

Anna Kieszowska

Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach [akiesz@op.pl]

## The value of the self-help groups in getting out of addiction and being sober of the punished persons – proposals for socialization

**Abstract:** The necessity of comprehensive support for people leaving prisons and their families should become the supreme activity of interdisciplinary teams. The article presents the complex and changing nature of modern society, which is a threat to isolated individuals, does not facilitate finding an agreement and makes it difficult to find a sense of belonging in an environmental group. Society does not propose to the individual how to solve the problem of sense of nonsense, but as a rule he tries to eliminate it from human life through access to various forms of institutional help that do not adequately support programs. The decisive role in rebuilding satisfaction is played by such factors as: belonging to the AA group, duration in sobriety, alcohol involvement and participation in psychotherapy. The most benefits come from the support of the community, which gives strength and spiritual and social development, which favors the improvement of functioning in the individual and social sense

**Key words:** humanistic society, the changing nature of society, self-help groups in addiction therapy, quality of life of „others“.

### Introduction

In the modern world more and more often we point out the lack of possibility to reconcile the common good with the individual good for ethical, social and

cultural reasons, despite the fact that culturally we have a concern for the good of others and put interests above personal (Rarot, 2005).

A growing anomie causes disorganization of public life and axiological confusion directly affects the social moods not only of the young generation, but also the helplessness of adults convinced of the need to protect the existing ethical and moral standards. The process of social change is perceived in terms of pleasure, contentment, less often – care and responsibility for another person. An example of such an approach is a rich offer of institutionalized solutions accompanying the social change and mechanical functioning of a human being.

In many cases segregation and exclusion are convenient because they help to avoid a feeling of commitment, sacrifice or help for fear of excluding. On the other hand, the vague nature of the promoted slogans, the low credibility of the inspirers of social action, and thus the lack of social conviction, cause that the putting into practice new help programs of an inclusive nature to the public life doesn't find understanding and acceptance (Radziewicz-Winnicki 2005, 2008).

The complex and changing character of modern society is a threat for isolated individuals, it doesn't make easier to find agreement on the level of social values and norms, it rather makes a sense of belonging to the community difficult, which is a hermetic environment. People without a sense of individual and collective meaning can't become fully legal members of the society in which they should participate. The complexity and changeability of the social life, the disappearance of generally recognized traditions and seemingly universal norms cause competition between different relative systems of values, causing that the contemporary man finds the meaning in life difficult. It is easier for him when he belongs to a specific community. Society produces and consumes not to exist in a human way, but it exists to produce and consume (Jan Paweł II, 1991, 39). Society that has at their disposal such tools as a free market economy can't allow that the incompetent (excluded) people remain on the margins of community's life. If this takes place, it means that there has been a real reversal of the relation between the means and goals of action in the everyday life of mankind.

It is known that industrial society, due to the requirements of economic reality, can't afford to give up competitiveness. Therefore, not only the strong people have something to offer "weak" people, when they accept material responsibility for them or try to involve them in the rhythm of the organization of social and economic life, so that the "weak" can also offer their work to others. (Nouwen 1993).

The measure of the humanistic society and its civilization is the real respect for the weak, the others, the excluded and the ability to shape the social and economic structures so that they enable a joint exchange. The processes of alienation and frustration that have recently taken place are a supra-system phenomenon, because they don't connect with specific solutions of the economic system, but only result from the wrong place of man in the world. The alienation takes place

in a working environment; in community life, consumption and the loss of the personal character of work. The current free market system, that recognizes the nature of man, doesn't protect from alienation.

The reasons are not only structural determinants, but an attitude of employers and employees, the loss of awareness of the sense and purpose of work, and the economic reasons related to the employee's efficiency. The postulate of economic and social cooperation between strong and weak-others can be deduced from a specific economic calculation. People who are less talented and not competitive reduce the pace and productivity of work. But the same people, when they hold auxiliary positions in the production's process, undoubtedly increase the efficiency of the whole team. Their partners can focus on difficult tasks that require better preparation, more effort. Such a division of roles requires the social acceptance of both interested parties. For the weak-others their situation can't be a complex that makes it impossible to establish any contact, it can't lead to alienation and, consequently, to exclusion (Boros 1964). Difficulties in recognizing one's own potentials and limitations lead to confusion, uncertainty and avoiding of difficult situations. People that need help can't accept it, often because of the lack of acceptance of one's own role of the needy. Social partnership becomes impossible then. There is a balance to be found between those who can help others and those who can receive and perform tasks on their own.

## The changing character of society

Nowadays, human life problems are considered in the context of the crisis of culture and general value-orientations as the disappearance or fall of values, disorders and crises of identity. In an open society in which there is a plurality of values (social control, freedom of moral and moral standards were weakened), the meaning of life loses its social and communal dimensions and becomes first of all a personal matter of the individual (Bleistein 1986).

The meaning of life arises with particular intensity in extreme situations, dilemmas of difficult situations that can't be avoided and when a person doesn't know how to proceed and what consequences will be incurred, for example irreversible changes in the case of an incurable illness based on suffering, the death of a loved person or related situations with long-term isolation of a man in the penitentiary system. At the same time, society doesn't offer the individual the means to solve the problem of sense of nonsense, but usually tries to eliminate them from human life through access to various forms of institutional help.

The changing character of modern society creates also a threat to isolated and non-affiliated individuals, because it doesn't make easier to find an agreement on the level of commonly shared values and norms. The modernity makes rather difficult the feeling of social rooting and finding the

basis of one's own identity and social support. You can't talk about total passivity and apathy here, but the phenomenon of marginal functioning of convicts in the wild falls into this group of behaviors. Forming enclaves create a sense of security in a certain sense.

A high complexity and changeability of social life, disappearance of generally recognized traditions and norms, competition of various relative systems of values or goals cause that contemporary man finds it difficult to find meaning in life.

## **The importance of self-help groups in getting out of addiction**

The most of the present research confirms that the quality of life declines with abuse and addiction to alcohol (Florkowski et al. 2000). The quality of life of people who abuse alcohol is worse, in comparison to the total population. Addicted people have a lower sense of satisfaction with life than people with cancer, both with regard to somatic and mental state (Habrat et al. 2000). In the studies of Jakubik and Kraszewska (2002), alcohol addicts have a high level of alienation and low sense of the meaning of life and the degree of social adaptation. Similar results were achieved in the studies of other authors (Pilecka 1986; Antonovsky 1987). In turn, maintaining of abstinence for three months improves the quality of life only to a level that is similar to that asserted by people with cancer (Moskalewicz et al. 2000), and people abusing or addicted to alcohol, abstaining or drinking in a controlled manner they experience an improvement in the quality of life in some areas (Florkowski et al. 2000). An improvement of the quality of life's parameters is particularly evident in the first six months of abstinence, and the next months bring gradual deterioration (Florkowski et al. 2000). In addition, people with a short and long period of abstinence are characterized by a higher level of lack of life satisfaction than people with a medium period of abstinence. Convergent data were achieved in the results of six-month treatment of addicted homeless people (mainly alcoholics). There was asserted a free gradual improvement in the quality of life, but later this process slowed down and the quality of life didn't reach the level that was asserted in the general population (Moskalewicz 2000). A similar improvement in life satisfaction was asserted by addicts who maintained abstinence for over four years. Abstinence causes constant improvement of life's satisfaction and arouses the sobering alcoholics' interest in professional and cultural life as well as developing interests (Moskalewicz 2000). The use of emotions-regulating properties of alcohol becomes more likely with subjective deficits of sense of control, self-efficacy, sense of own value, low sense of coherence and preferring escape-avoid style of coping with difficulties (Poprawa 2006). Ineffective coping with stress can also be caused by the low sense of coherence in addicts (Bakuła 2001).

In addition to stress, the personality traits of alcoholics are an important factor affecting life satisfaction of addicts. They are characterized by high severity of neuroticism (Pasikowski 2000; Mellibruda 1999; Nikodemaska 2004), high severity of anxiety and nervous tension and insecurity (Szczukiewicz 1996). It may be associated with reduced self-esteem of addicts.

Woititz (1994) indicates that addicts are characterized by low self-esteem, and alcohol gives them a false sense of self-confidence. The mentioned personality traits of addicts are also related to their self-realization, which affects life satisfaction.

This factor may reduce life satisfaction due to the feeling of not realizing the value, perceiving one's behavior as incompatible with the recognized system of values, due to low motivation to achieve goals and life values, low perseverance and the belief in the choice of inappropriate life goals (Szczukiewicz 1996).

In addition, it was stated that self-fulfillment is a higher level of quality of life and is the last phase of recovery of addicts (Sztander 1994).

Studies on the quality of life of people addicted to alcohol indicate that alcoholics who use the support of AA self-help groups don't differ from the general public in terms of their life satisfaction (Brown 1990; Kairouz, Dube 2000; Wnuk 2005). The decisive role in rebuilding satisfaction have such factors as: belonging to the AA group, duration in sobriety, alcohol involvement and participation in psychotherapy. The most benefits come from the support of the community, which gives strength and spiritual and social development that improve functioning in the individual and social sense (Zwierzyński 1998; Stanik 2000; Zaworska-Nikoniuk 2001; Jaraczewska 2009).

There was also stated a mediating role of a sense of meaning in life between the involvement in the AA community and the sense of quality of life and the length of stay in the self-help movement and satisfaction with life. This variable is agents for research between the length of stay in the AA community and the increase in life satisfaction (Wnuk 2006).

Abstinentes in the initial period of cessation of drinking concentrate on avoiding alcohol, reducing the symptoms of drinking, after a longer period of sobriety and active participation in meetings AA start to engage in this form of supporting others, so they focus not on reducing unpleasant feelings, but on improving satisfaction with life.

The results of the presented research confirm the great strength and value of self-help groups in getting out of addiction and being sober. The variable that is agents between the involvement in the self-help movement and the sense of hopelessness is the meaning of life.

Continuing of research on community involvement and a sense of meaning in life is important, because it could contribute to the extension and refinement of the model of recovery of addicts (Wnuk 2007). A common feature of self-help groups that differentiates them from other groups is the starting position of all members.

Everyone starts to act in this position from powerlessness, when a man can't deal with his own problems and limitations (Kurantowicz 1993; Urbaniak-Zajac 1993; Wnuk 2010). The main goal is help for the members of the group in dealing with difficult situations, leading to the optimization of their functioning. The source of help is mutual exchange and sharing of skills, knowledge and experience. Group members have common problems and similar life experiences. Group's control is based on a set structure and specific operating mode (Szmagalski 1987). The essence of self-help is the emphasis on self-determination, reliance on one's own strength, creativity, empowerment and activation of all other skills, predispositions, talents and unit competences (Urbaniak-Zajac 1993; Kurantowicz 1993; Wnuk 2010).

Self-help in the case of AA groups can be treated as the opportunity to engage and skillfully use of available resources of individual units and groups that they create themselves during a long-term sobering process.

Kurantowicz (1993) regards self-help as a form of social realization of the good that is, self-help, unselfish support, remaining in a mutual relationship of understanding and love.

A necessary condition for helping a person treated as realizing good is a reference to another human being with love caused by mutual search for the common good and a better tomorrow.

Groups aimed at mutual help and achieving a specific goal, usually created by people who are similar in some respects, who have focused on helping each other to meet the common need to overcome traumatic states or life-threatening problems in order to achieve desired social or personality changes.

The founders and members of such groups perceive that their needs can't be or aren't satisfied by existing social institutions and can only help themselves on the basis of mutual exchange. Self-help groups lay emphasis on face-to-face interactions and personal responsibility of their members, analyzing good and bad sides of social functioning, exhausting emotional support and providing material help.

The principles contained in two AA steps lay emphasis on autonomy, self-sufficiency, independence, separateness, equality, community of interests of group members, and a superior objective in the form of bringing a message for a suffering alcoholic (Wnuk 2010) and support in later life stages. When supporting others in difficult situations, people's feelings are internalized (Liczyński 1988; Wnuk 2010). Self-help has a principle that when we help other we help us. The help is provided by a person who bases on own experience. Self-help is based on the knowledge obtained by alcoholics, who in the sobering process experienced various problems that they solved by themselves.

In turn, a sobriety is treated by researchers as the most optimistic and true view of a person, other people and the world, acceptance and the surrounding reality, stable and sufficiently high self-esteem, openness to other people, the

ability to use own predispositions, skills and talents, high level self-awareness, ability to establish the friendship, love, skillful coping with stressful situations, taking full responsibility for own life and the tendency to look for motives of own behavior without losing others for own failures (Brown 1990; Melibruda 1995; Cierpiałkowska 1997, 2000).

This seems too idealized, but – as emphasizes Melibruda (1995), in the period of sobriety there is a chance to go from the stage of cleansing the body from alcohol, through sobriety understood as learning of the art of a good life without alcohol, to sobriety as a virtue and attitude in life. In the philosophy of sobriety, the second medicine is the best medicine for a human being.

Only thanks to personal resources, self-efficacy, life satisfaction and social support – the individual tries to master life crises and stress transactions (Chodkiewicz 2004, 2005, 2007; Jakubik, Kowaluk 1997).

In turn, Trzebiatowski (2010) emphasizes that older alcoholics are aware of the psychosocial risks that bring many illnesses and therefore they have independently decided to visit therapy; they were in a better mood, had motivation to be sober, showed changes in all spheres of life, e.g., higher self-esteem, personal development, contacts with children, development in all areas of life, except the economic sphere.

They treat the AA community as mutual responsibility, tolerance and self-less help to other alcoholics, anonymity, strong bond, availability and democratic coexistence. Assessing the aspects of quality of life related to the assessment of health, physical fitness and emotional well-being, they emphasized much less severe psychophysical complaints, a significant sense of agency and subjectivity, the belief in long-term abstinence as the beginning of recovery.

Summing up, it can be assumed that the community satisfies the majority of needs related to support and participation in social life.

According to the Wnuk's research (2006), the increased involvement in the AA community and a longer stay in the self-help movement reduce hopelessness and increase happiness by increasing the sense of meaning in life and coping with problems.

Anonymous alcoholics order their lives during therapy and concentrate on emotions to be able to undertake constructive tasks and initiatives when they finish the therapy.

## **Supervised adaptation of addicted convicts**

During the supervision (supervised adaptation), convicts are obliged to undertake tasks imposed by the penitentiary court and implement them in conditions of the open environment. There is also the possibility to take own additional challenges and tasks to improve relations with the local environment. However, the new

social causes loss, fear and fear of new tasks, their implementation and layout in an open environment.

As results from the research, people punished don't show commitment to the local environment and they don't have a sense of understanding and acceptance from the environment. Barriers are the past and its negative consequences manifested in unfavorable feelings of the family, neighbors and the local environment and dislike of punished people.

Taking addiction treatment in the local community by punished persons usually boils down to one-time visit in the AA group and withdrawal due to other issues that a prisoner or convict was faced with as part of conditional early release.

Experiences and methods to live with others during imprisonment make it difficult to decide to participate in the AA therapy, when the personal experiences related to living in isolation and side effects completely drift away from the problems of addicts.

Personal problems are so intricate and complicated that the former prisoner basically can't assess and understand in what order he should take action, because he wasn't properly prepared for it. Former prisoners show a big need for support due to deficiencies that underestimate the sense of life, disrupt good relations with the family, disturb the continuation of work and at the same time avoid the possibility of participating in forms of addiction therapy (Kieszkowska 2012).

Establishing of assumptions and motivations for participation in addiction treatment may require even statutory solutions, taking into account a separate support group for former prisoners due to the specificity of their problems and experiences related not only to alcohol, drug abuse, violation of social norms, but also to the hierarchy of values in the prison and in the free life and the effects of prisonization.

For example, the group "AA plus" could create a community where personal problems concerning similar experiences of each person in a group can be discussed regarding the trauma of isolation, ways of dealing with problems at large and searching for optimal solutions without the participation of the criminal world (Kieszkowska 2012).

Therapists should be here special people who fully understand the situation of former prisoners and at the same time can create specific conditions, so that these people will consciously participate in full participation and work on themselves in order to modify behaviors towards pro-social behavior and sober life.

At the stage of therapeutic work with the convict it is necessary to have a parallel therapy with family members or relatives (definitely more difficult if it wasn't carried out early during the stay of the convicted person in isolation or when the family shows no interest).

In cooperation, it is possible to use the help from organizations and associations in providing support, making therapists aware of the legitimacy of therapy or conducting specific forms of social education and specialist counseling for specific needs of punished persons, their families and society.



Meanwhile, the lack of willingness to engage in social initiatives of former prisoners results with negative experiences from the period of stay in the local environment, committed criminal act and bad relations with the environment, as well as exclusion of former prisoners from the local environment.

Therefore, they have no motivation to act, they seem to follow the recommendations of their superiors and don't have the right knowledge that could help them to become independent in the living environment. In addition, they show a low level of resourcefulness in finding and continuing of work, because the offer wasn't enough in the penitentiary unit. The basic barriers are in the sphere of social contacts, solving difficult situations, lack of ability to make decisions, specific perception of reality and distorted self-image, and lack of proper pedagogical support.

Former prisoners in a difficult and complicated life situation without the participation of specialist help have no chance to rebuild correct relations in the local environment, to take up social roles. During the supervision, the actions aimed at increasing or maintaining the sense of self-efficacy and dispassionate optimism will be important.

The sense of self-efficacy during supervision has a direct impact on the sense of effectiveness after supervision. The dispositional optimism during supervision has a direct impact on the later sense of the meaning of life, which strengthens the sense of effectiveness and thus people who after the supervision had a higher level of sense of life established better relationships with their neighbors, used from more sources of support and, consequently, continued their professional work. On the other hand, the low level of self-esteem causes that a person experiences negative emotions in the existential dimension. Self-esteem and effectiveness means being ready to choose more difficult or re-engaging tasks, perseverance in pursuing a goal, the ability to learn new things or constructive dealing with anxiety and stress (Taylor 1984; Scharzer 1997; Bishop 2000).

Assessing and accepting one's own situation is an important element of adapting to life in a new reality, and correctly analyzed, interpreted by the process of transformation of the convict, will enable him to understand the place he has in the society and the tasks that he undertakes and can carry out in the future.

In activities correcting the personality predictors of the improvement potential, there should be directly used the techniques of working with the individual, based on the change of attribution and overcoming learned helplessness, teaching optimism, indicating the possibility of achieving the intended goals, conducting self-training learning to control emotions and solve difficult situations.

In studies regarding the stigmatization, there was asserted a decrease of mutual biases depending on the number of direct contacts marked with marked ones, especially when these relations are accompanied by positive emotions (Bodenhausen, Moreno 2001). In the case of a sense of coherence, this factor is a strongly established disposition, but at the same time it isn't permanent, because it can

be developed in people who are convinced about the necessity of their change (Antonovsky 1995).

The self-help groups, religious communities, addiction therapy centers and psychiatric treatment centers are based on theories of social learning.

The therapeutic community strengthens the feeling of belonging and motivates for independent choices in line with social expectations. The need for corrective actions is the only chance for this group of respondents to survive in the local environment and partially rebuild the positive image of a human being. We should take into account the fact that the offered support and undertaking of corrective actions may be rejected, especially in a group where there are people that are free more than eight years, who have assumed the status of a homeless person.

For this reason, social rehabilitation activities towards ex-convicts should focus on experiencing situations related to the sense of meaning of life, acquiring skills in the substitution of aggression, gaining a conviction about their personal capabilities in the sense of independent functioning in a social environment.

The implementation of specific behaviors should help to develop a positive image of oneself and increase self-acceptance, develop appropriate skills in problem solving and dealing with difficult situations. Developing of life competences should be the basis of many reintegration programs that increase human preparation for living in society.

Special meaning of dealing in difficult situations is attributed to the self-efficacy mechanism (Bandura 1982). An expectation of self-efficacy reflects our own assessment of the subject, according to which it has the right skills to deal with a given situation.

The sense of self-efficacy affects the choices, decisions in undertaking a specific task and the effort and perseverance in action as well as the quality of emotional relations occur before the planned tasks as well as during these tasks. In order to act effectively, a man must have got the right skills and incentives to accept challenges. There is a probability that those that doubt regarding their abilities, in the face of difficulties will reduce their efforts or will give up and in addition they will generate strong emotional arousal, while people with a strong sense of effectiveness and in such situations increase their efforts to cope even more challenges. Properly offered social support is acceptable in the case of an individual's readiness to change his or her life situation and the readiness of the society.

## Conclusions

Understanding of the local return of a prisoner – a former prisoner to the environment will depend on the culture of a given society, norms and values and undertaken system solutions in the area of psychological, pedagogical, social, eco-

conomic, legal, spiritual help and their proper involvement in the process of healing of “others”. Such solutions include:

1. Development of a comprehensive diagnosis based on the individual case method with the possibility of taking appropriate actions;
2. Designing of forms of work with convicted persons – punished persons taking into consideration their potentials, resources and deficits, including the obligations and forms of compensation towards the victims;
3. Cooperation of organizations and associations in providing of support, lobbying of social campaigns, making the public aware of the legitimacy of effective actions, organizing of trainings and counseling regarding specific needs of convicted persons, their families, society;
4. Inclusion of religious cult centers to strengthen activities in the area of receiving a convict to the community or community and accentuating the common responsibility for the fate of the neighbour.
5. Working out the assumptions and motivations of participation in addiction treatment of all convicts, including a separate group of support for former prisoners due to the characteristics of their personal and life problems related not only to alcohol and drug abuse, but also violation of social and legal norms, as well as experiences from penitentiary institutions. The support group should create a community in which personal problems can be discussed (difficult experiences of every person, coping with problems during remaining at large and looking for optimal solutions without the participation of the criminal world). Therapists will be here special people that help to recognize the situation of the convict, his behavior, new problems and the use of specific techniques in the relieving of the existing tension – isolation trauma, working out of specific communication skills that in penitentiary conditions had the character of physical strength and verbal aggression. During the therapeutic work with former prisoners it is necessary to have a parallel therapy with family members, which will be definitely more difficult if it wasn't organized earlier – during the imprisonment of the convict or when the family isn't interested in its loved ones.
6. Working out of solutions related to the shelter of former prisoners when they don't have a family or all activities of specialists didn't change a decision of their relatives and the former prisoner is rejected. It is reasonable to set up hostels for temporary residence period and participate in the cost of former prisoners or adaptation of other rooms in a local environment that could be used during the prisoner's transition period.
7. Creation of environments that support social reintegration, i.e. workplaces with positions for former prisoners, cultural centers supporting the creation of these people, organizations, associations, self-help groups – what is in the modern world is not only a necessity, but an obligation of society in searching for optimal solutions in this area.

The above mentioned proposals of activities are chance to build a new culture of an open society, based on responsibility, acceptance and care for common existence and respect for others. They have a good chance of success when collective responsibility will lead to the inclusion of optimal solutions in criminal practice and penitentiary policy in work with human being.

## Summary

The necessity of comprehensive support for people released from prisons and their families should become a supreme activity of interdisciplinary teams. The article presents the complex and changing character of modern society, which is a threat for isolated individuals, doesn't make easier to find an agreement and makes it difficult to find a sense of belonging in an environmental group. However, the society not only offers individual many ways how to solve a problem of sense of nonsense, but also usually tries to eliminate them from human life through an access to various forms of institutional support. The decisive role in satisfaction's rebuilding have such factors as: belonging to the AA group, duration in sobriety, involvement of alcoholic and participation in psychotherapy. Most benefits follow from the support of the community, which gives strength and develops in spiritual and social way, and this favors the improvement of functioning in the individual and social sense. The need for corrective actions in the future is the only chance for this group of excluded people-former prisoners to survive in the local environment and partially rebuild the positive image of a person.

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