

The Role and Importance of Treatment in the Resocialization Process of Convicts*

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The purpose of the execution of prison sentence is for the convicted individual to adopt socially acceptable values through the application of appropriate treatment programmes during the prison term. Their purpose is easier inclusion in living conditions after the execution of the sentence, so that said individual does not commit criminal acts in the future. The above mentioned raises the question of whether it is possible for a person to change while serving a sentence and, after leaving prison, turn into a free citizen, useful for himself and society, how different prison deprivations and other factors affect the resocialization effects, which forms of treatment may influence changes in attitude, habits and behaviour of prisoners, etc. Looking for the effects of treatment and answers to the above questions, this paper tries to indicate the actual situation, problems and challenges in the process of resocialization of prisoners, especially those serving long prison sentences, and possible ways to improve the situation in this area. With that objective, the role and importance of different forms of treatment in the realization of the resocialization process is particularly emphasized. The conclusion is that the execution of prison sentences must not be reduced to a minimum of prison routines and lack of planning and practice related to a wide range of treatment forms. Also, further efforts should be focused on hiring a sufficient number of trained treatment officers, investing in treatment facilities and programmes, developing a long-term policy towards prisoners serving long prison sentences and paying greater attention to their more intensive treatment, all in order to ensure the conditions that will contribute to the possibility of achieving the purpose of the prison sentence.

KEYWORDS: treatment / resocialization / prisoners / prison sentence

* This paper was presented by Nataša Tanjević as part of her keynote address at the International Scientific Conference “Life in Prison”, organised by the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research and held in Belgrade, Serbia, from 2 to 3 December 2024.

Recommended citation: Tanjević, N. (2024). The Role and Importance of Treatment in the Resocialization Process of Convicts. In M. Milićević, I. Stevanović, & Lj. Ilijić (Eds.), *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference “Life in Prison: Criminological, Penological, Psychological, Sociological, Legal, Security, and Medical Issues”* (pp. 133–142). Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research. <https://doi.org/10.47152/PrisonLIFE2024.27>

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Introduction

The term *treatment* is a way of treating prisoners that aims to permanently eliminate criminal behaviour and reduce the percentage of recidivism (Korać, 2010) i.e., prepare the prisoners for reintegration into society without committing criminal acts. This is particularly emphasized in the new Standard Minimum Rules of the UN for the Treatment of Prisoners², which indicate that the goal of treatment is for these persons to choose, after leaving the institution, a peaceful and independent life and to stand by that decision. That is why the treatment should strengthen their self-esteem and develop a sense of responsibility. From the above mentioned, it can be deduced that treatment actually represents the most important segment of the execution of a prison sentence and at the same time is the obligation of the state. It must be accessible to all prisoners, since only through the implementation of treatment programmes and investment in treatment programmes and facilities can the purpose of the execution of the prescribed prison sentence prescribed by the law be achieved.

Prison Treatment and Resocialization Possibilities

The ultimate goal of prison treatment is resocialization, a process that consists of changing the prisoner's habits, attitudes and values deemed to have led him to commit a criminal offence and training the prisoner for a socially acceptable lifestyle (Macanović, 2011). It is a long and very complex process influenced by many factors, among which the most important are: length and conditions of prison stay, psychological structure of the prisoner, individual approach to each prisoner, treatment method, motivation of the prisoner and the expertise and approach of the person conducting the treatment. Above all, it can be acknowledged that successful resocialization leads to treatment adapted to personality characteristics, therefore the prisoner should be treated in a way that matches his personality as much as possible, in order to awaken and develop a sense of responsibility for his behaviour inside of him, to eliminate negative influences and encourage the acceptance of positive values and socially acceptable behavioural patterns (Macanović & Nadarević, 2014). That is why it is very important that treatment programmes be individualized, i.e., adapted to the risks and needs of each individual prisoner (Tanjević, 2018).

The importance of estimating criminogenic risks and needs is reflected in the possibility of adequate classification and use of various treatment interventions, but also in the prevention of any maladjusted behaviour in prison. In practice, this

² The United Nations Standard Minimal Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), Vienna, adopted by the General Assembly of the UN Resolution on 17th December 2015, 70/175.

means that the prisoner should be directed to specific treatment programmes adequate to the estimated risk level, which programmes should reduce that risk. During the needs assessment, efforts should be made to identify personal needs and characteristics associated with his harmful behaviour and offences he has committed.

Finally, in order for an inmate to be able to live in the social community he will return to after his sentence is completed, it is necessary that all the activities a person from that community needs to function be provided to him to the largest extent possible during the serving of his sentence. From the above, it can be deducted that in order to achieve the process of resocialization and good social reintegration of prisoners after their release, corrective prison treatment needs to include the use of various educational, labour and leisure programmes, contents and activities (Jovanić & Ilijić, 2015).

Education and work engagement are very important resocialization tools and play a significant role in meeting individual needs, acquiring working habits, new abilities and knowledge, developing responsibility, activating potential, building social relationships and in training the prisoners to lead a law-abiding life after leaving prison (Tanjević, 2023)³. On the other hand, filling free time with adequate content is also a significant factor in re-education because it enables the development of abilities, positive habits, new emotions and ethical feelings in prisoners, and at the same time reduces their tensions and frustrations and enlivens their life inside the prison walls. Therefore, the possibility of recreation, including sports, culture, hobbies and other leisure activities must be provided, and to the greatest extent possible, prisoners should be allowed to participate in organising these activities themselves.

From all of the above mentioned, it may be deducted that the possibilities for resocialization within the prison will primarily depend on the variety of types of prison treatments, on the number, training and approach of the staff who conduct the treatments, motivation of prisoners to participate in the implementation of the treatment programmes, which are all factors that will contribute to the ultimate goal i.e., success of the treatment.

³ At the end of 2022, the author of this paper conducted research in the Niš and Požarevac Penitentiaries on a sample of 360 prisoners, which showed, among other things, that respondents most often see labour and education as an opportunity for personal development, an opportunity to find employment more easily after they leave prison, but also as an opportunity for advancement in treatment. The importance of education and labour in the resocialization process was pointed out by numerous authors. See e.g. B. Knežić "Education of convicts - a way to be free", Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade, 2017; Lj. Ilijić, "Education and professional training of convicted individuals as an important factor in reducing recidivism", RKK 1/14 et al.

Treatment Effects - Status, Problems and Challenges

The Protector of Citizens, performing the tasks of the National Mechanism for Torture Prevention (NPM), noted significant improvements in terms of treatment of prisoners in recent years⁴.

Above all, during visits to NPM prisons, it was observed that new specialized programmes for group work with prisoners were created and the capacities of prison officials to implement them strengthened. These include: a general cognitive-behavioural programme, a programme for perpetrators of violent crimes, a programme for perpetrators of domestic violence and specialized programmes for group work with alcohol and drug addicts⁵. The overall goal of these programmes is to reduce recidivism. Specific goals relate to developing cognitive and social skills, gaining insight into one's own addiction and treatment needs, understanding other people's feelings, changing the thinking patterns, resolving conflicts, controlling emotions, controlling anger, developing life skills, etc. Having the above mentioned programmes is important if one takes into account that many prisoners have addiction problems and that there is a problem of prevalence of domestic violence, criminal acts with elements of violence, etc. Also, the implementation of the mentioned programmes is important since it contributes to the achievement of individual goals, such as the adoption of socially acceptable behaviour models or the establishment/maintenance of abstinence. However, it has also been observed that development of specialized programmes is difficult in some prisons, primarily due to the insufficient number of treatment officers, lack of spatial capacities, but also due to certain difficulties in forming groups, which are conditioned, among other things, by the criteria for the selection of prisoners⁶. Therefore, further efforts should be focused on hiring a sufficient number of treatment officers trained to implement the mentioned programmes and including as many prisoners as possible in the same, especially in the general cognitive-behavioural programme, which we consider applicable to all categories of prisoners. Also, the needs of prisoners themselves for certain programmes must be examined, and new programmes developed and implemented (for example,

⁴ See the Report on the work of the National Mechanism for Torture Prevention for the year 2022, available at: <https://npm.ombudsman.org.rs/attachments/article/1213/GI%202022.pdf>

⁵ Programmes were prepared by a Working group consisting of treatment officers from several Serbian prisons, with professional support from a Council of Europe expert, within the Council of Europe project "Enhancing the human rights protection for detained and sentenced persons". More on that is available at <https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2022/142/1>

⁶ Some of the criteria are: established abstinence, motivation (willingness), length of sentence (being able to participate in the programme until the it is completed), cognitive capacities, i.e. a convict determined to have cognitive functioning at a level lower than the one necessary for inclusion in the programme, illiterate convict or convict not suitable for group work due to lower intellectual capacities.

self-harm and suicide prevention programme), as well as programmes intended for special categories of prisoners, such as women, minors, the elderly, etc.

In its individual reports on visits, the NPM noted improvements in the organisation of leisure activities, reflected in the fact that in many prisons, there are different clubs in which prisoners can participate (art, literature, IT, drama, etc.), various sports activities (tournaments and competitions in indoor football, basketball, table tennis, chess, etc.) and cultural and artistic events (visits of theatre groups, film screenings, literary creativity festivals, public speaking, imitations, etc.)⁷. Further efforts should be directed to providing as wide a spectrum of purposeful activities as possible in all prisons and motivating as many prisoners as possible to get involved.

Finally, even though some progress has been noted in the professional training and work engagement of prisoners, there is still a need to extend them to the entire prison system, and to provide conditions for the work engagement of as many prisoners as possible, especially those in closed prison wards⁸. Namely, availability and type of work usually differ depending on the type of security regime. Prisoners in open wards have more opportunities for work engagements, including work outside the prison.

However, although there may be understandable restrictions on the work engagement of persons in closed wards due to security reasons, we believe that purposeful work is especially important for these prisoners, considering the negative impact of the strict regime they are under. On the other hand, since a high percentage of prisoners with different educational needs are serving prison sentences, it is both necessary and important to professionally plan and implement various educational programmes and vocational training. Finally, as Knežić (2017) states, "education is good enough, whatever it is like, to add more to life behind bars than hope for a life without returning to crime" (p. 48).

International standards also point to the need to improve the treatment of individuals under the increased surveillance measure, taking into account that this measure is limited solely to the removal of persons from the regular regime - to confinement/locking in dormitories. In this regard, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) indicates that each unit where such a measure is implemented needs to have a permanent multidisciplinary team composed of bachelors of pedagogy, psychologists and social workers who should develop more detailed individual plans for each prisoner and increase direct interaction with them through

⁷ See the NPM Report about the visit to the Belgrade Penitentiary, Report about the visit to the Sremska Mitrovica Penitentiary, Report about the visit to the Pančevo Penitentiary, Report about the visit to the Valjevo Juvenile Penitentiary, all available at <https://npm.ombudsman.org.rs>.

⁸ NPM has pointed out this need for years in its reports. See for example, the NPM Operating report for 2022, op. cit., p. 30.

motivational interviews (CPT/Inf (2022)03). This requires the development of a purposeful regime for prisoners under a measure of increased surveillance in order to promote their easier reintegration into the regular regime.

A major issue in prisons is the absence of effective treatment for prisoners with mental disorders. Namely, persons who are serving prison sentences, and who, after the sentencing, suffer from severe mental disorders, are a particularly sensitive category within the general prison population. No treatment programme can be implemented with them, nor can the purpose of the prison sentence be achieved, in terms of the Law on the Execution of Criminal Sanctions ("Official Gazette RS", no. 55/2014, 35/2019). At the same time, the existing legal framework does not allow the imposed prison sentence to be replaced by the security measure of mandatory psychiatric treatment and custody in a healthcare facility, and prisons are not, in terms of organisation, staff or technical resources, equipped to provide adequate treatment to prisoners with severe mental disorders (Tanjević, 2023). The above mentioned category of prisoners requires adequate psycho-social rehabilitation treatment, not just pharmacotherapy. This would contribute to better control of mental disorder symptoms and functioning within the prison environment, improvement of the mental health of prisoners, and better reintegration.

Here we draw attention to the fact that the problem of organisation of treatment is also burdened by the problem of long detention, so for example, a person sentenced to three years in prison who spends a year or more in detention will not have the opportunity to actively participate in the re-education process and prepare for reintegration and return to the social community after the end of the prison sentence. However, it seems that the greatest challenge is the organisation of treatment work, i.e., implementation of the resocialization process for those sentenced to long prison sentences. Namely, long prison sentences, especially if the majority of these are served under a restrictive regime, de-socialize prisoners, i.e., make them lose their sense of social values and relationships, which makes their reintegration into society upon release more difficult⁹. In this regard, we believe that the system of execution of criminal sanctions should focus increased attention on the more intensive treatment of these prisoners, implementation of the resocialization process and finding ways to contribute to preserving the dignity, life and health of individuals sentenced to long prison sentences, as well as their easier reintegration in society, once their sentence has been served. In particular, their prison sentence plan should be sufficiently dynamic and allow them to participate in purposeful activities and adequate programmes and various forms of treatments. The implementation of specialized individual programmes for this category of prisoners could provide a more targeted and varied approach

⁹ The results of the mentioned research also point to this. Author's research shows that as many as 72% of respondents indicate that they feel that the longer they are in prison the more they distance themselves from the society.

to the progress and rehabilitation of prisoners. This is of great importance because practice has shown that prisoners serving long sentences have very few opportunities of transfer to a more favourable regime, one of the reasons being that the prison administration is unable to offer them a satisfactory range of suitable rehabilitation activities, access to work engagement, professional training, educational courses, etc. After all, in the report after the visit to the Republic of Serbia in 2021 (CPT/Inf (2022)), the CPT recommended that "Serbian authorities develop a long-term policy towards prisoners serving long sentences" (pp. 38-64).

Finally, in terms of current standards, individual plans – treatment programmes for convicts should aim to ensure gradual progression within the prison system (principle of progression). Therefore, it is necessary for individual plans to be revised at regular intervals and modified, if necessary, in order for resocialization to yield maximum results. We consider this to be very important, because the point of the rules on regular reviews is to consider whether there have been significant changes in the prisoner's life and behaviour, as well as whether progress in his resocialization has been achieved, and then to harmonize the decisions made by the competent authorities with those changes. That way, the goals of special prevention would also be achieved, because if the prisoner does not believe that there is hope that he will be able to progress in the treatment, despite the achieved change, dedication and improvement in the realization of the treatment programme, neither correction nor re-education can be expected, nor any other active attitude towards the treatment implemented with him. Also, in this way, the conditions would be created for the prisoner to spend some time outside the prison and interact with the outside world through the use of extended rights and benefits or work engagement. That would enable him to gradually integrate into the social community.

However, although with the adoption of the new Rulebook on treatment, action programme, classification and subsequent classification of convicted persons ("Official Gazette RS", no. 55/2015), the intention was to achieve a more effective application of individualized treatment programmes, and more successful progress in treatment, i.e., transition from closed to semi-open prison wards, we believe that no major progress has been made in this area. In relation to that, the Protector of Citizens, while performing the NPM duties, has been pointing out for years in his annual reports, that the prisoner classification procedure is deficient since it is insufficiently transparent, that the criteria for promotion to a more favourable educational group are not sufficiently explained to prisoners, that educators are mainly concerned with administering questionnaires, etc.¹⁰ The mechanism of progression in treatment according to existing criteria implies a

¹⁰ See for example, the Annual Report on the Work on the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture for the Year 2021, available at: [Izvestaj za 2021.pdf \(ombudsman.org.rs\)](#)

difficult transfer to more favourable educational groups, so that prisoners are often released from prison from the same educational group they were classified into immediately after being admitted. One of the main reasons is that there are not enough treatment officers in the prison system compared to the total number of the prisoners. Also, in some prisons there are 100 prisoners per one educator, which means that an educator, with their daily administrative tasks, cannot possibly dedicate themselves to each prisoner. The result of this is that work with prisoners is often formalized, which, among other things, is reflected in the possibility of their transfer to a more favourable treatment group.

Another problem lies in the fact that the Questionnaire for assessing the risk of convicts sentenced to more than 3 years, the so-called Big questionnaire, contains shortcomings that make its practical application difficult and affect the subsequent decision-making concerning the prisoners. The main shortcoming is that the questionnaire mainly estimates the prisoner's past and relies on static factors that cannot be changed, which makes it difficult to change the score during the execution of the prison sentence, i.e., to reduce the number of points and the degree of risk. On the other hand, it contains very little space for recording changes in the behaviour of prisoners during their sentence, i.e., indicators of success of educational and correctional work (the so-called dynamic factors), although dynamic factors themselves, which are closely related to criminal behaviour, indicate areas that should be targeted by treatment and can be corrected to some extent through effective interventions (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Therefore, we believe that there is a need to improve the subject questionnaire in this part, in order to enable an essentially effective practice in the treatment of prisoners and achieve the purpose of serving the prison sentence.

Conclusion

Even though the answer to the question whether and what can be changed in people who are serving a prison sentence is very complex since it depends on a large number of factors, it is indisputable that only punishing and imprisoning criminal offenders is not enough for change to be observed, but that rehabilitation procedures are also necessary. They have the greatest effect on changes in behaviour, decrease of recidivism and reintegration of prisoners into society. However, the implementation of treatments is hampered by the problems of the prison system that we discuss in the paper, the biggest being the insufficient number of treatment officers (compared to the number and heterogeneity of prisoners), often without additional training, lack of spatial capacities, overcrowding of closed wards in prisons, but also lack of different programmes intended for particularly sensitive categories of prisoners.

On the other hand, it should be taken into account that, once they serve their sentences, the majority of prisoners will be free citizens again, who will return to their social community. Therefore, it is in the interest of that community to ensure the implementation of programmes that will reduce the negative effects of prison, have a positive impact on the change in behaviour of prisoners and contribute to the most successful social reintegration, and consequently, prevention of crime. This especially applies to those sentenced to long prison sentences, because imprisonment has a significantly different effect on this category of persons, considering the impact of deprivation is greater, and that they will spend most of their lives deprived of freedom, separated from the outside world, in conditions that are strictly defined by rules of conduct. If, at the same time, they do not have adequate family support, professional support from employees in the institution, sufficiently well-designed treatment programmes, opportunities for education and professional training, their chances for successful resocialization and social integration decrease.

We will conclude that the application of treatments for prisoners is not all-powerful and that it certainly will not have any or will have very small effects on a number of prisoners, but that the number of those whom its implementation can influence greatly and help with their resocialization and integration into society is significantly higher. Taking into account that the key factors of change are two basic things, namely the motivation of the prisoner to change and adequate and effective treatment, further efforts should focus on hiring a sufficient number of treatment officers, who will be carefully selected and trained to implement various treatment programmes. The officers, with their approach, will motivate prisoners to join the programmes, provide the widest possible spectrum of different treatment forms, but also develop and improve specialized treatment and rehabilitation programmes and evaluate the applied programmes. All this is important because conditions and opportunities must be created for people to be re-educated, to change their attitudes and previous behaviour, transforming them like that into people who can re-join society and continue their lives without committing criminal acts.

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