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PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF MORAL EDUCATION IN DETENTION

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Abstract

The moral life has its values, norms and its courts, it ensures respect for values that transcend the direct interest of the person and makes one think of the others, accepting and protecting them and promoting their interest as a real purpose. To reach all these, we need to take an educational step of asserting the moral good and denying the moral evil and for all these to become real, a lot of work, sacrifice, passion and dedication are needed and the work of a psychologist can hope to be an integrated element in such a construction. This is an ascertaining study which addresses the prison system as a whole, from the experience within a single prison, but at the same time, it addresses the whole society which includes this particular prison. The points of interest and also the research objectives were to identify the degree of perception of moral values among young prisoners, attitude determination and the acceptance degree of the prisoners regarding moral education activities during detention; forming documented opinions on the most effective moral education activities for prisoners.

Keywords: *moral education, moral culture, set of values, the factor of rehabilitation*

1. A NEW CONCEPT IN THE ROMANIAN PRISON SYSTEM

The work is developed on a undeniable current theme that brings in the center of the investigation the man, and not a mere man, but one that, in specific social circumstances, has come to be isolated, legally, by the society and forced to give up his freedom, for long or small periods of time. [1].

Since this year (2011) the "credit system" has been introduced in some of the (pilot) prisons which is functioning upon the idea of accumulated, acquired or canceled credits. For each activity carried out by a prisoner within the programs of education, productive, hobbies, sports, etc., he receives a bigger or a smaller number of credits which accumulates

with each activity carried out during detention, thus giving him the opportunity to collect as many credits as possible. With this number of credits each inmate acquires rewards such as additional packages or visits and even the permission to go home for one day.

This system aims to increase prisoners self-confidence and encourages them to acquire as many credits for the programs conducted and the evaluation within the Parole Board before the punishment deadline will also be done related to the number of credits accumulated by each prisoner. It is about a much easier evaluation, ethically speaking and it may contribute to the assessment of the social recovery of prisoners.[3].

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

We wish to mention that in this paper we only present the beginning of a research provided as permitted by the subjects condition, that of prisoners in a prison. Therefore, the objectives, even if they have the size of a much more daring project, relate to the expectations commensurate with the possibilities and the motion space of the subjects given the circumstances.

We propose, therefore, the following objectives:

- Identifying the perception of moral values among prisoners;
- Determining the attitude and the acceptance by prisoners of moral education activities during detention;
- Formation of documented opinions on the most effective moral education activities for prisoners.

3. WORK HYPOTHESES

Based on the proposed objectives and the pattern of scientific data gathered in the first part of this paper, we considered useful to submit to testing and evaluating the following hypotheses:

1. Most prisoners have a valid perception of ethical values, but have a negative assessment of their ability to respect and promote these values;
2. Among the prisoners there is a hierarchy of preferences for cooperation with educational factors, depending on the degree of involvement;
3. Most prisoners recognize the seriousness of the offenses for which they were condemned and appreciate positively the role of detention in their social behavior correction.

4. THE POPULATION STUDIED

Sampling difficulties were evident during the research. The requirements imposed by the representation scientific requirements in conjunction with voluntary request, forced us to draw in research only those prisoners who have shown interest to our theme, so some of the prisoners got away from the theme - those

prisoners who would, in our opinion, mostly need moral education: those who remain in complete opposition to the social system and outside its living rules.

The sample for the research, looks as follows:

- A group- sample of prisoners selected on a voluntary basis (50 people), statistically structured on the basis of relevant criteria for the research: age, sentencing limits, recidivists – non-recidivists, married, unmarried, with or without children, level (type) of religiousness.
- Factors of influence and education from the prison staff and partners, established on a friendly basis: priest, psychologist, director, NGO representative etc.

The conclusions of the identification data of prisoners show a balanced distribution in terms of age and occupation before imprisonment.

There is a preponderance of unmarried prisoners with sentences of up to five years, and the overwhelming majority declare themselves to be of Christian - Orthodox religion. However, the preponderance of married prisoners (32%), of those with sentences over five years (34%) or recidivists (32%) is significant, which allows the extraction of relevant conclusions.

5. METHODS AND RESEARCH TOOLS

During the research the following methods were used:

1. Conducted interview, applied to the people in the management and education areas of the prison and other persons representing civil society with whom the prison cooperates.
2. Questionnaire-based survey applied to the prisoners forming the sample.

The opinion questionnaire applied to the prisoners in the prison in which this study was conducted, has been designed based on the research objectives and hypotheses and on the conclusions drawn from the field literature.

We are aware that it has its limitations in terms of both design and implementation. The limited work possibilities have not allowed, as was necessary in terms of scientific requirements, its calibration on a pilot sample, for which the answer to some questions revealed some limitations of form or the lack



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of discriminative significance, as the case of, the question on the religion of participants or the insufficient separation of particular social situations (cohabiting, unmarried but with children, etc).

The limits of the questionnaire are related to representativeness. A total of 50 prisoners who agreed to answer the questionnaire, all men, from a single prison, is undoubtedly a major limit. We consider, however, the results of the survey satisfactory, especially since the prisoners participation was absolutely voluntary, without coercion.

We consider this study to be a beginning that may allow a more extensive research in a major project, possibly on a national scale.

3. Case studies of prisoners, based on voluntary and confidentiality regarding their identity and also, their consent on the data published in the study.

4. The monograph of a case

The instruments in paragraphs 3 and 4 have a feature allowed by the research team with reserve, but considered to be useful for the research, for the public penetrability and plasticity of the texts, but also for the relevance of the social and spiritual universe of the material described.

3. CONCLUSIONS

After applying the aforementioned tools, we believe that, under the limits of validity determined by the very limits of the study, we can formulate important conclusions regarding the direction to follow concerning the moral education of prisoners.

3.1. After analyzing the results of applying all the tools for collecting information and opinions on the population studied, we found that the detainees have an acceptable moral culture, manifesting in a significant majority,

their attachment, at least declaratively, towards these values. A significant nuance is that some officers of the prison show serious reservations about this perception, saying that the prisoner is, by nature, incorrigible, indocile, unable to gain access to authentic moral values. We believe this view as an isolated one, and in order to shape it as determining we would need to do a research on a representative number of persons within this category.

A major conclusion resulting from the study is that most prisoners properly assess the causes that led to the crimes they were convicted for, detaching as causes, the entourage and the personal character, with emphasis on the fact that both the character and the entourage have met a favorable social environment in which the privileged values were far from the authentic ethics: money, adventure, priority of physiological needs rather than moral, "all installed in society amid a post-revolutionary freedom which transformed itself for many, into libertarianism and denial of any authority".[4].

Therefore, the participants in our study recognized with sufficient clearness that even they know and adhere to the basic moral values, when they were outside the law were unable or unwilling to undergo it.

Under these circumstances, we consider that the first hypothesis of our study confirmed totally of two sources (case studies and opinion questionnaire) and partly from the third (interview), less exploited under circumstances of genuine testability, due to the small number of respondents.

We therefore believe that *most prisoners have a valid perception of ethical values, but have a negative assessment of their ability to respect and promote these values, before detention.*

Based on this conclusion, we believe that moral education in prison is fully possible, finding a favorable echo among the majority of prisoners, that not only manifest openly their willingness to participate, but they also demand more activities, more differentiated, better organized, less formal and closer to the personality profile of each prisoner.

3.2. The assessments from the application of an instrument of research have revealed interesting features about the preferences of detainees in cooperation with educational factors inside and outside the prison. By far, the most outstanding preference is for what detention has taken from the prisoner : his family. This is more evident for married inmates, but is significant for the unmarried ones too. Next, in order, the psychologist, educational staff, priest, prison mates. However, prisoners assessment, supported, in part, by the prison staff, is that the presence of these educational factors in their lives is insignificant, and the responses of "rarely" or "pretty rarely" are prevalent.

We believe, therefore, that the second hypothesis is confirmed, so that *among prisoners there is a hierarchy of preferences for cooperation with educational factors, according to institutional and non-institutional factors*, opening the way for an objective analysis of how to think the involvement of these factors in the moral education of prisoners.

On the other hand, it requires a rethinking of the role of professionals and individuals with specific responsibilities in the moral education of prisoners. The role of the priest has to be more important. A measure which we believe that could significantly change the nature, content and effectiveness of moral education in prisons should be changing the role of the psychologist, who should have a specific role according to his specialization and in the prisons with large staffs a psychological department distinct from that educational one should be effectively constituted.

3.3. The main objective of our study was to find means by which education would provide moral and social rehabilitation of those deprived of freedom. For this it was necessary

to evaluate the extent to which prisoners recognize the seriousness of the acts committed and supports the idea that they can rediscover their role in life through education.

By assessing the results of the instruments applied in the research, we find a favorable attitude from the prisoners. The feeling of guilt is mostly shared and the opinion about the role of moral education in prison is a favorable one, as well.

Therefore, the third hypothesis of our study is confirmed. *Most prisoners recognize the seriousness of the offenses for which they were condemned and appreciate the role of moral education while in detention in straightening their social behavior.*

So, nothing prevents us, to give greater importance to the moral education of prisoners. We have not thought for a moment to propose the transforming of the prison into a recreation center or a house of culture. We do not think that the prisoner should be included in educational activities in most of the time spent behind bars. We also do not believe that bars should be covered up in velvet or that the guards should be changed into counselors. We understand and accept that detention must be, above all, perceived as a punishment, with all its valences, involving deprivation of freedom.

The analysis of the results led to a major conclusion: that most prisoners have a valid ethical perception of moral values, but have a negative assessment of their ability to respect and promote these values before detention.

Based on this conclusion, we believe that moral education in prison is fully possible, finding a favorable echo among most prisoners, who not only openly manifest their willingness to participate, but they also ask for activities that are more differentiated, more less formal and closer to their personality profile. Another way of life than that which brought the prisoner behind bars requires a new set of moral and civic values that he should have the opportunity to discover. During detention it is necessary to give credit to moral education as an important factor in rehabilitation.[1].



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Those who will approach this work will discover that evil is not all evil, that the world behind bars is a world where a lot of guilty consciences cannot wait to be given the opportunity to raise at the level of the authentic human being. Provided someone to discover them, bring them to light and to restore them their trust and hope. The success will never be complete. "But if one lost sheep was brought to the flock it is called that a minimal moral act was committed". [2]

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