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Selected problems of conducting research in prison facilities in the context of the analysis of prisoners' temporal perspective*

Abstract: The aim of this article is to characterize selected problems faced by social researchers in prison facilities. The authors, referring to the literature on the subject and their own experience gained while conducting research in prisons, analyze the challenges faced by researchers who do not belong to penitentiary institutions.

The first part of the article presents problems related to the organization of research in institutions of a total character, the specificity of the group of prisoners – participants of the research (including, among others, aspects of motivation, self-presentation and the cognitive and emotional functioning of prisoners) and the need for the researcher to maintain a neutral, impartial, objective attitude towards the subjects.

The second part of the article is devoted to the reflection on the methodology of research on the temporal perspective, which appeared in connection with the NCN research project "Temporal aspects of the activity of men serving prison sentences – longitudinal study". The analysis of the specificity of experiencing time by persons serving isolation penalties and the critical analysis of tools for measuring the temporal aspects of their functioning is presented.

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The article concludes with conclusions on factors that may increase the level of credibility of the results of research conducted in penitentiary institutions.

Key words: prison, isolation penalty, methodology of research in social sciences, temporal psychology.

Introduction

Poland is among the leading European countries in terms of the highest percentage of prisoners in relation to the general population. The prisonization rate in 2016 was 186.1 persons per 100,000 residents (cf. Nawój-Śleszyński 2018, p. 105), and at the beginning of 2020 it was already 196 persons per 100,000 residents¹, which equals 75,664 prisoners (as of 29 February 2020).

The psychosocial situation of people sentenced to isolation penalties, due to its specificity, various ways of adaptation of prisoners, processes taking place in the group of inmates and often insufficient effects in social rehabilitation, arouses interest of many groups of researchers dealing with social sciences – not only psychologists, but also sociologists or educators. It would seem that the group of people serving isolation sentences is a relatively convenient population for scientific research. It is large, gathered in specified places, and has time to devote to meet with the researcher. In addition, a large amount of information has been collected about each person – court files, community interviews, sociodemographic and other data that can be confronted with information from research. In reality, however, organizing and conducting such research involves a number of challenges. These may concern both the formal side of the research process, organization of research, strong dependence of the results obtained on the situational context, as well as the specificity of the group, the type of contact with the prisoners and limited possibilities of using standard research tools.

The purpose of this article is to review the most relevant issues to be considered prior to conducting research in prisons by researchers from outside the institution. The authors refer to the literature on the subject and extensive experience gained while conducting research in prisons. Since the observations collected here have emerged in connection with the implementation of the research project entitled Temporal aspects of the activity of men serving prison sentences – longitudinal study², some of the comments presented here relate to the context of research on the temporal perspective. In accordance with the topic of the research project, the analysis refers to the specificity of research covering the male part of the population of prisoners, also because they constitute a dominant group among the inmates in Polish prisons.

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¹ Based on: <https://sw.gov.pl/strona/statystyka--miesieczna>, report of 20.03.2020.

² The research project number 2015/18/E/HS6/00346, from National Science Centre (Poland).

A prison is an institution that meets all the criteria set out by Goffman (1961, 2006) for a total institution – it creates a separate world for people associated with it, in which the functioning is regulated by detailed regulations that define every aspect of prisoners' lives. Sleep, work, study, free time are all realized in one place and the whole community is uniformed and treated in a bureaucratic way (Zbyrad 2012). The reality created by the institution becomes a separate world for people linked to it, which is governed by different rules than those governing the 'free' world (Poklek 2010, p. 37). The quality of research carried out in prison conditions can be affected by many factors. They lie both on the side of the subject of the research, who may misunderstand the research situation and its context, on the side of the researcher and their methods, and they also may be related to the organizational side of the conducted research. One should bear in mind that the challenges in the penitentiary space are determined by the specific and high intensity of the problems discussed below, rather than their qualitative nature. Specific is also what the difficulties are determined by. Similar problems may be encountered by researchers working in other institutions of more or less total character, which are characterized by certain organization, norms, as well as the specificity of the people gathered in them (e.g. hospitals, social welfare homes or social rehabilitation centers), affecting the quality of the conducted research.

Methodological problems: organizational

A specialist who plans to carry out research in a prison must first get the permission of the prison authorities, and earlier the regional director of Prison Service (if they plan to carry out research within one district inspectorate of Prison Service) or the director general of Prison Service (if the research is to cover the whole territory of Poland). For the staff of the unit (especially the security and penitentiary department staff), who are burdened with many tasks, helping in the organization of research is an additional duty. Conducting research disrupts the daily routine of the institution and imposes more workload on staff. Many researchers, regardless of their cultural background, indicate that this may be a serious obstacle to conducting them (Apa et al. 2012; Bernaś 2007; Salaam, Brown 2013; Towl 2006). Despite this, which is worth emphasizing, the authors of this article have never encountered any refusal or reluctance on the part of the administration while conducting research in various prisons in Poland, and have repeatedly observed a far-reaching willingness to cooperate – this, however, required prior permissions and good organization of the planned undertaking (a sample action plan prior to the research can be found in Apa et al., 2012).

Good cooperation with the management and staff primarily depends on the precise definition of both parties' expectations. It is essential to clearly outline the purpose of the research, the method of selecting a sample of the subjects, as well

as the conditions under which it would be conducted – so that the prison administration is aware of it and can provide it. Penitentiary institutions may have real difficulties in organizing research on their premises due to, among other things, the lack of free space that prison facilities struggle with (Nawój-Śleszyński 2013; Gilna 2014), and the workload of the staff may make it difficult to reconcile the requirements of the research with security requirements and may result in a piling up of the duties of prison staff. Also, a lack of sufficient number of staff can make it difficult to reconcile the requirements of the research with security requirements. The carrying out of individual research requires the prison administration to provide not only a suitable place but also additional protection for the participant and the researcher, and to involve staff in bringing in and out the prisoner.

At the stage preceding the research, it is also very important that the representatives of the administration of the penitentiary institution accept the fact that the prisoners' participation in the research is voluntary. Most of the daily interactions between prison staff and inmates come down to the former giving orders and the prisoners obeying them. Therefore, a possible refusal to participate may be considered by some representatives of the administration as an unacceptable form of insubordination. In prison conditions, it seems extremely difficult to organize the research in such a way that the staff does not know which of the participants refused to participate. The participant is brought by the wardens or their arrival and departure from the place of conducting the research is somehow monitored, which allows the officers and educators to draw clear conclusions.

It is therefore reasonable to inform the staff in advance that in some cases, the researcher may, for a variety of factual reasons, resign from conducting or continuing the research. This will ensure that prison officers will not be able to clearly identify the reason for the brief meeting between the researcher and the prisoner and blame the latter for a lack of cooperation or insubordination.

The organization of bringing in the inmates is further complicated by the need for them to familiarize themselves with written information about the research, the form of consent to participate in the research and – particularly extensive – the form of consent to the processing of personal data. The time of reading these documents by the inmate and possibly clarifying them may be even several minutes. This usually excludes the possibility of a prison officer waiting for the prisoner's decision to take part in the research and, in case of a refusal, causes him/her to be called again to bring in another prisoner, which often takes a long time (the officers are busy with other duties). This can be frustrating for the prisoner and the Prison Service.

It is important to take into account the context and organizational and spatial capabilities of a particular institution. The official population level of prisons and detention centers in Poland, which currently stands at 93.9%³, does not have to

³ As of 29.02.2020; cf. <https://sw.gov.pl/strona/statystyka--miesieczna>; report of 20.03.2020.

be reflected in the situation of a given unit. Usually, the room where the research is carried out is also intended for other purposes, which entails certain time limits in terms of its use. It should also be borne in mind that the time of interviewing individual prisoners will be individually adjusted, depending on the pace of a particular person's work, which does not help to schedule officers' activities.

The situation is not made any easier by the solution in the form of group research (not always substantially justified), because gathering a larger group of inmates in one place is a particular challenge for the security department, and the possible comments of the participants concerning the research, the researcher or the method are sometimes immediately reinforced by the group, which makes the obtained results unreliable and leads to the creation of artifacts (cf. Apa et al. 2012) and in extreme cases to the discontinuation of research in a given prison due to the refusal of next individuals invited to take part in the research. All the information quickly spreads throughout the inmates' community and just the pilot study may determine the attitude of other prisoners to the research (Pełka-Sługocka 1970).

For obvious reasons, not all officers are well informed about the nature and scope of the research, which in some cases may raise a variety of concerns, such as potential complaints about the way the prisoners are treated, and discourage cooperation. These fears are, moreover, to a certain extent justified, since some prisoners treat a meeting with someone from outside the prison staff as an opportunity to express criticism of the prison service or the justice system. The correct attitude of the researcher, maintaining neutrality and not engaging in conflicting interactions, and at the same time being aware of the unilateral exposure of problems by the inmate, promotes the institution's trust to the researcher and mutual cooperation.

In some cases, detainees who have agreed to participate in the research after explaining to them its purpose treat the meeting with the researcher as an opportunity to get help in resolving their personal problems related to the legal situation or the conditions of detention. In such situations, mainly due to the nature of the interaction and the impossibility of verifying the legitimacy of the prisoner's complaints, the researcher faces a difficult situation in both the purely practical (organizational) and ethical aspects. This kind of behavior extends the time of the interview and concerns the wardens, and in extreme cases makes the interview completely impossible. Sometimes the prisoner's complaints may be so disturbing that they may – for ethical reasons – require advice on how to deal with the difficult situation. For this reason, the researcher should have a good knowledge of the law, and penitentiary law in particular. In exceptional cases (e.g. when the researcher has found that as a result of spontaneous statements of the respondent they have obtained information about a real and serious threat to health or life), it may be necessary to decide not to keep professional secrecy and to take appropriate intervention actions. Of course, such a situation cannot

be ruled out and one must be prepared for any negative consequences it may have for further research. The moral obligation to intervene may also result from improper behavior of officers towards prisoners observed by the researcher. Such incidents may complicate the research situation and lead to tensions between the staff and the researcher, which will hinder further cooperation. It is worth noting that the problems of the ethical aspect of conducting research in prisons have not yet been satisfactorily analyzed in the literature.

Many detainees, especially those who serve their sentences and at the same time are subject to other legal proceedings against them, are convinced that participation in psychological research is related to their legal situation. Hence their special caution and increased tendency to create a positive self-image through their answers. Prisoners make assumptions about the purpose of the research and try to guess the researcher's intentions, talk about the researcher and the research procedure, working out the optimal – in their opinion – way to behave during the research. This may lead to the so-called Orne effect (Orne 1962), i.e., guessing and anticipating hidden requirements of the diagnostic situation and the researcher's expectations, which has a great influence on their answers and the reliability of the obtained results.

It is worth noting that many of the difficulties discussed here concern researchers from outside the penitentiary institution. Conducting scientific research and psychological diagnosis by persons employed in the penitentiary institution may encounter fewer organizational difficulties, but in this case there is a significant problem with the issue of professional dependence and the inmates' perception of the researcher/diagnostician as an element of the oppressive system.

Methodological problems: subjective

Specifics of prisoners as research subjects

A number of problems faced by a researcher intending to conduct research in prisons are related to the specificity of the research group. The most important of them are presented below.

Consent to research

It is particularly important and difficult to build trust for the researcher, to ensure the anonymity of answers and to convince the participant that no information will be disclosed to either the prison authorities or third parties (Apa et al. 2012; Salaam, Brown 2013). A serious obstacle in the conduct of research can be the inmates' perception of the researcher as belonging to the oppressive system, which discourages them from cooperating. The research may be treated by prisoners as an attempt to obtain additional information, for example, about

the circumstances of a crime, which can then be used against them. Pełka-Sługocka (1970, p. 285) pointed out that the prisoner's placement in a prison has an impact on the formation of states of anxiety about the expression of their own opinions towards prison administration representatives and fellow prisoners. It may even be problematic to obtain written consent to participation in the research – such consent is obligatory e.g. in the United States (American Psychological Association 2010; Kimmel 1996). In other countries and cultures, including Poland, it is assumed that conscious verbal consent is sufficient (Salaam, Brown 2013; Sivakumar 2018). In Poland, both The Code of Ethics for Research Workers (2012) and The Psychologist's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2005) indicate the necessity of voluntary participation, thorough informing the subject about the purposes, the course of the research and the possibility of resigning from it at any time, as well as respect for the personal dignity of the research subject and not taking advantage of their official dependence – however, they do not mention the necessity of obtaining written consent for the research. The written consent of detainees to take part in the examination may and usually is required by university ethics committees or by the prison management.

Signing documents with one's own name and surname may cause fear and resistance in detainees, while on the other hand, it should be borne in mind that collecting signatures protects both the researcher and the administration from possible later complaints from the prisoners. The dilemma of how to identify and register research participants should therefore be resolved at the beginning, while at the same time deciding on a specific research strategy and adjusting the form of the consent given (oral or written) to the anticipated research group.

An additional document, this time obligatorily requiring a signature from the respondent, is the information on the manner of processing their personal data – required by the Personal Data Protection Act adopted in May 2018. In order to conduct research in a prison, it is also necessary to foresee where and how (in accordance with the regulations) the researcher will keep the collected documentation and how they will encode their database.

It is therefore essential to thoroughly familiarize the participant of the research with what the research concerns, to whom and how the results will be shared and how the protection of their personal rights will be ensured. The way this information is communicated may reduce anxiety and encourage people to sign the documents required to conduct research.

Motivation for research

The motivation of the participants, despite their consent to take part in the research, is not always the same as the volunteer application status. The inmate may decide to take part in the research for various reasons – e.g. to break the boredom of imprisonment, the everyday routine, to get in touch with someone new from outside the prison, and the research itself may simply be treated by the

inmate as a form of entertainment and an “interlude” in serving their sentence. They may also think that the situation of the research is an opportunity to gain something – to express one’s own regrets, ask for a favor or to pass information to someone outside the prison through the researcher (which of course should be controlled by the researcher). Agreeing to participate in the research may be an attempt to make a positive impression on prison staff by demonstrating a willingness to cooperate. Prisoners hope that such behavior can make the effort to obtain conditional early parole or better conditions of detention more effective. It happens that the respondents play a kind of a “game” with the researcher, trying to achieve additional benefits. The inmates are also motivated to participate in the research by the material prizes that are offered to them.

Based on past experience, an attempt can be made to classify the most characteristic attitudes of inmates towards a research conducted under conditions of penitentiary isolation by a researcher from outside the institution. The first one, *de facto* the rarest, is the attitude of real consent – resulting from an understanding of the essence of a scientific study, a genuine willingness to cooperate, an effort to present the most truthful answers, good contact during the research. The second comes from a misunderstanding of the essence of the research, an attitude of anxiety and suspicion, an apparent consent given for fear of the consequences of refusal and censorship of statements to avoid possible negative consequences. Another is the attitude resulting from treating participation in a scientific research as entertainment, allowing to break away from the day-to-day prison routine, without focusing on the essence of the research or the accuracy of the answers. With this attitude it often happens that the respondents are talkative, they tend to talk about other issues, try to ask about the researcher’s views or their private matters, attempt to transform the contact into a social one. The fourth attitude results from the respondent’s need to release their emotional tension, to express their resentment, to complain about unfair treatment or to make personal remarks against prison officers. By adopting yet another attitude, the inmate aims to achieve specific benefits, such as sending a letter, passing on a message and others, which the researcher should obviously not agree to. It is only during the course of the research that the attitude can be determined, so that an inappropriate approach can significantly affect the course of interaction and the quality of the results.

It should be noted that the problem of motivation for the research is a wider one and it does not only affect researchers conducting research among detainees (Rosenthal, Rosnow 1975), but here it becomes particularly clear. It makes it extremely difficult to control the four variables indicated by Brzeziński (2004) (i.e. motivational status, hints suggesting a research hypothesis, fear of judgment and interpersonal expectations towards the researcher) that influence the way the participant perceives the research situation and may affect the results obtained.

Self-presentation in the prison community

The self-presentation of the interviewed persons under the conditions of detention is strongly influenced by the context of the total institution. The institution that determines and controls all aspects of the functioning of the detainees and creates conditions and circumstances that are perceived as highly stressful is the context in which the characteristics of the situation dominate and determine how it is experienced and responded to, rather than the natural tendencies of the participants that make up a particular style of experiencing or behavior. It is the specificity of the situation that forces allowed or preferred emotional, behavioral and interpersonal reactions, and the observation of one's own behavior remodels existing cognitive patterns of knowledge about oneself and other people. Therefore, the answers given in the form of self-description may, even when asked about dispositions of a relatively stable nature, differ significantly from those given at liberty.

Falsification of the self-description and omission of certain topics and avoidance of certain matters may be associated with a conscious tendency or result from defensive mechanisms of the Self. Many detainees, especially those who serve their sentences and at the same time have other legal proceedings pending against them, are convinced that participation in psychological research has something to do with their legal situation. Hence their particular caution and increased tendency to create a positive self-image when answering questions. The respondents speculate about the purpose of the research and try to guess the intentions and expectations of the researcher, working out the optimal – in their opinion – way to behave during the research. This is intended to influence the post-diagnostic situation (aiming at minimizing losses and maximizing benefits associated with participation in the diagnostic procedure). It may also lead to the aforementioned Orne effect (1962).

An important problem that occurs during the research on detainees is their strong desire to present themselves positively in the prison community. "Keeping one's face" – not admitting their weaknesses, hiding positive emotions, demonstrating stereotypical masculinity and toughness while denying all weaknesses – is extremely important for them (Pereira et al. 2004). For this reason, some topics and subjects, which are difficult or painful for the inmate, and which arouse vivid emotions, may be omitted or avoided, treated only occasionally for fear of revealing a weakness. Uncertainty as to the researcher's intentions and the use of the obtained material may cause fear and distrust in the participants, and as a result even simple tasks will raise fears of being exposed to ridicule (which can especially happen in case of simple projection methods). As a result of such fears, they may tend not to admit to misunderstanding the instructions or to perform tests or tasks superficially, randomly, which may result in a low level of reliability of the results obtained.

It is important to bear in mind that prisoners are involved in complex relationships with fellow inmates, possibly functioning in a prison subculture, and thus participating in psychological research alone may be treated as undesirable cooperation with the staff. During the examination, detainees may try to maintain the consistency of their self-presentation with the image they have presented to other inmates so far, on the one hand fearing the disclosure of problems and attitudes that could lower their status in the prison community and, on the other hand, protecting themselves from the unpleasant tension resulting from cognitive dissonance. The tendency of detainees to self-presentations and self-descriptions consistent with the variable of social approval is related to the promotion of different values and attitudes than in the society outside prison.

During the period of imprisonment, which is of a stigmatizing and socially devaluing nature, the defensive motives of the unconscious or not fully conscious Self are also activated. They concern, among others, implying one's own innocence, the tendency to blame other people for the committed act, splitting the Self – for example, perceiving oneself as an honest person who only becomes aggressive under the influence of psychoactive drugs, which favors blaming the crime on alcohol or other psychoactive substances. These and similar cognitive reinterpretations make it possible to maintain good opinion about oneself, a sense of dignity and positive self-esteem (Witek, Gulla 2018).

Cognitive and emotional functioning of prisoners

A serious difficulty faced by a person intending to conduct research in the population of prisoners is the specificity of their cognitive and emotional functioning. People who have experienced long-term isolation often have cognitive and personality deficits, associated, among other things, with a high percentage of people in this population abusing psychoactive substances (alcohol, drugs, sedatives and psychotropic drugs or steroids) or addicted to them. They often suffer from psychoorganic disorders, which involves reduced intellectual performance, concrete thinking and a deficit of abstract thinking (Łuczak 2014). People with these disorders may have difficulties in understanding complex situations and their determinants, they also have serious deficits in communication, interpersonal relations, and their perception of the world and opinions expressed are often disturbed by the mechanisms of addiction (Poklek 2010; Terry 2003). In addition, most prisoners have a low level of education (mostly primary and vocational education⁴), poor verbalization, limited vocabulary, and long-term interruptions in intellectual activity and reduction of stimuli in prison isolation may contribute to problems with reading and writing of a secondary illiteracy character (Fudała et al. 2000). The low level of education is most often caused by both a lack of mo-

⁴ This is not only specific to Poland – in other countries the level of education of prisoners is also significantly lower than that of the so-called general population (cf. Hetland et al. 2007).

tivation to learn and environmental negligence, but also by serious difficulties in acquiring knowledge, which may be the result of injuries to the central nervous system and related dysfunctions.

A significant number of prisoners, especially recidivists, exhibit deficits in their ability to focus on performing tasks that last longer. Such a tendency in cognitive functioning results from their previous experience and is described as part of classic criminological concepts. For instance, Walters (1990, 2005, 2006) indicates that one of the characteristics of cognitive functioning of criminals is a tendency to discontinuity. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), on the other hand, claim in the general theory of crime that the basis for engaging in criminal activity is a low level of self-control, which is expressed, among other things, in the habit of quickly satisfying one's desires, inability to postpone rewards and lack of perseverance in pursuing one's goal.

It should also be borne in mind that prolonged living in prison isolation can lead not only to functional but also anatomical changes in the brain. Persons experiencing traumatic situations are characterized by reduced hippocampal structure (Dąbkowska 2007), which affects the decrease of memory capacity and the ability to learn from their own experience. The functioning of the brain under the conditions of prison isolation is also affected by the lack of sunlight and the related disturbance of biological rhythms, as well as the lack of possibility to use natural ways to increase the level of serotonin (Young 2007). This is reflected in the general psychophysical condition of the inmates – their intellectual capacity, mood and well-being.

Cognitive limitations do not allow inmates to understand more difficult words, longer sentences or double negation, make it difficult to analyze the content of the question and provide generalizing answers. They contribute to faster mental exhaustion and make it difficult to control emotions in a situation of fatigue, causing impatient, dysphoric or suspicious responses to the questions asked. Some inmates find it difficult to understand what the scientific activity of the researcher is. Usually, the low intellectual level of the detainees translates into their lack of understanding of the nature of scientific work and the nature of the relationship between science and prisons. A psychologist is associated by most prisoners only with the person making a diagnosis, providing advice, support or therapy. Most inmates probably do not understand the explanation of how the data collected from them will be used, because they have never had contact with scientific publications. The lack of knowledge in this area raises concerns about maintaining anonymity.

Apart from cognitive difficulties, detainees usually have problems with naming and expressing their emotions, because on the ground of the psychoorganic syndrome there are changes in their way of experiencing, as well as emotional lability, hyperactivity and impulsivity (Łuczak 2014). They are often characterized by alexithymia, which is the inability to identify and name the emotions

experienced and the difficulty of distinguishing between physiological stimulation accompanying emotions and physiological changes occurring for other reasons, poor imagination, superficiality and concreteness of thinking (Wawrzyniak, Chmielewska 2002).

The level of cognitive and emotional functioning of prisoners can be influenced by ongoing events in the prison, the current personal situation of prisoners and the situation of their relatives. The impact of these experiences is particularly evident when the interview is conducted after the prisoner's meeting with their close ones or during unusual events in the prison. Some of them declare directly during the course of the interview that they have problems with concentration when answering. In such cases, the best solution seems to be to resign from the interview on a given day, which may however result in the above-mentioned organizational problems.

Difficulties for the investigator-diagnostician

The most important thing for the reliability and accuracy of scientific research is for the researcher to maintain a neutral, unbiased and objective attitude towards the research subjects. Detainees are bound by an unambiguous, official label of a prisoner, associated with the recognition of guilt and a conviction by a final judgment of the court. Therefore, it may be difficult to free oneself from an institutional predictive approach (belief of investigating a person with a criminal past and criminal intent, bringing to mind certain negative characteristics of that person), which could result in bias and the distorting effect of the self-fulfilling prophecy mechanism in the form of the Golem effect (Babad et al. 1982; Davidson, Eden 2000) or the Rosenthal effect, associated with the influence of the label attributed to a person on the way they are treated (Abrams, Siegel 1979). This can be particularly difficult when interviewing the perpetrators of the most serious and violent crimes. The researcher's effort should therefore be directed at keeping and maintaining an unbiased attitude of cognitive curiosity and respect for the subjectively treated participant.

Being a person from outside the prison, the researcher – despite their knowledge and even experience in conducting research in similar units – often does not know the specific conditions of a particular institution. This applies not only to the way the work of prison staff is organized, but also to the relationships between individual detainees and prison staff, and to the relationship between inmates. It is therefore sometimes difficult to understand how topics concerning relationships can affect consent or refusal to participate in research, or why other alternative forms of spending time, rather than participating in research, are more attractive to detainees.

In every research carried out by external researchers, there is a problem of limited time allocated for the research and the conditions to carry it out. The researcher, who is aware of the importance of the microcontext of the diagnosis, must strive to optimize the organization of the research, as this will ensure maximum accuracy and reliability of the results. At the same time, however, they cannot disregard the institutional constraints and should keep their expectations realistic. It seems that the adoption of the condition of a “good enough” microcontext (a condition of confidentiality and intimacy) facilitates carrying out research. The situation of a research is always a certain interaction between the researcher and the participant, and the way the participant perceives it has a great influence on the results obtained (Jamieson et al. 1987).

Methodological problems: the subject matter

Specificity of research on temporal aspects in prisoners

The difficulties mentioned above are generally related to research in the field of social sciences, but in psychological research they can occur with particular intensity, especially if they concern phenomena which are perceived by the subjects as hardly practical, abstract issues. Such are the studies on the way of experiencing time by inmates. The study of this issue is at the same time something obvious, as time is the most measurable aspect of imprisonment and one of the main punishing factors.

The issue of psychological time encompasses, apart from the issue of the awareness of time itself, the subjective sense of the way in which time elapses and the ability to estimate time periods without and with measuring instruments, as well as the issue of time perspective, i.e. the tendency to place events on the past-present-future continuum (Tucholska, 2007). The time perspective understood in such a way can be characterized by determining its length (i.e., the temporal horizon specific to a given person), degree of density (compactness), degree of structuring and level of realism. The temporal orientation, a notion similar to the time perspective, is the specific (positive or negative) attitude of a person towards their own past, present and future, and the orientation in thinking and acting towards goals, objects, or events of the past, present or future (so-called orientation towards the past, present or future). These aspects of psychological time are fundamental in the human process of experiencing, affect human functioning in all contexts of his/her life – decisions, actions, emotions and psychophysical health (Zimbardo, Boyd 2013).

When conducting research on the temporal aspects in the population of detainees, it is important to remember about the specific difficulties that are associated with imprisonment and may affect the results of the research. Many of

the needs of convicts, both biological and social, are deprived and prisoners are subject to processes of prisonization, social degradation and stigmatization (Ci-osek 2003; Bałandynowicz 2010; Schnitker, Massoglia 2015). During the period of imprisonment, the prisoner's ability to make their own choices and decisions is severely limited – the schedule of the day, activities, entertainment, and work are mostly determined by external factors rather than internal, individual regulatory mechanisms. Some researchers point out that the institutionalization of everyday life is conducive to shortening the future time perspective (Landau 1975). This applies to all total institutions, which are characterized by strict control over the way of spending time and over the behavior of people subordinated to it.

“Prison time” differs significantly from time spent outside the facility (Cope 2003). On the one hand, it is strongly structured and strictly controlled by the staff, and on the other hand, its excess is difficult for a detainee to manage in prison conditions. Prisoners therefore take a variety of actions in an attempt to speed up its course – these can be both productive (paid work, learning, reading, engaging in self-service activities) and destructive (violence against other convicts, provoking brawls, etc.). They also include napping, avoiding some thoughts, stereotypical activities, focusing on satisfying the simplest everyday needs, which results (as a result of long-term isolation) in passivity (Fudała et al. 2000). Also, the obtaining and use of psychoactive substances can be a strategy to “kill” the time left until they are released (Cope 2003).

Specifics of the diagnostic workshop – research tools

Methods for the investigation of time perspective and temporal orientation can be generally divided into quantitative (various types of questionnaires) and qualitative (psychological observation, in-depth interview and drawing methods). The self-report tools most commonly used in Poland include the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) by P.G. Zimbardo (Zimbardo, Boyd 1999), the Future Time Perspective Inventory by W. Lens (1994), Questionnaire of Temporal Orientation AION-99 by C. Nosal and B. Bajcar (1999), the Temporal Competences Questionnaire by Z. Uchnast and K. Tucholska (2003). Among the drawing techniques, the most popular are the Circle Test and the Lines Test by T.J. Cottle (1976).

Both drawing techniques and inventories can cause difficulties in research involving people serving sentences of imprisonment. Filling in questionnaires can be too complicated for prisoners, both because of the wording of the individual items, the content not always adjusted to the reality of the prison, and the formal aspect, forcing them to remember the instructions and to adjust to a particular way of giving answers. Questions require additional explanations and additions from the researcher, which raises a number of doubts related to the standardization of the test. Standardization of the tool, i.e. a uniform way of using it, is one

of the basic criteria of a proper psychological measurement. The instruction given to the research subject and its strict observance significantly contributes to the equalization of the research conditions, giving the possibility to apply inter-group comparisons and to relate the results of the participants to existing standards (cf. Groth-Marnat 2009; Weiner et al. 2012).

During the research on people serving a sentences of imprisonment, and especially in the research on temporal aspects, there is always a doubt about which period of life the question refers to. Imprisonment in a prison is often treated as a kind of time caesura, a breakthrough moment, hence the need for the respondents to clarify whether a given question in the inventory relates to the present situation or rather to the situation preceding the imprisonment or anticipated after leaving the facility. There are also doubts as to whether the respondent should address the realities of the situation, limiting their choices, or answer according to their preferences in a situation of free choice. However, it should be remembered that not every participant informs the researcher of their doubts, so it is not clear how they understood the instructions and what meaning they gave to the questions. Moreover, the questions asked as part of the diagnostic methods can be interpreted in a specific, culturally diverse way, due to the processes of prisonization that take place during the imprisonment.

The previously discussed tendencies to falsify the self-presentation may concern each of the research methods, and the alertness of the participants and their reluctance to provide confidential data limits the scope or precision of the information provided in self-report methods. An additional problem is the relatively rare use in research of the so-called lie scales, which allow to control the falsification of self-presentation, which can occur during interviews. Generally, few test and psychological methods have such scales, and the assessment of possible distortions, made by the participant, is usually based on observation of their behavior during the research.

Although the presented example concerns psychological research, it is easy to apply the resulting findings to all social science research conducted in prison conditions.

Conclusions

The methods of research in the field of social sciences applied in prison conditions may – despite the efforts of the researcher – turn out to be inaccurate and unreliable. It should be remembered that human activity in a closed environment is conditioned by many factors that do not occur outside of prison (Kwiatkowski, Bańka 2013). In particular, the study of temporal aspects of people functioning in a total institution, where the time spent inside prison becomes an element of punishment, needs to be adapted to the studied population. When

undertaking research in a prison, one should each time consider the motivation of the subjects and be sensitive to the ethical aspects of the research situation. Particularly important are the professional competences of the researcher (Stemplewska-Żakowicz 2009), their interpersonal skills, allowing them to establish contact with the inmate, communication skills (simple, understandable language, without the elements of preaching or emphasizing the asymmetry of relations; cf. Frankfort-Nachmias et al. 2008) and a broad knowledge of social sciences – not only psychological, but also of sociological sciences, social rehabilitation pedagogy and legal issues (Pełka-Sługocka 1970).

In the case of psychological research, the standard test and psychological tools have a Polish adaptation that is suitable for a broad population, but which may not be sufficient for specific groups, such as those serving sentences of isolation. The optimal solution seems to be each time making adaptations for specific groups and subsequent meta-analyses, allowing to improve Polish adaptations of the methods used mainly for specific, poorly accessible, institutionalized groups and those in situations conducive to crisis psychological reactions. It seems that the adaptation procedures, which Drwal (1995) describes as transcription or translation, are insufficient, at least when it comes to conducting research in a group of convicts – a paraphrase or even reconstruction procedure would seem more appropriate (Drwal 1995; cf. Brzeziński 2004). This would include a more linguistically free development of the individual items of the questionnaire, simplifying them and using unambiguous concepts and modifying the instructions in order to adapt their content to the situational context and to the life experiences and cognitive capabilities of people serving sentences in isolation. The facade equivalence of the adapted questionnaire, which does not work in prison conditions, seems less important than its psychometric and functional equivalence (Drwal 1995). The psychological methods used in the incarcerated population should have an uncomplicated structure, simple vocabulary, short sentence periods, unambiguous terms and concepts understandable in the context of life experiences of this specific group of people.

The analysis of the difficulties in examining convicts, illustrated by the specific problems of scientific research into temporal aspects, can be applied to most standardized forms of research in the social sciences, so it is hoped that it will steer potential researchers clear from failure in research carried out not only in prison, but also in other institutions that are more or less total in nature, or from obtaining artifacts in them.

When conducting research in prisons and other institutions with a similarly specific way of functioning, the researcher must respect the applicable legal and institutional regulations. The process of obtaining consent for research should be treated as a negotiation process, in which both parties see the benefits associated with the improvement of knowledge through the research process. It is important for the researcher to be able to translate the scientific notions into practical action

directives and pass them on to the prison administration, and in the course of research, to maintain loyalty both to the scientific truth and to the research subject and the institution with which they are working. It seems to be a good practice to pass on the research results in the form of a publication to the institutions hosting the researcher, or to organize a meeting presenting the results of the research and devoted to the possibilities of their practical applications.

To summarize the above, it is worth pointing out some of the basic requirements that need to be met to make sure that the research done by external researchers in prison leads to reliable results:

- ensuring an appropriate micro-context for the research through cooperation with prison authorities;
- orientation in the cognitive capabilities and motivation of potential subjects preceding the research;
- adaptation of the diagnostic workshop to the specifics of the examined group and the criteria determining the situation of the isolation penalty;
- providing comprehensive information about the potential study and obtaining their informed consent, including a clear definition of the role and position of the investigator outside the institution;
- providing at least elementary feedback to the research subjects after the test;
- sharing the overall conclusions of the research with the penitentiary institutions participating in the research.

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