszukujących zatrudnienia*, „Probacja” 2019, nr 1, s. 13-32; B.M. Nowak, *Praca jako czynnik chroniący ekswiężniów przed powrotnością do przestępcstwa i wykluczeniem społecznym*, „Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, sectio J – Paedagogia-Psychologia” 2019, nr 32(3), s. 289-306; B.M. Nowak, *Hierarchia*

Moreover, internal factors such as personal characteristics, deficits, abilities and personality dispositions of convicts are also taken into account⁶. The research explorations in the discussed area encompass also the activities of numerous institutions setting the directions of penal⁷ and social policy⁸.

Reintegrating former prisoners into society is usually problematic. The greatest readaptation difficulties, however, affect those who have completed long-term sentences associated with serious crimes and those who have committed crimes against the family and, due to significantly weakened or broken family ties, cannot

wartości osób wykluczonych społecznie. Komunikat z badań, „Pedagogika Społeczna” 2017, nr 1(63), s. 139-159; B.M. Nowak, *Interdyscyplinarne, sieciowo-systemowe podejście do procesu readaptacji i reintegracji społecznej osób skazanych i ich rodzin*, „Studia Edukacyjne” 2016, nr 41; A. Baładynowicz, *Probacja. Resocjalizacja z udziałem społeczeństwa. Konteksty antropologiczno-filozoficzne*, Warszawa 2019; A.H. Fidelus, *Determinanty readaptacji społecznej skazanych*, Warszawa 2012; A.H. Fidelus, *Praca ze skazanymi z perspektywy modelu społeczno-przestrzennego*, „Forum Pedagogiczne” 2017, nr 1, s. 37-48.

⁶ J. Felczak, *Wpływ sytuacji osobistej skazanych na ich resocjalizację i readaptację społeczną*, „Polityka Społeczna” 2020, nr 9, s. 18-24; B.M. Nowak, *Kapitał ludzki i społeczny w procesie reintegracji społecznej ekswięźniów i ich rodzin*, w: red. I. Mudrecka, *Resocjalizacja, readaptacja i reintegracja społeczna – problemy, programy i perspektywy rozwoju komunikacji*, Warszawa 2017b; A. Jaworska, *Zasoby osobiste i społeczne skazanych w procesie oddziaływań penitencjarnych*, Kraków 2016; B. Stańdo-Kawecka, *O koncepcji resocjalizacji w polskiej literaturze naukowej polemicznie*, „Probacja” 2010, nr 1, s. 116-118; J. Florczykiewicz, *Poczucie marginalności osadzonych odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności i wybrane jego uwarunkowania. Sprawozdanie z badań*, „Profilaktyka Społeczna i Resocjalizacja” 2013, nr 22, s. 153-187; I. Niewiadomska, *Osobowościowe uwarunkowania skuteczności kary pozbawienia wolności*, Lublin 2007.

⁷ B.M. Nowak, *At risk of social exclusion labor market disadvantage of ex-convicts – polish casus*, „Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych” 2018, nr 2(27), s. 85-96; T. Szymanowski, *Polityka karna i penitencjarna w Polsce w okresie przemian prawa karnego*, Warszawa 2005; T. Szymanowski, *Recydywa w Polsce. Zagadnienia prawa karnego, kryminologii i polityki karnej*, Warszawa 2010.

⁸ K. Piątek, E. Kościński, A. Kusztelak, J. Stępień (red.), *Regionalny i lokalny wymiar polityki społecznej*, Poznań 2016; J. Morel, B. Palier, J. Palme, *Polityka społeczna jako inwestycja*, Warszawa 2015; F.W. Gawrycki, M. Krupecka (red.), *Problemy polityki społecznej. Wybrane zagadnienia teoretyczne i praktyczne*, Poznań 2021.

count on the support of relatives⁹. As a result of rejection by the free-living environment, they often return to crime and feed the area of social exclusion.

Preparation of persons incarcerated in penitentiary units to be released and function smoothly, in accordance with social standards, is a complex and multifactorially conditioned process. From the very moment the convict is admitted to serve his or her sentence, the Prison Service takes measures to prepare him or her for release after completion of the adjudicated term of imprisonment. This involves, inter alia, diagnosis of problems, treatment of identified disorders, implementation of social readaptation programmes, including vocational activation, and development of individual resocialisation and readaptation plans. To make these measures effective, prisoners have to feel the need for a meaningful life and have a life plan that is a projection of their ideas about the quality of their functioning when they are released.

Apart from external support, successful social readaptation requires the former convicts to reach a state of psychological rootedness, i.e. the belief that there are ideas and values that give meaning to human life. Achieving such a state is difficult, as former prisoners are confronted with a discrepancy between the conditions of prison life and their needs and the reality experienced after completing their sentence and leaving the place of isolation. The problems then arise in terms of adjustment, permanent stress, anxiety and frustration, awkwardness in independent functioning, and difficulties in establishing social relationships and rebuilding damaged or broken family ties¹⁰.

1. Sense of meaning in life, quality of life and life plans as a defining framework

Sense of meaning *versus* meaninglessness of life are key issues for existential psychology and psychotherapy, apart from death, loneliness and freedom¹¹. The realisation of the meaning of life is a course of action providing superior, mature forms of behaviour. Its determination consists in realising the meaning of one's

⁹ K. Porębska, *Wsparcie społeczne w warunkach izolacji jako wyznacznik skutecznej readaptacji*, „Probacja” 2009, nr 2, s. 49-53.

¹⁰ D. Pstrąg, *Obawy skazanych związane z adaptacją do życia na wolności*, w: *Zagadnienia readaptacji społecznej*, red. F. Kozaczuk, Rzeszów 2009; A. Szymanowska, G. Korwin-Szymanowski, *Stosunek instytucji świadczących pomoc do byłych skazanych*, w: *Zagadnienia readaptacji społecznej skazanych*, red. F. Kozaczuk, Rzeszów 2009.

¹¹ I.D. Yalom, *Existential psychotherapy*. Basic Books, New York 1980.

being directed towards clear, practical and acceptable goals. It should be emphasised that the construction of the meaning of life is a therapeutic procedure, eliminating so-called existential frustrations¹². This is because the will to make sense of life motivates a person to overcome his or her limitations, gives him or her strength and directs him or her to seek meaning in every activity and situation in which he or she finds himself or herself¹³.

The term “quality of life”, on the other hand, is nowadays defined as “... the degree to which material and spiritual needs are satisfied, which cannot always be measured quantitatively¹⁴.” The term is also understood as biological and psychological well-being, life satisfaction or enjoyment of life and giving new meaning to life¹⁵. It is most often considered in terms of material and living conditions and personal qualities that can be evaluated objectively, as well as those qualities the evaluation of which results from the subjective perceptions, feelings and opinions of the evaluator¹⁶. The sense of quality of life depends on the individual’s subjective assessment of his or her level of (social and psychological) functioning, based on an ideal situation and a system of values as a point of reference for the assessment of one’s own life.

In the personalistic-existential approach to the sense of quality of life, human beings are considered as complex and multidimensional beings. This means that each individual is characterised by a heterogeneous structure of needs and aspirations, and this implies a diversity of interpretations of one’s own well-being¹⁷. One should emphasise that the smaller the difference between the ideal state and the real state, the higher the sense of quality of life. The quality of life is connected to the sense of its meaning, which in turn is related to order and purpose,

¹² J. Dąbrowski, L. Gawor, S. Jedynek, K. Kosior, J. Zdybel, L. Zdybel, *Mała encyklopedia filozofii*, Bydgoszcz 1996, s. 424.

¹³ V. Frankl, *Homo patiens. Logoterapia i jej kliniczne zastosowanie. Pluralizm nauk a jedność człowieka. Człowiek wolny*, tłum. R. Czernecki, J. Morawski, Warszawa 1976, s. 47.

¹⁴ J. Lipińska-Lokś, *Możliwości badania jakości życia osób z chorobą Alzheimera i ich rodzin*, w: *Człowiek z chorobą Alzheimera w rodzinie i środowisku lokalnym*, red. A. Nowicka, W. Baziuk, Zielona Góra 2011, s. 203.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, s. 205.

¹⁶ I. Bielawska, *Jakość życia a system wartości*, w: *Współczesne problemy pedagogiki specjalnej*, red. U. Bartnikowska, C. Kosakowski, A. Krause, Olsztyn 2008, s. 233.

¹⁷ M. Straś-Romanowska, T. Frąckowiak, *Personalistyczno-egzystencjalna koncepcja poczucia jakości życia a doświadczanie niepełnosprawności*, w: *Jakość życia w niepełnosprawności – mity a rzeczywistość*, red. M. Flanczewska-Wolny, Kraków 2007, s. 16.

especially when “(...) we associate the notion of ‘meaning’ with the notion of ‘life’, then we can say that life has meaning if we direct our actions towards a specific, worthy goal. A meaningful life thus depends on what we recognise as a goal and on whether we are willing to pursue that goal¹⁸.” The feeling of meaninglessness in life, on the other hand, which also determines the quality of life, is connected to life pessimism, as people experiencing a state of hopelessness “(...) constantly focus (...) on their own unresolved life problems, initially livelihood problems, then basic problems and finally integration problems. Ultimately, their attention focuses (...) exclusively on issues of the meaning of life and the meaning of their own life in general¹⁹.”

The process of future planning determines to a large extent a person’s destiny, especially when it comes to having to make life choices. A life plan is therefore “(...) a system of goals that a person aims to achieve in his or her activities, and the general principles for achieving these goals”²⁰ or, in other words, “(...) a projection of the understanding and vision of one’s own future²¹.”

The importance of the sense of meaning in life and quality of life for the subjects of penitentiary resocialisation is of such importance that we decided to analyse this category of persons through the prism of their life plans, making this issue an essential determinant of the process of social readaptation and a determinant of aspirations to change the previous lifestyle and the quality of life.

This paper aims to identify and discuss the aforementioned aspects in the context of unsuccessful social readaptation of former prisoners and their return to crime. However, it is necessary to refer beforehand to statistics showing the main trends in the population of convicts, including those sentenced under the conditions of Article 64 of the Criminal Code.

¹⁸ E.J. Konieczna, *Poczucie sensu życia osób niepełnosprawnych ruchowo*, Kraków 2010, s. 11.

¹⁹ M. Lewicka, *Sposoby rozwiązywania problemów życiowych prowadzące do powstawania stanów pesymizmu życiowego*, „Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis. Prace Psychologiczne” 1994, t. XXXIX, s. 103.

²⁰ M. Mądry, *Plany i marzenia w życiu człowieka. Teoretyczne podstawy badań*, „Scripta Comeniana Lesnensia” 2010, nr VIII, s. 89.

²¹ T. Hejnicka-Bezwińska, *Orientacje życiowe młodzieży*, Bydgoszcz 1997, s. 44.

2. Return to crime in the light of statistical data

The recorded number of convicted individuals (in total) in Poland has remained year-on-year at a similar level since 2015, with a slight decrease in 2018 and a renewed increase in 2019 (Table 1). However, it should be noted that in 2020, a significant, hitherto unprecedented, decrease in the total number of convicts by more than 3,000 persons (compared to 2019) was observed. This may have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, in 2021, a renewed increase in the number of convicted persons was observed almost to the level reported in 2019.

Table 1. Convicts by return to prison from 2015 to 2021

years number of convicts (in thousands)	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
in total	37,247	37,378	37,597	36,833	37,307	34,223	37,246
convicted under the provisions of Article 64 of the Criminal Code	23,439	23,342	23,209	22,653	22,482	20,547	21,436

Source: based on statistics published by CZSW (<https://www.sw.gov.pl/strona/statystyka-roczna>) [accessed: 17.11.2022]

Similar is the case with regard to conviction under the provisions of Article 64 of the Criminal Code (Table 1). In this case, there is a successive decline (2015–2019). Another spectacular decline was observed in 2020 – a decrease in the number of persons convicted under the provisions of Article 64 of the Criminal Code by nearly 2,000 compared to 2019, which was probably the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this category, there was a renewed increase – albeit a decrease compared to 2019 and previous periods – in 2021.

Analysis of the year-on-year data (2019–2020) likewise indicates a decrease in the number of recidivists in all categories of multiple return to crime, but relatively the largest decline can be observed in the number of convicts returning to crime for the first time (Table 2).

One might think that the results of the above analyses should generate a sense of optimism given the general impression of a decrease in the number of convicts, including recidivists, in the last five years. However, they can by no means serve as a basis for drawing reliable conclusions, as they do not unequivocally testify either to the effectiveness of resocialisation carried out in isolation conditions or

to the positive readaptation of former prisoners. Indeed, the decrease can be interpreted as an indicator of undetected recidivism.

Table 2. Number of recidivists across all categories of multiple return to crime (total) in 2019–2020.

years convicted for the	2019	2020
second time	21,033	19,190
third time	9,486	8,746
fourth time	4,075	3,807
fifth time	1,432	1,318
sixth time	659	604
seventh time and beyond	622	558

Source: based on statistics published by CZSW (<https://www.sw.gov.pl/strona/statystyka-roczna>) [accessed: 17.11.2022]

3. Methodology of the research

In the study aimed at identifying the life plans and perceptions of recidivists serving prison isolation sentences and the quality of their life after release, we adopted methodological assumptions appropriate to the grounded theory methods embedded in the symbolic interactionism approach. The diagnostic survey and the corresponding categorised interview technique, as well as the document analysis with narrative text content analysis were used. By triangulating the methods and techniques, it was possible to interpret the collected intersubjective evidence and to discover the complexity and multiplicity of the various themes.

An original interview questionnaire for incarcerated recidivists, consisting of two parts (categorised and narrative), was applied as a research tool, providing, in particular, knowledge about the respondents' perceptions of their functioning after prison isolation, as well as the discrepancies between their perceptions (ideal state), the reality they found after release (real state) and their sense of quality of life.

The survey was conducted at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 in the Mazovian penitentiary units²². The participants of the study were 245 men,

²² Przedstawione w artykule badania nad planami życiowymi i wyobrażeniami recydywistów penitencjarnych o jakości ich życia na wolności są częścią wieloaspektowego projektu badawczego nad przyczynami porażki readaptacyjnej byłych więźniów, realizowanego w latach 2015-2020.

recidivists serving prison isolation sentenced pursuant to Article 64 of the Penal Code and selected on the basis of a purposeful random sampling scheme. Given the qualitative nature of the study, this group should be considered representative for all prisoners serving a sentence of imprisonment for at least the second time²³. Recidivists participated in the study on a voluntary basis, after having signed a consent allowing the use of research material derived from their narratives.

The total number of subjects examined included 137 single recidivists and 108 multiple recidivists. The place of residence of the majority of respondents was a large city and a medium-sized city (a total of 62.9% of all recidivists surveyed). The remaining respondents came from small towns and villages (37.1% in total). Nearly half of the recidivists in the study were middle-aged – they represented the age group of 31 to 40 years. On the other hand, young recidivists, aged from 21 to 30, accounted for more than 1/4 of the total number of respondents. We also recorded 18% of those aged 41 to 55. Seniors aged over 55 accounted for the smallest proportion (10% of all respondents). Unmarried status was reported by more than half of the recidivists. One-fifth of the respondents were in formal and informal relationships, whereas one-fourth declared to be divorced or widowed living on their own or in a concubinage. Almost half of the respondents represented a low level of education, i.e. completed primary or lower secondary school (42.5% in total). Slightly more than 1/3 of the total number of recidivists under study had acquired vocational education (in and out of prison), while 1/5 completed secondary education. There were only 5 persons with higher education in the sample.

Before presenting the results of the study on the life plans and perceptions of penitentiary recidivists on the quality of their life after release, it should be emphasised that this type of investigation, as well as attempts at interpretations and generalisations should be approached with caution due to possible attributional distortions and interpretative entanglements. This is because the collected research material comes from the self-reports of repeatedly isolated persons who, in the vast majority of cases, are characterised by a criminal style of thinking²⁴ (specific content of thinking initiating and maintaining behaviours associated with notorious lawbreaking), for which the presence of moral defence

²³ Zob.: S. Pasikowski, *Czy wielkość jest niezbędna? O rozmiarze próby w badaniach jakościowych*, „Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych” 2015, nr 21 (2), s. 195-211.

²⁴ G.D. Walters, *Criminal belief systems: An integrated – interactive theory lifestyles*, Westport, CT: Praeger 2002.

mechanisms²⁵ is characteristic, facilitating the perception of oneself still as a good person, despite the violation of one's own moral principles.

4. Results of the study and conclusions

After entering the study, participants were asked about their life plans and the possibility of realising them once they completed their prison isolation and were released. The recidivists surveyed projected their lives referring also to their previous experiences of functioning while released (between consecutive sentences). They admitted that they returned to the criminal path at different times, but most often 1–2 years after completing their prison sentence and leaving prison (almost 1/3 of all recidivists under study).

The collected research material made it possible to categorise the respondents' statements. Due to the volume limitations of this paper, only selected statements of the respondents were quoted with regard to the identified categories.

a) striving for material improvement

The majority of recidivists surveyed give priority to financial resources (60.8%). A significant percentage of respondents wish to provide their relatives with good material and living conditions upon release (77.1%). Almost half of the recidivists need financial resources to be able to spend them on personal pleasures²⁶. More focused on the material situation of their families were (regardless of marital status) recidivists living in large cities (85.2%) than those from other living environments.

The desire to gain and accumulate money was declared more frequently by residents of medium-sized cities (68.2%) than by people from other categories of residence. Earning a lot of money is most desirable for individuals classified as having secondary and higher education (77.8%), aged from 41 to 51 (75.0%) and living in rural areas (73.2%). The latter are mostly unable to specify a source of income and have no idea how to earn it legally. However, they are least interested in spending it on their own pleasures (30.4%) compared to those in the other age groups and representing other categories of residence.

²⁵ J. Strelau, *Psychologia*, t. II, Gdańsk 2000, s. 616-617.

²⁶ Badani wskazywali więcej niż jedną opcję, stąd rozkłady odpowiedzi nie sumują się do 100%.

The respondents emphasised in their statements that, despite their willingness and precise plans to improve their material status after leaving prison, they had not been and still would not be able to realise them on their own. This is because the vast majority of them had previously (between consecutive sentences) experienced problems finding work, even seasonal work. The long-term unemployment caused them to consider it unrealistic to obtain funds in a legal way and they returned to their criminal activities:

“After being sentenced for the second time, I planned to change when I got out, to find a good job and show everyone that I would go on living a normal life, like others. But there was no chance of that – I had no work and no human respect, so I organised a team in my village and in another district we rummaged through cottages until we got caught... If I had been able to work, earn money and live respectably, I would not have been so tempted to do bad things” (Jan, 43, resident of a village, primary education, widower).

“Is there anyone happy without money? Well, a family is good, there is happiness. But if we sit around and don't have anything to put in the pot, we won't laugh. There are as many of us as there are ways of living, everyone does what they think is right. If there is no job, there is no money to live on. And what can you do? Well, the usual thing is to steal on your own, or preferably in a group” (Andrzej, 32 years old, resident of a small town, vocational education, single).

The majority of recidivists surveyed are interested in taking up employment after release. The most optimistic in their ideas about finding a job after release are usually residents categorised as living in a large city (62.5%), young people (63.1%), individuals with secondary and higher education (60.3%). Based on their previous experience of seeking employment while free and the difficulties encountered, the recidivists surveyed emphasised first and foremost the reluctance of employers to hire convicted persons, who as a rule do not have the required certificate of clear criminal record. They also stressed that they were a disadvantaged group in the labour market, against whom discriminatory practices were applied:

“The first time I was released I was looking for a job all the time. I was also registered at the job centre. As usual, they didn't want a convicted person, often at interviews they required a certificate of clear criminal record. The last years between sentences I was temporarily employed to install air conditioning. A colleague helped me to find this job. Then I became unemployed again, and my wife and mother-in-law bent my ear, so I coped in such a way that I ended up here anyway. I think that even now I won't manage to live decently outside the prison

walls, but it is said that hope dies last..." (Tomasz, 28, resident of a medium-sized town, vocational education).

"Someone wants to work but they can't because the employer doesn't hire. There are no jobs for people with criminal records. The only thing left is to start your own business, but you don't have money for that. So you see, it's easier to steal than to earn. Well, I won't do that. Now I'm planning to get serious, whatever it takes, I'm going to find a job in a private company somewhere, otherwise I'll go abroad" (Marcin, 37, living in a big city, secondary education, single).

b) educational plans

The analysis of the research material showed that for more than half of the recidivists surveyed, their level of education is important. It was reported more frequently by residents of rural areas (71.4%) than of cities, regardless of their size, as well as by divorced (62.3%) and middle-aged (41–55 years) people – 70.5%. However, all of them underlined that they needed education, in particular vocational education, in order to achieve the objectives outlined in the freedom plan. Some people linked their low level of education to difficulties in establishing good and lasting social relationships. They indicated various reasons for their decision to increase their level of education or to acquire specialised skills. Mostly, however, they believed it was important for them to be able to find a permanent job as a result, to be respected in their family and to accumulate enough financial resources to start a family:

"Because I'm now hopefully leaving this place soon... I've spoken to my ex and I'd like to take my son even for a year. When I've put my life back together. You know I would like him to stay with me. Because I would take him to my place for a week or two or travel to the west and back. For him, maybe I'll finish school one day, because it's a bit embarrassing when your father only has primary education, isn't it? And for my partner too, because she's... I don't know, she's a woman from a different world, very polite and educated and somehow... Well, I think I'll at least graduate from a vocational school, because right now I'm self-taught, I'm a good tiler. I don't know if it's going to happen, but I have already made a plan" (Janusz, 47, living in a small town, primary education, divorced).

"All in all, I only have an elementary education because I didn't finish a vocational school. I attended three of them and didn't finish any of them. When I get out, maybe I'll finish some education, because how can I find a girlfriend if I don't have a vocation, and nowadays education is important... For me it's also important, because I'd like to have a permanent job, and that would also be

a reason to start a family. I need some support from others, when I am free, because I don't think I can find the right school on my own. I'm a bit shy, and also a bit old" (Dariusz, 36, living in a village, primary education, single).

"After my release I was thinking about going to school, but I didn't have time, because I needed money. Now I'm planning to get some education, because we live in such a time that if you don't have an education, you're finished, you won't have a permanent job or enough money to pay the rent, and it's impossible to meet someone, I mean a good girl. The girls around me are all similar to me... I don't know what I should learn, because I don't have any interests, but I don't care what school I go to, as long as I get a better education" (Sebastian, age 28, living in a small town, lower secondary school education, single).

"I have a secondary, general education. After my release I would like to further my training, probably in electronics, IT, and this sort of thing. Because I've been successful in this branch; I've been locked up three times for stealing electronics (laughs). We'll see if it'll work out, but I'll do my best, because after the third sentence I have no intention of coming back here" (Jarosław, 33, living in a big city, secondary education, married).

Further education after release was not of interest to more than 1/3 of the respondents. Most of them were senior recidivists who saw no point in further training, despite having a low level of education:

"I have no educational plans, but that's because of my age. I'm getting on in years and my health is not great. What I can do, I do and I don't want to do any more..." (Wojciech, 55 years old, rural resident, primary education, widower).

There were also statements from young and middle-aged recidivists who had no educational plans. The reasons they indicated most often concerned negative observations of social reality, a hedonistic attitude to life or a lack of aspirations for further education:

"I have a secondary education. No, I'd rather not study further, because people graduate and still don't have a job. When I was going to work before I was pinched, I was working with a bloke a year older than me who had finished university and earned less per hour than me. He was working as a helper and the studies didn't help him" (Piotr, 26, rural resident, secondary education, single).

"I have an incomplete university education (laughs). I studied, but I didn't graduate... I don't plan to study further, because a degree isn't the most important thing, and studying tires me out and takes time. I want to live: women, wine and singing!" (Michał, 45, resident of a large city, university education, married).

"I don't want to continue my studies. I went to a technical school because I had an aggregate sentence to serve. And I have nothing to do in prison, so I think,

I would attend school for the period of the aggregate sentence, and I would have a better opinion. But it turned out that I didn't need it either. I'll tell you honestly that I regret I went to that school, because I was degraded, as I sat in the half-open penal institution and I have my papers messed up. The school indirectly caused that because I was obliged to move to another penal institution and there the majority obeyed the rules while I did not. I was the only one during these two and a half years what I stayed there, I didn't allow them to impose certain things on myself. And I don't even want to think about school after release" (Andrzej, 36 years old, resident of a small town, vocational education, divorced).

c) personal development plans

A significant percentage of respondents are interested in their own development (69.8%). Those who wish to pursue their passions most frequently come from small towns and rural areas (77.1%), are aged from 31 to 40 (71.0%), are divorced (70.5%) and have secondary and higher education (74.1%):

"My hobby is riding horses, and I had a lot of contact with them as a child because we owned four of them on the farm. As soon as I am released, I will get one, even if I have to steal it from someone (laughs). Don't worry, my plan is to marry a girl from a village, but one who will be rich, and we will work together and buy two lovely horses. I will take care of them. That's my dream... But if I know life, I'll probably come back here in a while, unfortunately" (Tomasz, 34, lower secondary school education, resident of a village).

"My passion involves antiques: coins, furniture, maps and other vintage items. I am familiar with these things. I think it will also allow me to settle down, but I told myself exactly the same last time" (Szczeban, 42, resident of a small town, secondary education, divorced).

On the other hand, self-confidence and the desire to improve one's potential are declared by only one quarter of the total number of respondents, of which the most frequent are those aged from 31 to 40 (74.0%) and residents of large cities (68.2%):

"When I'm out, I'll go to the gym, because I've always liked sport. I used to lift weights, it's still my hobby, even here I go twice a week to exercise" (Paweł, 38, resident of a large city, vocational education, single).

"I love playing chess. I used to play with my grandparents in the park a lot, but it was a shame to outplay them all the time. When I get out of here, maybe I'll set up a local chess club. I can also do many other things, for example I am said to be a good painter. I like to paint watercolours and landscapes. Sometimes I made

them as gifts for friends. I will keep doing these things, but maybe I will also take up graphic design... we'll see..." (Sławomir, 41, resident of a medium-sized town, university education, divorced).

More than half of the recidivists under study want to gain knowledge about the world, including most frequently seniors (66.7%), persons with vocational education (71.1%) as well as secondary and higher education (72.4%). Gaining knowledge about the world is of least interest to rural residents:

"When I finally get out of here, I'll be watching other countries on TV, especially the ones I used to dream of going to... the Dominican Republic, Mexico or Brazil. They're so exotic. I would visit Africa too, but now I'm too old, so I'll watch it on TV and the Internet. I will look at how people live, what they eat, how they have fun" (Zbigniew, 58, small town resident, vocational education).

"I've always been interested in what's been happening in the world. I used to watch TV and check out all the news channels. I also used to browse a lot on the Internet. When I'm free, I'll finally be able to do this without restrictions, together with my son. Of course, when I find a job, I will do it in the evenings, but I will have a lot of fun. But for my son, I'll have to reduce the Internet usage a bit, because my wife told me that he stays up too late at night and goes to school barely conscious in the morning. That's how I imagine my life outside the prison, but something is going wrong with me and my wife, she'll probably divorce me. It would be bad, but I think there will be no choice, because my wife is such a choleric woman" (Paweł, 40, resident of a large city, university education).

d) plans for social participation

Willingness to participate in various social initiatives is expressed by nearly half of the recidivists interviewed, of which the most frequent are people from small towns (42.9%), divorcees (42.6%) and nearly half of those with higher and secondary education:

"I am enthusiastic about helping others. Not to give my own thing to someone, but to help collect for a child's treatment, or the homeless... I also know people like me, but with no home. I helped them when I was in between sentences. I even attended a collective Christmas Eve for them and made Christmas packages. I don't know how it's going to be now, because I'm not going back to my family – it's broken up and I have to manage somehow on my own. I probably won't have time to help anymore, but I will want to do something" (Paweł, 32, resident of a small town, secondary education, single).

More than half of the respondents, including 1/4 of seniors, are reluctant to contribute to social life. Respondents are not interested in culture and art, although almost 1/3 of them have plans in this area. Most of them are residents of small towns (nearly half) and 1/3 are unmarried:

“I don’t like all these celebrations, concerts and other gatherings. I prefer to stay at home, drinking a beer, watching TV, with my favourite woman and peace and quiet...” (Janusz, 45, resident of a medium-sized city, vocational education, divorced).

“I don’t understand art, some kind of daubery, twisted sculptures, as they say – installations. And people are delighted, watching, smiling and discussing. I am a simple peasant and this art or culture is not for me, oh no...” (Kazimierz, 56, resident of a village, primary education, married).

To conclude, the vast majority of persons sentenced to prison isolation after release take measures to implement a plan related to the improvement of their own and their family’s material status. However, a theme is present in many of the respondents’ statements indicating a large discrepancy between the imagined life after release (planned functioning) and the reality after release, especially with regard to the lack of effectiveness in independently striving to improve their own and their family’s unsatisfactory material circumstances. This is due to the fact that in families with a correctional problem, the crisis spirals around its original source: most often unemployment, poverty, addictions to psychoactive substances and other pathological behaviour of family members. Due to the negative perception of the social environment, they are socially stigmatised and placed in a discredited category – the group of socially disadvantaged families²⁷. The lack of social support for members of this type of family returning from prison isolation and looking for work leads them to organise ad hoc financial resources to support themselves and their families, often acquiring them by criminal means. As the interviewees’ statements show, their friends or members of their immediate and extended family are usually useful in solving employment problems.

An undeniable problem, and at the same time a barrier to obtaining employment and funding in a socially acceptable way, is the low level of education of convicted persons. The results of the survey indicate that they are willing to improve their vocational competences, taking advantage of both the offer of prisons in relation to internal employment and the opportunities offered by

²⁷ Więcej na ten temat w: B.M. Nowak, *Rodzina w kryzysie. Studium resocjalizacyjne*, Warszawa 2011

employers through external employment. Some of them also plan to increase their level of education once they are released. However, all evidence suggests that these plans clash with the multitude of their difficult, existential life issues and quite often are left behind.

Prisoners with a low level of education, inhabitants of rural areas and small and medium-sized towns, middle-aged people, especially the seniors, represent categories of multiple convicts who do not see the possibility of having a reasonably prosperous, decent life after release and changing the way/style of functioning adopted before imprisonment. They have a negative experience and do not see any chance of improving the quality of their life on release. They fear a painful collision with the demands and challenges of everyday life and the existential needs of their families. The fear of functioning after release is particularly felt by repeatedly sentenced seniors. They are usually poorly educated and, because of their age and health, do not see the point in improving their education or gaining professional qualifications. Although their life plans are not exorbitant, they, too, clash painfully with reality. Being unattractive on the labour market, unable to cope with securing basic needs and not receiving adequate social support, recidivists in their senior years are condemned to a life of poverty and, in situations of family breakdown, often become homeless²⁸. This result leads to the claim that, in a custodial setting, this group of convicts should receive targeted social support and special care in securing their health and employment needs.

People who are repeatedly sentenced and incarcerated in penitentiary units often plan to develop their potential – talents, interests and passions – while at liberty. In the resocialisation and readaptation perspective, this is a very valuable information allowing to apply more often alternative methods and techniques of work with convicted persons. They have a supporting function for conventional methods of resocialisation measures implemented within the framework of penitentiary and post-penitentiary work. Methodological work in the field in question should be aimed at stimulating convicted persons' personal development and achieving changes in their attitudes and behaviour as a result of their success and perceived social approval. Convicts who are most susceptible to this type of influence are middle-aged, have a secondary or higher education and live in small social enclaves (small towns and villages). They are also the most interested in participating in community life and taking part in various social initiatives. In a social inclusion approach, this aspect of former convicts' functioning

²⁸ B.M. Nowak, *(Nie)skazani na wykluczenie..., op.cit.*

undoubtedly becomes a factor protecting them from stigmatisation, indifference of local communities, loneliness, marginalisation and social exclusion. Yet, it is essential that the activities they undertake are aimed at achieving constructive and socially desirable goals, and this is a task specifically for correctional institution officials, members of non-governmental organisations and professionals involved in preparing prisoners for release and assisting former prisoners in their efforts towards positive social readaptation – volunteers, probation officers, social workers or resocialisation educators.

To refer to the title of the present paper, the life plans of the incarcerated formulated on the basis of their ideas about life after release are not always realistic, and undoubtedly difficult for them to realise. We should emphasise that the life plans of persons sentenced to prison isolation can be a risk carrier when the over-optimistic attitude of those formulating them evaporates in the face of difficulties that arise and problems that accumulate and are not solved on an ongoing basis. This state of affairs leads to bitterness, depressive states, the adoption of risky lifestyles, a resurgence of criminal thinking and a return to a criminal lifestyle²⁹. For this reason, it is very important to draw up individual readaptation plans in preparation for the release of convicts, verified by the penitentiary staff in terms of the real possibilities of their implementation in the free living environment, in cooperation with convicts returning to their home communities.³⁰ This care and effort put into the precise identification, in specific local environments, of the entities that can effectively support the readaptation of former prisoners, is a factor that protects these prisoners from recidivism, and therefore a key factor in the prevention of recidivism.

Summary

Large discrepancies between the ideal state (life plans formulated in a closed environment) and the reality found after release significantly reduce the sense of quality of life of former prisoners and induce them to pathological coping and return to crime. However, it should be emphasised that the sense of meaning and quality of life of people sentenced to prison isolation requires further in-depth research explorations and the development of a dedicated methodology for resocialisation and readaptation work. That is because the methods of work with

²⁹ B.M. Nowak, *(Nie)skazani na wykluczenie..., op.cit.*

³⁰ A. Iwanowska, *Przygotowanie skazanych do życia na wolności w trybie art. 164 k.k.w.*, Warszawa 2013.

prisoners and former prisoners that have been developed and are currently in use are not sufficiently effective and do not fully secure preventive needs. This is evidenced, inter alia, by the results of the present study and numerous communications from studies carried out by other researchers. The existing systemic solutions do not provide sufficient conditions for local communities to holistically, efficiently and effectively undertake activities for former prisoners returning to their living environment after the end of their isolation sentence. Nor do they create opportunities to effectively support their highly dysfunctional families³¹. However, a lot of progress is being made in this area by non-governmental organisations, such as the Sławek Foundation, whose mission is to help former prisoners return to social life, or the Pomost Foundation in Zabrze, which runs a Social Readaptation Centre for people leaving prison. These are social initiatives that can be an important part of local, cluster-based networks of readaptation assistance and support³², monitoring the reintegration progress of convicts until they achieve independent citizenship. Nevertheless, this requires a significant reconstruction of penitentiary and post-penitentiary assistance systems based on the results of empirical research on the determinants of recidivism, the adoption of a coherent strategy for the social reintegration of convicted persons and an integral model of resocialisation-readaptation support.

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³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² B.M. Nowak, *(Nie)skazani na wykluczenie...*, *op.cit.*

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