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## Functions of self-harm of female prisoners raised in dysfunctional families

**Abstract:** Every social environment negatively interprets and judges self-aggressive behavior. Among people serving prison sentences, there is an increased risk of self-injury, which to some extent results from growing up in dysfunctional families. The article presents the problem of the function of self-injury of female prisoners and significant predictors of some functions. The main functions in the studied population of prisoners turned out to be regulation of affect, self-care and stressing of suffering.

**Keywords:** Intentional self-aggressive behaviors, self-destructive functions, female prisoners, dysfunctional family.

The concept of self-aggressive behavior has been the subject of many theoretical studies and empirical research for over several decades (Doctors, 1981). The discussions on the psychological functions of self-aggression in human life have a shorter history due to the difficulty of their precise definition, as well as their imprecise interpretation. However, the literature indicates that knowledge of these functions is particularly useful for psychologists who diagnose and carry out therapeutic measures against people with self-destructive tendencies (Pembroke, 2006).

Pathological self-injury is an intentional form of behavior, occurring repeatedly and causing minor or moderate physical damage (Klonsky, Muehlenkamp, 2007). It is differentiated from an attempt to change one's own image using tattooing or piercing of selected body parts, as well as from acts of self-aggression resulting in serious health damage and such damages that typically cannot be repeated (e.g.

eye removal). As a matter of fact, self-injury does not contain suicidal intentions, and most people undertaking this kind of action choose more than one form of self-aggression throughout their lives. Each of these forms is criticized and widely unaccepted in society, even in subcultures. The most common is the cutting of one's own body, as it occurs in more than 70% of people with self aggression (Anderson, Crowther, 2012). It is more common among women, while for men it is more characteristic to hit their limbs or head against a hard surface or self-incineration (Laye-Gindhu, Schonert-Reichl, 2005).

The widespread nature of self-aggressive behaviors is difficult to estimate, as much of it is not included in police or hospital statistics. This is because sometimes, after an act of mild or moderate self-injury, some people dress their wounds themselves, and only in the case of more serious health damage do they seek help in medical facilities. Nevertheless, empirical studies show that 4% of adults have a history of self-injury (Klonsky et al. 2003), while among children the percentage is 7.7% (Hilt et al. 2008), and among adolescents, it ranges from 14% to 21% (Muehlenkamp, Gutiérrez, 2004). Compared to the above mentioned age groups, self-aggressive behaviors are much more frequent in psychiatric patients and detainees in prisons. In recent years, particular attention has been paid to women serving prison sentences, as they have shown a clear tendency to self-destructive behavior (Chamberlen, 2016; Kwiatkowski, 2018). This results to some extent from the fact that almost half of them had at least one episode of self-aggression in their lives (Appelbaum et al., 2011).

Intentional self-injury may result from several separate factors. These include mental disorders, intellectual disabilities, personality traits and negative environmental influences. Initially, acts of self-aggression were recognized as a symptom of Borderline personality disorder (Joyce et al., 2010). Ultimately, it has been proven that this type of socially unacceptable and inappropriate behavior is related to other mental disorders: depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress syndrome, or eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia (Bentley et al., 2014). The relationship between self-injury and suicide attempts and thoughts is also widely discussed in the literature, although they have different characteristics, intentions and phenomenological assumptions (Cooper et al., 2005). In addition, people who commit self-aggressive acts have a visible tendency to abuse alcohol or drugs (Kwiatkowski, 2018). Both the abuse of psychoactive substances and self-injury lead to physiological damage to the body, and thus they are underpinned by related psychological processes.

Personality traits have a significant influence on people's behavior in various life situations. Some of them determine the choice of destructive methods of solving everyday problems, including intentional self-injury (Klonsky, Muehlenkamp, 2007). The main human trait predisposing to self-injury is experiencing negative emotions. People committing self-injury experience statistically more of them, and these emotions are more intense in contrast to those that arise in people without a

tendency to self-aggression. Usually, after an act of self-injury committed in order to stop negative feelings, they experience calm or relief, although some people occasionally experience guilt or embarrassment (Doctors, 1981). Next, it is worth to mention the view that self-aggression is associated with a deficit of emotional skills, which is characterized by feeling “mismatched” emotions, inability to recognize or understand them, or difficulty in expressing them. In addition, people who do self-injury often describe their emotional state as “something unrealistic”, especially during the occurrence of psychotic episodes, or believe that they “feel nothing” (Lloyd-Richardson et al., 2007).

The problem with one’s own emotionality is closely related to the existence of fragmented vulnerability to self-criticism and directing intense anger or contempt towards oneself. Self-denial is a feature that is characteristic for people who try to punish themselves or express excessive anger at themselves through self-aggression. However, it should be noted that this type of behavior is more common in people with low self-esteem (Lundh, 2007). Among the personal predispositions of a person, also neuroticism and openness to experience foster self-aggressive tendencies (Brown, 2009). This type of role is also attributed to impulsiveness and a feeling of loneliness (Kwiatkowski, 2018). The feeling of loneliness does not only apply to people in open environments, but is particularly acute when they are serving a prison sentence. The current state of research on this subject proves that in the majority of cases isolation from other people precedes the occurrence of acts of self-aggression (Appelbaum et al., 2011).

Regardless of internal or external causes of intentional self-injury, it has been proven that they have certain functions. Some of the first reflections on this issue date back to the 1990s. The model of the functions of self-injury presented by K.L. Suyemoto (1998) was subject to considerable criticism, as it concerned only theoretical deliberations, but at the time it was still an innovative project. This author pointed out that self-aggression allows to effectively refrain from negative emotional states, dissociation, suicide or conflicts related to one’s sexuality. Furthermore, self-injury can be used by people to set boundaries protecting their own identity, as well as to try to create an environmental response to conflicts or conflicting requirements which threaten them (Suyemoto, 1998). It is unquestionable that the lack of accurate empirical research confirming the existence of precisely described functions made it difficult to apply the solution proposed by Suyemoto (1998) in practice, but the detailed description of six functions of self-injury became the beginning of further research explorations.

For several years there has been a systematic increase in the interest of clinicians in the issue of functions of self-injury (Klonsky, 2007). Through specific empirical research, it has been possible to identify the reasons why a significant proportion of the male and female population commits various acts of self-injury. Numerous evidence suggests that the functions described in the literature are not mutually exclusive, but often coexist. The main reason for undertaking auto-

aggressive behaviors is considered to be the need to relieve the accumulated internal tension (Herpertz, 1995; Osuch et al., 1999). In the population of adolescents, it has been noted that regardless of gender, the regulation of affect is a key driver of the decision to do self-injury, and moreover, it does not only refer to the last act of self-aggression or a few acts in the last year, but also has to do with the entire history of self-injury (Scoliers et al., 2009). An analogous conclusion was reached on the basis of studies conducted among youth, people in the early adulthood and adult women with Borderline-type personality disorders (Shearer, 1994; Sadeh et al., 2014).

In addition to the primary function, which is considered to be the need for an individual to free oneself from unpleasant emotional states, it has been shown that there are also others that are common in the general population, as well as in psychiatric patients or detainees placed in prisons. The functions of self-aggressive behaviors include marking one's distress, anti-suicide, setting interpersonal boundaries, sensation seeking or self-punishment (Klonsky, 2007). Research in the prison environment has shown that in 26% of women deprived of liberty, self-injury was preceded by "depersonalization" and "derealization" (Wilkins, Coid, 1991). The result of this study suggests that an important function of self-injury in convicted women is to stop the state of dissociation. Self-injury allows them to "feel anything", including pain, and should satisfy their desire to deal with numbness and emptiness (Lloyd-Richardson et al., 2007).

The problem of feeling negative emotions concerns a significant part of the population of people deprived of liberty. The occurrence of apathy, chronic tension, anxiety or depressive symptoms in detainees does not necessarily result solely from the currently experienced difficulties characteristic for oppressive environments. Some of them may be of genetic nature, while others are the result of negative experiences from childhood. In this perspective, harmful environmental impacts expressed through material and household, cultural and pathological factors predispose to non-compliance with the legal order, but also to self-injury behaviors. Numerous studies on self-injury have pointed out that this condition can be attributed to growing up in dysfunctional families where physical, psychological, sexual violence, or neglect occurred (Carroll et al., 1980; Roe-Sepowitz, 2007). Special attention is paid to the issue of abuse of adolescent children, who in their later stages of life in a way reflect the sexual abuse they have experienced, through mutilating their bodies (Noll et al., 2003). On the other hand, on the basis of a collection of several dozen empirical studies, it has been proved that the impact of this type of violence against children is much smaller than initially assumed (Klonsky, Moyer, 2008).

Malfunctioning of the family predisposes to self-injury both in present and in future. This is due to the fact that a dysfunctional family is unable to solve basic problems and conflicts, as well as to perform its proper functions. Lack of care for the child and bonds between individual members of the

family is characteristic of this type of family, as is a lack of emotional support, overprotection or communication disorders. In the family structure, children are the most affected, which contributes to their lowered intellectual ambitions, lack of focus on achieving goals, lack of security and self-confidence (Bednarski, 2012). An important predictor of self-aggressive behaviors is also growing up in a broken family (Rosen et al. 1990). Divorce, death of a parent, or imprisonment of a loved one disrupts the functioning of the family system. For this reason, a partial loss of emotional support and inconsistency in providing positive reinforcements contributes to self-injury in children growing up (Carroll et al. 1980). Adults with a tendency to self-injury demonstrate a negative emotional attitude towards their parents, which may reflect their attachment to problems experienced in their childhood (Prinstein, 2008). The major cause of negative memories from the past is living in an environment where at least one parent abused alcohol or other substances affecting their consciousness. Addiction to psychoactive substances is considered to be the primary cause of family dysfunctionality, as it causes the slow destruction of the addict, leads to the disintegration of the whole family, as well as is a factor conducive to intentional self-injury and even suicide attempts (Sher, 1997; Roy, 2009).

## Aim of the research

The main aim of the study was to identify the main functions of self-injury in women serving prison sentences. Moreover, an attempt was made to identify the environmental predictors of specific functions of self-injury in the studied population of female prisoners.

## Research group

The study involved 60 women serving prison sentences in the Detention Centre in Opole. On the basis of the data contained in the personal files, it has been established which prisoners grew up in a dysfunctional family. The majority of the women were serving their first custodial sentence ( $N=34$ ), while the rest ( $N=26$ ) were in prison isolation for at least the second time. In the analyzed group, the average length of the sentence imposed was over 13 months ( $SD=12.25$ ). The lowest recorded sentence was 1 month and the longest 60 months. Nearly half of prisoners served their sentence for committing a violent crime against another person ( $N=29$ ) and the rest of women committed a non-violent crime ( $N=31$ ).

The detainees participating in the study were between 19 and 54 years old ( $M=32.55$ ;  $SD=8.46$ ). There were 24 women with lower secondary education, 16

of them had both primary and vocational education, and only 6 had secondary education. The vast majority of the convicts were single women (N=37), but in the analyzed group there were also 16 married and 7 formally divorced women. Over 66% of the prisoners had at least one child, which is a total of 40 women, while the remaining 20 were childless. As many as 53 women prior the detention had lived in the city, and only 7 in the countryside. The majority of women in the analyzed group of prisoners made a living from the money they received from social welfare (N=19). Next, the women used to do casual work (N=12) or were dependent on their partner (N=11). As many as 8 women have been living off theft before their current stay in prison, while 7 have been supported financially by their families. Only 3 women were employed in a place where they had an employment contract of indefinite duration.

## Method

The Inventory of Statements About Self-injury (ISAS) has been used to determine the particular functions of self-aggressive behaviors of female prisoners (Klonsky, Glenn, 2009). The presented method consists of two separate parts, where the first one describes the type of self-injury undertaken, as well as contains a few questions relating to the history of self-aggression throughout life. Only the second part, devoted to 13 functions of self-aggression, is applied in the study. The task of the person surveyed is to address the questions and provide one of three answers (0 – not relevant; 1 – somewhat relevant; 2 – very relevant). The result of the reliability of the whole scale is at the level of  $\alpha = 0.84$ .

The ISAS Inventory is a tool designed to measure 13 separate functions of self-injury: affect regulation, interpersonal boundaries, self-punishment, anti-dissociation/feeling-generation, anti-suicide, sensation seeking, peer bounding, interpersonal influence, toughness, marking distress, revenge, autonomy, self-care. Based on previous research on the functions of self-injury, it should be noted that conducting appropriate statistical analyses made it possible to identify two factors of these functions (Klonsky, Glenn, 2009). The first one contains interpersonal functions (e.g. autonomy, interpersonal boundaries, toughness), while the second one – intrapersonal functions (e.g. affect regulation, self-punishment, marking distress). These factors correlate at a moderate level ( $r=0.40$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

## Research results

Statistical analysis showed that in the studied group of women there are three key functions of self-aggressive behaviors. The main intention of self-harming among the detainees from dysfunctional families is affect regulation ( $M=4.18$ ,

SD=2.10). Self-care is the second most important function, as its average result is 2.90 and the standard deviation is 2.08. The results of the study prove that marking distress is the third function of intentional self-injury among convicted women. The quoted function received an average score of 2.63 and its standard deviation was 1.90. None of the other 10 functions exceeded the average score of 2.00. The table below contains detailed results of averages, standard deviations and minimum and maximum scores of the functions of self-injury in the group of convicted women.

Table 1. Averages, standard deviations, minimum and maximum scores of individual functions of self-injury in the population of female prisoners from dysfunctional families

	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Affect regulation	4.18	2.10	0	6
Interpersonal boundaries	.933	1.31	0	5
Self-punishment	1.46	2.16	0	6
Anti-dissociation/feeling-generation	1.61	1.91	0	6
Anti-suicide	1.88	2.24	0	6
Sensation seeking	.750	1.50	0	6
Peer bounding	.400	1.30	0	6
Interpersonal influence	.500	1.25	0	6
Toughness	.966	1.92	0	6
Marking distress	2.63	1.90	0	6
Revenge	1.10	1.79	0	6
Autonomy	1.41	2.11	0	6
Self-care	2.90	2.08	0	6

Source: own research.

Among the selected sociodemographic characteristics, it has been shown that some of them are important predictors of the functions of self-injury in female prisoners. After the initial r-Pearson's correlation analysis it was proved that marital status has a negative relationship with the self-punishment function ( $r=-.301, p<0.05$ ). Moreover, a negative correlation between having children and doing self-harm to achieve autonomy was noted ( $r=-.258, p<0.05$ ). The last environmental variable that has a significant relationship to the three functions of self-injury is the source of livelihood of female prisoners prior to their arrest and imprisonment. The above mentioned trait has a negative relation to the function of affect regulation ( $r=-.307, p<0,05$ ) and self-care ( $r=-.270, p<0,05$ ), and a positive relation to revenge ( $r=.297, p<0,05$ ). The remaining variables analyzed in the study, such as: age, education, place of residence, previous criminal record,

type of crime committed and length of imprisonment, did not significantly correlate with any of the functions of intentional self-injury.

On the basis of significant values of r-Pearson's coefficients, an attempt was made to perform a single-variable regression analysis. In the first case, the response variable was self-punishment and the explanatory variable – marital status. The proposed regression model transpired to be well matched to the data  $F(1, 58) = 5.790$ ;  $p < 0.01$ . Based on the results obtained, it should be concluded that the marital status of female prisoners is related to the function of self-injury called self-punishment (beta =  $-.301$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The presented model explains only 9% of the variance, thus marital status is a weak predictor of self-punishment. Regression coefficients for predicting the use of self-injury for self-punishment based on marital status are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression coefficients of the model with the dependent variable (marital status) and the independent variable (self-punishment)

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(1) Constant	1.643	.105		15.589	.000
Self-punishment	-.097	.041	-.301	-2.406	.019

a. Dependent variable: Marital status

Source: own research.

In the next regression model, the impact of having children on doing self-injury with the intention of achieving autonomy was examined. Similarly to the previous model, this one transpired to be well matched to the data  $F(1, 58) = 4.135$ ;  $p < 0.01$ . The result of the study indicated that the number of children is to a small extent related to the function of self-injury – autonomy (beta =  $-.258$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, this model explains only 7% of the variance, which indicates that having children is a weak predictor of the aforementioned function of self-aggressive behaviors. The regression coefficients of these variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Regression coefficients of the model with the dependent variable (having children) and the independent variable (autonomy)

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(1) Constant	1.393	,169		8.217	,000
Autonomy	-,136	,067	-,258	-2.034	,047

a. Dependent variable: Children

Source: own research.



The source of livelihood before imprisonment was the last of the explanatory variables considered. Based on the results of the analysis of variance, it has been established that this variable has a statistically significant relationship with three functions of self-injury in female prisoners. In the model consisting of the function of affect regulation and the source of livelihood before arrest, a good match of the regression line to the data  $F(1, 58) = 6.031$ ;  $p < 0.01$  was found. Moreover, the results of the study indicate that the material situation of the convicted, expressed by the necessity to seek help among other people, and even committing crimes, is connected with their self-injury done in order to reduce negative emotions ( $\beta = -.307$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Like previous models, also this one explains only to a small extent the volatility of the dependent variable, as indicated by the variance at the level of 9%. Table 4 contains regression coefficients for the variables described.

Table 4. Regression coefficients of the model with the dependent variable (source of livelihood prior to imprisonment) and the independent variable (affect regulation)

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(1) Constant	4.003	.471		8.492	.000
Affect regulation	-.248	.101	-.307	-2.456	.017

a. Dependent variable: Source of livelihood prior to imprisonment  
Source: own research.

Revenge turned out to be the second function, which in the constructed model had a positive relation to the source of livelihood of female prisoners. The model proved to be well matched to the data, as evidenced by the result of the analysis of variance  $F(1, 58) = 5.591$ ;  $p < 0.01$ . The study proved a positive relationship between doing self-injury for revenge on another person and earning money independently ( $\beta = .297$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Unfortunately, also in this case, the analysis of variance equaling 9% proved that the source of livelihood prior to the imprisonment is a weak predictor of the function in question. Detailed data concerning the regression of the described variables are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Regression coefficients of the model with the dependent variable (source of livelihood prior to imprisonment) and the independent variable (revenge)

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(1) Constant	2.658	.248		10.707	.000
Revenge	.281	.119	.297	2.365	.021

a. Dependent variable: Source of livelihood prior to imprisonment  
Source: own research.

In the last regression model, the response variable was self-care, while the explanatory variable was the source of livelihood prior to imprisonment. The proposed model proved to be well matched to the data  $F(1, 58) = 4.552$ ;  $p < 0.01$ , and the regression coefficient indicates that doing self-injury for the purpose of self care is connected with making a living from theft as well as using the support of other people or state institutions (beta =, -270,  $p < 0.05$ ). The verified model explains 7% of the dependent variable. Table 6 presents the results of regression coefficients for the above variables.

Table 6. Regression coefficients of the model with the dependent variable (source of livelihood prior to imprisonment) and the independent variable (self-care)

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(1) Constant	3.605	.367		9.821	.000
Self-care	-.220	.103	-.270	-2.134	.037

a. Dependent variable: Source of livelihood prior to imprisonment  
 Source: own research.

## Summary

Over the last several years, there have been numerous attempts to precisely define the functions of self-injury (Laye-Gindhu, Schonert-Reichl, 2005; Roe-Sepowitz, 2007; Shearer, 1994). Different authors describe and interpret these functions in a different way, but most of the concepts define them in an understandable and highly detailed way. The state of the research to date has hardly touched upon the issue of the functions of self-aggressive behaviors of people forcibly isolated from society. It should be noted, however, that knowledge about them can contribute to the introduction of optimal therapeutic measures during imprisonment.

In the population of detained women from dysfunctional families, self-injury is caused by three separate functions. The first of these is the affect regulation aimed at easing intense and unpleasant emotions. Responsible for the utilization of this function are human biological and psychological mechanisms. The act of self-aggression enables the regulation of accumulated tension by creating a sense of control over passive pain, which decreases after the occurrence of active pain resulting from self-injury (Darche, 1990). Self-aggressive behaviors are therefore a strategy to reduce emotions, which often include anger, anxiety and frustration. Growing up in an unhealthy environment causes a person to learn unsuitable coping techniques, which they use in their future life (Linehan, 1993). Both the unpleasant experiences from childhood, adolescence and the period before being

in prison predispose to self-injury, and the result of the research confirmed that in the group of detainees depressing mental states are its main cause. Previous studies have shown that people who self-injure for affect regulation also tend to feel hopeless and to commit suicide attempts (Nock, Prinstein, 2005).

The second function of self-injury in the surveyed population of convicted women is self-care. The possibility of taking care of oneself as a result of conscious bodily harm is not a common function, as apart from the affect regulation it is self-punishment that most often appears in the conclusions of the study (Klonsky, 2007). In the case of people from dysfunctional families, focusing on themselves is not a typical situation, as their previous experience often forced them to take over the role of a parent or older sibling. Doing self-injury for self-care may therefore be one of the few ways to take care of themselves throughout their lives. It is worth noting that self-care has important connections with other interpersonal functions, such as interpersonal influence or sensation seeking (Klonsky, Glenn, 2009). In this respect, it cannot be ruled out that an attempt to take care of oneself in the case of detainees also has to do with their need to attract attention, obtain love, friendship or attachment to significant persons.

The marking of distress through self-aggressive behaviors is the third important function observed in the study group. The expression of the mental pain that one feels in a self-destructive way occurs when other forms of communication become ineffective. The affect regulation has an analogous function, because the lack of opportunity to verbally express the accumulated emotions triggers self-injury in order to obtain relief (Suyemoto, 1998). People from dysfunctional families not only witnessed traumatic events, but also actively participated in them. Therefore, doing routine self-injury resulting from inner intentions to emphasize the harm they suffered may help them to get the needed emotional support. Both marking distress, as well as affect regulation, self-punishment, anti-dissociation and anti-suicide functions belong to the intrapersonal functions of self-injury, and therefore they are underpinned by concurrent physiological and environmental processes. It is highly likely that, similarly to the other intrapersonal functions, the marking of distress leads to self-injury in solitude and secrecy from others. It is also worth noting that intrapersonal functions coexist with elevated levels of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts and Borderline personality disorders (Klonsky, Glenn, 2009).

The overwhelming majority of prisoners serving prison sentences are diagnosed with anti-social personality disorders. An immanent characteristic of people who have been diagnosed with this type of abnormal personality is an increased level of risk of self-harm, but also a predisposition to blackmailing to commit suicide (Radochoński, 2009). Moreover, antisocial personality increases people's tendency to aggressive behaviors, to display uncontrolled emotional reactions, to neutralize their own destructive and socially inadequate behaviors, and to seek easy justifications for detrimental use of psychoactive substances or

addictions. Personality disorders may increase the likelihood of self-aggressive behaviors throughout life, but they are not the only determining factor.

The study has shown that some of the selected sociodemographic characteristics are related to the functions of self-injury. Marital status proved to be an important but weak predictor of the function of self-punishment. When interpreting the result achieved, it should be noted that unmarried or divorced female prisoners are much more likely to do self-injury to express anger at themselves or to punish themselves. Self-diminishing is a result of the process of learning from the surrounding environment, hence growing up in a dysfunctional family hinders proper functioning in adult life (Linehan, 1993). The result of the study also indicated that auto-aggressive behaviors aimed at achieving autonomy are more characteristic for childless women than those with at least one child. Early life failures expressed through a deficit of parental empathy cause the collapse of boundaries and the fear of setting them in people doing self-injury. Gaining autonomy, independence and distinctiveness from other people is the main motive of people trying to define the boundaries of their own "self" through self-injury (Suyemoto, 1998).

The three functions of self-harm have a significant connection to the source of livelihood of the detained women prior to their imprisonment. The results indicate that convicts who make a living from theft or who have financial support from their parents or social welfare are more likely to commit self-injury for the purpose of affect regulation. In this sense, working on an employment contract and doing casual work to independently meet one's economic needs are protective factors against doing self-injury in order to minimize overwhelming emotions. In addition, the study noted the relationship between the way of supporting oneself in freedom and the function of self-injury defined as revenge. Attempting to independently earn money by working on a contract, or even by performing commissioned temporary jobs, is a predictor of self-injury done in order to take revenge on people in one's own environment. On the other hand, the acts of self-aggression among the women examined result to a small extent from their need to take revenge on another person. Similar conclusions were drawn on the basis of analyses conducted in the group of adolescents with Borderline personality disorders (Sadeh et al. 2014). The final observation from the research is that the source of livelihood of the detained women prior to their imprisonment is an important predictor of the function of self-injury referred to as self-care. The negative correlation between these variables proves that receiving financial assistance from relatives or institutions, as well as getting money from theft, encourages acts of self-aggression oriented towards self-care.

As a standard, self-injury has many psychological functions, the adequate identification of which enables the implementation of a comprehensive therapeutic program. The reduction of negative emotional states through intentional damage to one's own body is the most frequent reason cited in the literature (Herpertz, 1995).

In the population of women serving prison sentences and at the same time coming from dysfunctional families there was a similar conclusion. The possibility of limiting this kind of destructive behaviors requires the adoption of a therapy focused on increasing the competence of the prisoners in coping with negative emotions. Such measures can be equally effective against those who choose self-injury in order to mark their own distress. Where interpersonal functions are the primary cause of self-aggression, it is necessary to support the inner capacities of a person and to teach them alternative ways to respond to interpersonal situations leading to self-injury. This type of psycho-correction techniques should be applied to people whose dominant function of self-injury is self-care.

In the conditions of prison isolation, self-injury of prisoners generates considerable risks and numerous consequences (Appelbaum et al., 2011; Kwiatkowski, 2018). Small or moderate self-injuries lead to health damage, while those that are serious can cause sudden death. Although some of the reasons for self-aggression are not known, there is a systematic search for the key functions of such behaviors (Fagan et al. 2010). Their knowledge not only contributes to the implementation of appropriate multifaceted treatments, but also serves to effectively identify those who commit self-injury, who have mental disorders or suicidal tendencies. Preventing self-aggressive behaviors and suicide attempts by both women and men serving prison sentences should be a priority for prison staff.

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