



Strengths and Weaknesses of the Polish System of Vocational Guidance and Career Counselling for Convicts on the Example of Occupational Activation Forms

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The aim of the article is to present strengths and weaknesses of the Polish system of vocational guidance and career counselling for convicts on the example of occupational activation forms. The forms are presented in the context of the functionality of the system of career guidance and counselling provided to convicts in Poland, along with entities responsible for its implementation.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The research problem has been formulated as the following questions: What are the forms of occupational activation of convicts, considering the context of the functionality of the system of occupational guidance and career counselling for convicts in Poland? The following methods have been applied for the research: an on-line questionnaire survey and a free-form interview with targeted questions.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: In the introductory part of the article the term of vocational guidance and career counselling is explained. Then the career counselling system in Poland is characterised. The considerations presented in the article are focused on strengths and weaknesses of vocational guidance and career counselling for convicts.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The analysis refers the career guidance and counselling system for convicts. It also indicates a necessity of synergy which would incorporate all the elements into one system.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Considering economic and social aspects, the functionality of the system of career guidance and counselling for convicts is highly significant. Occupational activation of convicts contributes to the prevention of recidivism and it allows them to find employment after they leave prison.

→ **KEYWORDS:** VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE, CAREER COUNSELLING, ACTIVATION, CONVICTS

STRESZCZENIE

Mocne i słabe strony poradnictwa i doradztwa zawodowego dla skazanych w Polsce na przykładzie form zawodowej aktywizacji

CEL BADAWCZY: Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie mocnych i słabych stron polskiego systemu poradnictwa i doradztwa zawodowego dla skazanych na przykładzie form aktywizacji zawodowej. Formy aktywizacji prezentowane są w kontekście funkcjonowania systemu poradnictwa i doradztwa dla skazanych w Polsce. Aktywizacja obejmuje również podmioty odpowiedzialne za realizację działań.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Problem badawczy został sformułowany w formie pytania: jakie są formy aktywizacji zawodowej skazanych w kontekście funkcjonowania systemu poradnictwa zawodowego i doradztwa zawodowego dla osadzonych w Polsce? W badaniach zastosowano następujące metody: ankietę online i wywiad swobodny.

PRZEBIEG WYWODU: We wstępnej części artykułu wyjaśnione zostało pojęcie doradztwa i poradnictwa zawodowego. Następnie scharakteryzowany został system doradztwa zawodowego w Polsce. Rozważania przedstawione w artykule koncentrują się na mocnych i słabych stronach poradnictwa i doradztwa zawodowego dla skazanych.

REZULTATY BADAŃ: Analiza dotyczy systemu poradnictwa i doradztwa zawodowego dla skazanych. Wskazuje również na konieczność synergii wszystkich elementów systemu.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE I ZALECENIA: Z uwagi na ekonomiczne i społeczne aspekty funkcjonowanie systemu poradnictwa i doradztwa zawodowego dla skazanych jest bardzo istotne. Aktywizacja zawodowa skazanych przyczynia się do zapobiegania recydywie i pozwala im znaleźć zatrudnienie po wyjściu z więzienia.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** **PORADNICTWO ZAWODOWE, DORADZTWO ZAWODOWE, AKTYWIZACJA, SKAZANI**

Introduction

The situation of people who have left prison to lead their life in freedom is extremely difficult. While isolated in prison, convicts are provided with basic existential necessities. After leaving prison, ex-convicts must face numerous challenges of everyday life and solve a lot of problems by themselves.

Considering such a context, various forms of occupational activation, including career guidance and counselling, become particularly valuable. Convicts are a very specific group of recipients of occupational activation, including career guidance and counselling. Their life situation is very complex, many of them have not been used to working, performing duties, being responsible for other people. At the same time, in many cases, there is a problem of burdens resulting from family conditions, such as domestic violence,

alcohol abuse, negligence, hereditary unemployment. Undertaken at penitentiary institutions, social rehabilitation activities, including occupational activation, come as an opportunity for convicts.

The material presented in the article comes as a result of empirical research studies which were carried out at penitentiary institutions and custody suites based in the area of the Regional Inspectorate of Prison Guard in Gdańsk in 2017 and 2018. The analysed population included the staff members of the departments at penitentiary units, as they are responsible for the implementation of activities in the field of occupational activation. There were 15 respondents who participated in the research. The survey method was applied with the techniques of a questionnaire form and an interview. The Polish penitentiary system implements programmes and projects in the field of career guidance and counselling, however, there is a gap in knowledge which refers to the structure of the applied solutions.

Career counselling as a process of assistance provided in the field of occupational activities

Career counselling and vocational guidance have already attracted attention of numerous authors, and this fact has been reflected in a number of publications. The term counselling is not an explicit notion, as it is often understood as a variety of support and counselling activities in all fields of human life as well as in the field of occupational activities. It should be also mentioned that some scientists apply the terms guidance and counselling interchangeably.

Career counselling is based on assistance provided in a choice or a change of a professional career, on recognition of an individual's strengths and weaknesses. Being focused on problems related to qualifications, profession, adjustment to customers' possibilities and to the requirement of the labour market, it is a significant area for pedagogues to act. As D. Kukla accurately observes, at present career counselling is mainly understood as assistance provided to people who struggle with problems related to the choice of their educational and professional paths. More and more frequently it is considered to be an indispensable element of support provided to individuals who wish to succeed in their professional career, but first of all, who wish to access a source of reliable information that can improve their career status (Kukla, 2012, p. 20). Career counselling can be also understood as a lifelong process. It is coherent, and it results from the idea of lifelong education, with special emphasis laid on the choice and path of a professional career (Sobierajski, 2013, p. 236). Advice is provided by a career counsellor. It is a person who organises various forms of counselling, who helps in acquisition of new qualifications and in identification of professional predispositions. Career counsellors provide job descriptions and positions which advice recipients are interested in, they establish and maintain cooperation with institutions of the labour market, schools and other education institutions. The tasks of a career counsellor involve workshops in professional career

planning, active searching for employment, collecting and updating information about educational and professional resources, with special consideration of new media, providing diagnostic tests which define suitability for a particular profession with the use of psychic and pedagogic measurement methods and techniques. (Kargulowa, 2010, p. 197; Becker-Pestka, 2011, pp. 7-18; Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 2017).

The structure of vocational guidance and career counselling in Poland is defined by a particular framework. Tasks related to career counselling and occupational information are implemented by the sector of education and labour. Tasks implemented by the sector of labour involve activities dedicated to adults. Assistance is provided by career counsellors employed at employment agencies.

The results of scientific analysis

At penitentiary institutions there are not any staff members who are focused exclusively on occupational activation of convicts. All the activities in that field, including occupational guidance and career counselling, are performed by correction officers at a particular penitentiary division, who are supported by their supervisors. Correction officers are people who have acquired proper skills and competences during relevant training courses. The staff members hold diplomas of higher education. The penitentiary staff's qualifications are constantly improved. The activities focused on self-education allow them to initiate and to implement efficiently projects in the field of occupational activation of convicts, including career counselling.

All undertakings in the field of occupational occupation of convicts bring numerous benefits for convicts, their families and the society. The more activities in the field of occupational activation are undertaken, the higher chance that after leaving prison isolation convicts will not return to it again. After leaving prison, convicts can find employment. They are prepared to start their occupational career, to perform their professional duties and to stay disciplined. They are able to pay their financial liabilities, alimonies and to maintain their families.

Convicts who serve their sentences in prison can also complement their education. The Polish law allows them to obtain education, even to graduate from higher education programmes, if they get a permission of the director of their penitentiary institution.

Activities implemented in the field of occupational activation, including career counselling, allow convicts to identify their capabilities and predispositions, to acquire new knowledge, to improve their intellectual development. All these activities also come as valuable management of convicts' time, improvement of their self-esteem, development of self-respect and evaluation of strengths.

Occupational activation of convicts is implemented with the use of means for post-penitentiary assistance and the European funds. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that a decision about taking advantage of career counselling is an individual question for each convict. Depending on convicts' needs, relevant activities are undertaken which

are adequate to his capabilities and expectations. The survey indicates that activities in the field of social rehabilitation, including occupational activation, are provided to all convicts. Such assistance is not provided, if there is no such need.

At present, the Regional Inspectorates of Prison Guard in Poland, including Regional Inspectorate of Prison Guard in Gdańsk, implement a project *Improvement of professional qualifications of convicts allowing them to return to the labour market after the end of their imprisonment sentence*. The project is implemented by the Prison Guard under the Operational Programme: *Knowledge, Education, Development 2014-2020*. The most important aim of the programme is to increase professional and social activities of convicts. Another aim of the programme is to enhance employment eligibility of convicts. Acquisition of new professional skills will increase convicts' chances to leave the area which is particularly endangered with social exclusion. It will also allow convicts to find their place in the labour market in a convenient and active way after they leave prison (Prison Guard, 2017a). Under the abovementioned programme, the Regional Inspectorate of Prison Guard in Gdańsk has scheduled training courses in such professions as for example a paver, a surface technician, a glazer and floor-fitter, a painter, a hair-stylist and others (Prison Guard, 2017b). The selection of training courses comes as a result of the labour market analysis and as a response to the demand for particular professions.

In Poland, also in the area of the Regional Inspectorate of Prison Guard in Gdańsk, there is another programme implemented: *Work for Prisoners*. This programme supports the process of comprehensively defined social rehabilitation of convicts who stay in prisons and custody suites, including, first of all, their occupational activation.

The programme has been developed on three basic components which determine activities implemented within its framework;

1. construction of production halls at penitentiary institutions;
2. increase in the scope of unpaid work done by convicts for local self-governments;
3. concessions for companies employing convicts (Prison Guard, 2017c).

As it can be concluded from the available information, in the area of the Regional Inspectorate of Prison Guard in Gdańsk, there are 2020 convicts employed, including 852 who provide work against payment (Prison Guard, 2017d). Additionally, it is planned to construct production halls in Wejherowo and Starogard Gdański in the next eight years.

Since 2011 in Poland the Fund for Occupational Activation of Convicts and Development of Prison Industrial Workshops has been operated. It was established on the basis of the amended Act of 28th August 1997 on Employment of Convicts (Journal of Laws 2014, item 1116), and it replaced the Fund for Development of Prison Industrial Workshops. It is a state earmarked fund operated as a separate bank account the administrator of which is General Director of Prison Guard. The Fund means are dedicated to finance activities in the field of social rehabilitation of convicts, including generation of new jobs for convicts, protection of existing positions, modernisation of prison workshops and their production, organisation of vocational training courses and courses enhancing already acquired professional skills for convicts, organisation of training courses in the field of occupational activation of convicts and courses allowing them to acquire skills required to find employment

(Prison Guard 2017e). In the area of the Regional Inspectorate of Prison Guard in Gdańsk the BIGB (a public sector enterprise) BALTICA is operated under the abovementioned Fund. It is based at the Custody Suite in Gdańsk (Prison Guard, 2017f).

Moreover, custody suites and penitentiary institutions implement originally developed programmes and projects. One of the examples is the *Programme for Occupational Activation of Convicts* which offers participation in individual and group courses in the field of career counselling at a penitentiary institution in Gdańsk-Przeróbka. It is assumed in the project that convicts should learn how to identify their own professional potentials, how to define professional and education targets, how to form their own positive self-esteem and to acquire skills required to succeed in finding employment. The programme has been developed by a prison psychologist, Private Magdalena Ciesielska-Dowgiałło.

Another solution is the programme *Prisoners at a Hospice*, implemented also in Gdańsk-Przeróbka. The general aim of the project is to provide convicts with a certificate which shall improve their attractiveness on the labour market, increase their motivation and self-esteem and encourage to search for employment actively after leaving prison. Among others, the specific aims of the project include increasing convicts' chances for employment after they have left prison, training for voluntary service, improving quality of psycho-social functioning of convicts who serve their sentences at penitentiary institutions, verifying the programme of social rehabilitation and occupational activation of convicts by developing a programme for voluntary service complemented with a training course for a medical orderly and other counselling and training activities. (Marczak, 2013, pp. 68-73).

Another example of an applied project is the programme *Skills, Work, Future*, implemented at the Penitentiary Institution in Malbork. The Author of the programme is Captain Monika Morozowska. The project refers to occupational activation and promotion of employment, and it is dedicated to convicts. The aim of the project is to provide convicts with skills required in the process of searching for employment, in order to increase their chances for social rehabilitation and to prevent them from recidivism.

The most important aims of the solutions applied in the field of occupational activation of convicts are focused on increasing convicts' motivation to learn, to complete their education, to complete vocational courses, vocational retraining courses or to acquire qualifications. Other important aims include providing convicts with skills required to identify their own predispositions and capabilities, encouraging convicts' willingness to find and start professional work and making them understand its value and significance. It can be assumed that activities undertaken in the field of occupational activation of convicts are implemented not only in the form of direct work with convicts. Such activities also involve self-education of people who are responsible for occupational activation projects, improving their qualifications, acquiring and updating knowledge, establishing and maintaining relations with external entities.

Participation of convicts in projects in the field of their occupational activation is implemented on voluntary basis. Convicts cannot be forced to participate in the programmes or any other activation projects. It is only possible to motivate them for active participation in such programmes.

It is difficult to state whether there are any disadvantages and weaknesses of the applied solutions. Surely, there is a problem with terminology applied to describe implemented activities. The prison staff does not define work in the field of occupational activation and counselling as a system. The activities are implemented in numerous ways, including self-education of the staff, however they are not organised in any kind of structure. Furthermore, the staff must face various difficulties in the implementation of their undertakings in the field of occupational activation of convicts, among others: differences in the intellectual level and age of convicts, problems in adjusting the pace and level of work to the participants' capabilities. A significant difficulty is also related to the lack of any information flow about the implemented activities between the particular units. Moreover, the shortage of the staff and the lack of funds also come as a major problem. There are insufficient financial means allocated to the implementation of projects in the field of occupational activation of convicts. Although all correction officers implement social rehabilitation programmes the abovementioned shortages make the implementation of the whole range of activities very difficult.

According to one of the correction officers employed at a custody suite, a better solution would be appointing one member of the staff to be responsible exclusively for the field of occupational activation, including vocational guidance and career counselling. It would make individual meetings with convicts possible, and as a result, it would be translated into higher efficiency of social rehabilitation projects. The correction officer believes that individual career counselling is more efficient than workshops and group work. It is then possible to adjust counselling activities to the requirements of an individual.

Conclusions

The problem discussed in the article is important when viewed both from the perspective of theory and social rehabilitation practice. Considering the limited size of the article, all the fields of the analysed problem have not been covered. It has been only possible to indicate the problem and activities which are performed with the participation of convicts. The analysed problem may fill in the gap in the field of implemented empirical research. It may also contribute to the development of a common and efficient system of providing convicts with assistance in the reality of the current labour market.

Activities performed in the field of occupational activation of convicts, including career counselling are of highly complex and multi-dimensional nature. This kind of work is very demanding, and it requires comprehensive knowledge which must be constantly updated. Apart from the shortage of staff and the lack of time, another weakness of the functioning structure refers to convicts themselves. Prison staff face a serious challenge of motivating convicts to change their lives, to make efforts that would allow them to complete their education, to acquire knowledge, to become active in the field of their professional careers, to increase their own potential. A significant question can be posed:

what could be done to prepare convicts for life in freedom, including their functioning on the labour market, during the time they serve their sentences?

Considering economic and social point of view, the functioning of the system of vocational guidance and career counselling for convicts is highly significant. Occupational activation of convicts contributes to prevention of recidivism, and it allows convicts to find employment after they leave prison.

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