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Type of Adaptation to Prison Conditions Employed by Inmates Depending on the Length of Stay in a Penal Institution

Abstract: The specific conditions of prison life determine the functioning of inmates. An attempt was made to verify whether particular adaptive behaviors of prisoners result from the mere fact of their stay in the penitentiary environment. Two groups of men were examined —a total of 102 first-time convicts sentenced to a maximum of 25 years. Their stay in prison was presented along a timeline and correlated with the frequency of choosing five types of adaptation, in accordance with Goffman's concept. Time spent in prison, irrespective of other factors, causes—in several or even a dozen or so percent of cases—the application of survival strategies. The research demonstrated that inmates begin their stay in the penal institution by withdrawing, and only over time does their mode of functioning change, as they begin to employ other adaptation techniques. With regard to the process of social rehabilitation, particular attention should be paid to the initial stage of the inmate's stay in the penal institution.
Keywords: types of prison adaptation, inmates, penitentiary system, social rehabilitation

Introduction

Typologies of prison survival strategies can be discussed from psychological and sociological perspectives. In the socio-cultural approach, the first typologies were developed based on qualitative descriptions, with Merton's theory of anomie

(1938) serving, to a significant extent, as a prototype (Olechnicki, Załęcki, 1997). Among the various types of prison adaptation techniques presented in the literature, Goffman's (2011) concept appears to be the most suitable for conducting research, as the adaptation strategies he proposed are solely the result of confinement in an institution. They were clearly defined, in contrast to Sykes's typology (2007), which merely provided a categorization of behaviors, potentially leading to semantic confusion in methodological terms. Also, in contrast to the concepts of Irwin (1987, 2013) and Cohen and Taylor (1972), Goffman's approach is more appropriate, as the aforementioned typologies cannot be represented along a timeline of the inmate's stay in a penal institution. This is because they are more dependent on socio-demographic and psychological factors than on situational, prison-related ones. According to Goffman (1961), withdrawal is characterized by a focus solely on current circumstances. Rebellion consists of opposing the institution. Domestication is marked by the acceptance of prison conditions as a result of institutional colonization. Conversion is a pragmatic pretense of reformation. Intransigent calculation involves manipulating the environment in order to gain benefits and is a certain type of game played with the surroundings. The author of the concept notes that particular adaptation techniques may appear in various combinations at different stages of an inmate's stay in the institution.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal is one of the strategies that enables a prisoner to survive. It consists in such a reduction of the quality of functioning and activity that leads to minimizing interest in current events in the daily life space under conditions of isolation. It is characterized by focusing attention solely on oneself and on matters that are currently dominant—that is, on what is directly related to essential existence—by downplaying issues and the presence of other inmates, showing no willingness to cooperate, weakening contact with family and one's immediate environment (Goffman, 2011). The cause of this may be the pain of imprisonment, loneliness, or a desire to escape from suffering, which leads to a suppression of activity and enthusiasm, and thereby to a psychological escape and rejection of the present. According to Ciosek (1995), it may also result from a camouflage of one's own emotional immaturity, while Sykes (2007) argues that it does not concern all inmates and usually applies to individuals who already struggled with reality before serving a custodial sentence. Contemporary research shows that withdrawal affects all inmates who come into contact with the penitentiary system for the first time; only the length of time it takes to adapt to prison realities may vary—being either shorter or longer (Zamble, Porporino, 1988; Schmid, Jones, 1990; Shalev, 2014).

Rebellion

Rebellion, or defiance, consists in expressing inmates' dissatisfaction through provocative behavior towards prison staff, manifesting their hostility, treating staff as enemies, refusing to compromise, and displaying aggression towards officers, fellow inmates, and sometimes towards themselves as a means of releasing intense stress, frustration, and emotional tension caused by a sense of injustice resulting from the court verdict and imprisonment. It also involves a negative attitude towards all forms of cooperation with the penitentiary system. According to Goffman (2011), individual rebellion is a tactic employed in prison by the majority of inmates at the beginning of their incarceration; over time, this strategy is replaced by other forms of prison adaptation. Collective rebellion is characterized by a collectivist attitude, during which inmates are expected to cooperate with and support one another, to be united, loyal, and faithful in order to collectively oppose misconduct or the improper execution of duties by prison officers. Acts of resistance against the institution usually end in failure. When inmates begin to cooperate in a rebellion, their individual interests and divergent views emerge, making unified action impossible. Only rarely are inmates able to act in harmony and achieve a high level of organization (Sykes, 2007). Furthermore, this kind of rebellion carries negative consequences, as it affects how officers perceive the situation—that is, it influences their attitude towards the prisoners—and results in increased control and repression. Victory in such situations lies with the institution, which is why inmates rarely undertake such actions. Another form of rebellion, according to Ciosek (1995), is the second life in prison, meaning affiliation with the subculture, which is characterized by overt hostility and resistance towards the institution.

Domestication

Domestication is a type of adaptation used by inmates in a penal institution when they strive to organize a stable existence under conditions of deprivation of liberty. Prisoners who apply this strategy are usually kind, pleasant, and helpful, which allows them to gain the approval of prison staff and fellow inmates. As a result, there is a high likelihood of functioning freely and tolerably in prison, and such a life may become more meaningful—potentially even better than life outside. According to Goffman (2011), if prison living conditions are favorable during the sentence, there is a significant likelihood that this survival strategy will be adopted.

Domestication is a strategy in which cognitive orientation prevails over emotional orientation, which, in consequence, enables quick adaptation and

greater resistance to conflicts and difficulties resulting from life in isolation. Its foundation lies in the awareness that the penitentiary system, like any other social system, should operate according to established rules, and adherence to these rules should ensure decent living conditions. This means that, both in prison and in freedom, one can find a sense of place, be content with the present situation, and feel "at home." Ciosek (1995) claims that this strategy is usually employed by individuals with asocial personalities for whom life in open society is unsuitable. The issue is that the inmate fails to distinguish between the world outside the prison walls and its conditions, and the internal structures and requirements of the penitentiary institution.

The Polish term *zadomowienie* (domestication) implies active agency—referring to a subject who acts. Goffman (1961), however, used a passive form, referring to a subject who has been institutionalized—that is, the prisoner has become colonized, and only as a consequence of this process does the adaptation occur, whereby the inmate "finds a home" (cause and effect). In line with Exupéry's tale, the little fox was tamed and therefore feels at home. In Polish systemic thinking on penitentiary matters, the issue of domestication is sometimes raised, particularly in reference to recidivists or persons lacking sufficient support and means to live outside prison. For such individuals, existence within the penitentiary system may turn out to be better than life in freedom. Thus, there is a risk of returning to prison by intentionally provoking a criminal act. Although this issue is related to the strategy of domestication, it directly pertains to the effectiveness of the process of social rehabilitation itself, which, by definition, should aim at full adaptation to functioning in society—not within prison. It goes without saying that instead of appropriate post-penitentiary (social) assistance, it is more convenient to treat imprisonment as a punitive episode—intended to ensure that the inmate does not feel too comfortable in isolation, on the assumption that fear of prison will reduce the risk of reoffending. But what, then, is the purpose of social rehabilitation? Such assumptions and the practices that follow are a denial of the very essence of social rehabilitation.

Conversion

Conversion is a strategy that can be described as pragmatic pretense of reformation—creating the appearance of ideal behavior. The behavioral feature of conversion involves a superficial identification with the views and beliefs of prison staff, imitation of their language, gestures, habits, and behaviors, and a desire to sympathize with and be liked by correctional officers. In doing so, the inmate hopes to achieve a personal goal—namely, some benefit for themselves (Goffman, 2011). The essence of this kind of behavior lies in separating one's actions from self-assessment and turning them into an independently functioning

reality, detached from one's self-defined identity (Sobczak, 2009). This technique is often referred to as *apparent adjustment* to prison conditions, which significantly complicates the rehabilitation process, since the inmate using this strategy appears to be disciplined and compliant. Such behavior distorts information about the inmate's true prosocial functioning, which in reality is only superficial, situational, and therefore temporary (Ciosek, 1995). This strategy is generally employed for selfish reasons. It leads to repression of personal problems and optimization of manipulative behaviors. It causes excessive self-focus, which contributes to inaccurate self-assessment and, consequently, impedes personal development (Gordon, 2005).

Cold Calculation

The cold calculation is a form of gameplay centered on manipulating relationships within the prison environment. It can be described as a mindset focused on controlling the situation in order to gain personal benefits or avoid trouble in interactions with others. This approach relies on using information about the habits and weaknesses of correctional officers, as well as knowledge of the issues, needs, and desires of fellow inmates (Goffman, 1961). Cold calculation involves a tactical combination of elements from various prison adaptation strategies. It incorporates details typical of both conversion and domestication. An inmate using this technique seeks to appear loyal to fellow prisoners, while simultaneously treating their desires and needs with ambivalence. To emphasize this perceived loyalty, the inmate may even feign opposition to the prison system and express disdain toward officers—but only behind the scenes. A prisoner employing this type of adaptation tends to become isolated, individualistic, prone to creating conflict, and manipulative. They may deceive correctional staff in order to lower their guard. If caught, such an inmate will immediately promise to reform their behavior and may even be willing to betray fellow prisoners. This strategy involves actions that lead to the isolation of contact with the outside world, but unlike domestication, it does not result in a sense of domestication (Ciosek, 1995). The tactic demands a great deal of cunning, intelligence, caution, and sustained attention. For this reason, it is usually applied in the short term, as it generates ongoing tension and stress (Pastwa-Wojciechowska, 2004).

The research will be conducted using publicly available contextual knowledge, within the framework of procedures commonly accepted in the field of social sciences. There is widespread consensus on the appropriate methodological approach in this area of study.

Research Procedure and Methodology Used

Research Procedure

The study was conducted just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic by criminology students from the University of Natural Sciences and Humanities (UPH) in Siedlce, at a male correctional facility located in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship. At that time, the prison housed 860 inmates, and the facility itself had been in operation since 1844. After receiving the necessary approvals, the students went to the correctional unit, delivered sealed envelopes containing the survey forms to the prison educators, and later personally retrieved the completed questionnaires for analysis. The educators assured the research team that they would not interfere with the process and that the inmates would be provided with appropriate conditions to complete the questionnaire freely. Respondents' answers were anonymous. Participation was voluntary and conducted without pressure from prison staff. The research was carried out using a random sampling method. The current phase of the study is of a screening nature, as selected samples were analyzed. Data indicating multiple convictions were excluded. Only individuals who were serving their first sentence, with incarceration up to 4 years, and men who had been imprisoned between 12 and 25 years were included in the report. Results from recidivists and individuals who had been incarcerated for more than 4 years but less than 11 were excluded, as the aim was to compare results between two extreme groups: the first, less experienced group (up to 4 years in prison), and the second, which had been living in the penitentiary system for an extended period (12 to 25 years).

Study Participants

The research sample consisted of 102 men divided into two extreme groups based on the length of their incarceration. All respondents were first-time inmates, with no prior experience of imprisonment.

The first group included 42 individuals, representing 41.8% of all respondents. These were inmates who had spent between 1 and 4 years in isolation. The first 10 participants were individuals who had been incarcerated for up to one year, two subsequent subsets of 11 participants each had been serving time for 2 and 3 years respectively, and the final subset consisted of 10 individuals who had been in prison for 4 years. The second group comprised 60 men who had been incarcerated for between 12 and 25 years, representing 58.2% of the selected sample. These were inmates serving long-term sentences, having been isolated from society for between 12 and 23 years. From each year within this range,

4 participants were selected for the study. Additionally, 6 inmates with 24 years and another 6 with 25 years of incarceration were included.

Applied Methodology

In the research questions, based on the literature, specific types of strategies were described in terms of behavior, and respondents were asked to indicate their answers on an ordinal scale. It was assumed that the higher the total score, the more frequently a particular type of prison adaptation strategy was employed. It was hypothesized that all types of adaptive strategies could be used by any inmate, regardless of individual psychobiological and socio-cultural contexts. Thus, the study focused solely on the specific survival strategies used by prisoners, excluding the causes of their behavior. The research was centered on these strategies as an abstract dimension of the actual time spent in prison. The duration of imprisonment was represented on a timeline expressed in years and should not be treated as a determinant. Time is an abstract concept, understood as a continuum of various environmental events and the sum of individual experiences occurring in the prison environment.

The study focused on five survival strategies (withdrawal, rebellion, settling in, conversion, and cold calculation) used by prisoners in correctional facilities.

The goal of the research was to determine the relationship between each type of survival strategy in the context of prison isolation and the length of time spent in the penitentiary unit.

The research problem was formulated as follows:

Is there a correlation, and if so, what is it, between the specific survival strategies in the conditions of prison isolation and the number of years spent in a correctional facility?

Two research hypotheses were formulated:

The longer the time spent in prison isolation, the less often inmates use the withdrawal strategy.

The longer the time spent in prison, the more inmates use strategies expressed through rebellion, settling in, conversion, and cold calculation.

In the first research hypothesis, a negative correlation was assumed, following the reasoning of Sykes (2007), who argues that prisoners rarely employ the withdrawal strategy. This behavior is often a result of an immature personality, someone who struggled with reality even before serving their sentence. It should be noted that withdrawal could also result from a radical change in life conditions and might occur as a consequence of trauma. In such cases, it would be temporary, and after the initiation period in the correctional facility, other forms of adaptation should emerge (Zamble, Porporino, 1988; Schmid, Jones, 1990).

In the second hypothesis, a positive correlation was assumed. It is hypothesized that after the initial period, the specific conditions of the prison will compel inmates to adopt a method of adapting to the interpersonal interactions and the systemic conditions present in the penitentiary unit. Being cut off from society, including previous environmental habits, interrupted emotional connections with loved ones, coping with what has been lost, restricted freedom of movement, living in a confined and small space with unfamiliar people, often without basic humanitarian amenities (such as personal hygiene, physiological needs, or sexual needs), along with prison brutality and excessive discipline, will force inmates to adapt based on the survival instinct. Similar conclusions can be drawn from literature in the fields of prison psychology and the sociology of deviance (Ciosek, 1995; Pastwa-Wojciechowska, 2004; Sykes, 2007; Goffman, 2011).

There are five dependent variables, each representing a specific survival strategy in the context of prison isolation. The independent variable is the actual time spent in prison, represented in years. The study was survey-based, and the questionnaire was constructed using the survey technique. The research tool, which was in a self-report format, was designed to ensure that the individual items clearly pointed to the characteristic features of a specific strategy. There were 23 questions, and the responses were placed on a 4-point Likert-type scale. Sample questions for the adaptive strategies characterized were formulated in everyday language and aimed at capturing the actual behavior of inmates. For withdrawal strategy, one of the questions was: *Do you often prefer to sit alone and not get involved in other people's business?* For the rebellion strategy, one of the questions was: *Do you intentionally show that you are fed up with the rules and regulations at prison?* The domestication strategy was illustrated by the question: *Do you feel that you are coping with life in prison and that it is not causing you any major problems?* In the case of conversions, one of the questions was: *Are you trying to be a 'model prisoner' to look good in front of the prison staff?* In contrast, the cold calculation strategy was illustrated by the question: *Do you sometimes pretend to be something you are not in your interactions with others in order to gain something or avoid problems?* The respondent was asked to indicate to what extent they accepted a particular type of behavior. A high sum of results indicated that the respondent frequently used a specific adaptation strategy. The withdrawal strategy was characterized by 3 questions, which related to weakening ties with close ones remaining outside the prison, trivializing relationships with the surroundings, and a lack of willingness to cooperate with other inmates. The rebellion-based technique was described using 6 questions, focusing on provocation, hostile aggressive attitudes, refusal to cooperate, and unwillingness to work with prison staff. Settling in was described based on 5 questions, which involved positive relationships with the environment and a declaration of a possible desire to remain in prison. The conversion strategy included 3 questions

related to focusing on personal interests, a pragmatic approach in relationships with others, adopting a submissive attitude towards prison staff to gain benefits, and imitating prison staff. Cold calculation was described using 6 characteristics, which involved an excessive focus on knowledge about fellow inmates and staff, using this knowledge, and avoiding trouble in relationships with others at all costs.

The Cronbach's alpha results for the individual strategy types were satisfactory: Withdrawal $\alpha = 0.609$; Rebellion $\alpha = 0.608$; Settling in $\alpha = 0.640$; Conversion $\alpha = 0.611$; Cold calculation $\alpha = 0.601$. The conditions for interpreting the results of the study based on the constructed questionnaire were met. The result is accompanied by a 10% margin of error when making inferences about the entire population, assuming that the feature occurs with a probability of 0.5 for the fraction size. In the study, linear regression analysis and Pearson's pairwise correlation test were used.

Analysis of the Research Results

Table 1. Linear model between dependent variables and time spent in prison

	B	BS	t	p	Beta*	R2
Years in prison	-.086	.019	-4.594	.000	-.417*	.174
withdrawal	8.108	.281	28.840	.000		
Years in prison	.067	.019	3.541	.001	.334*	.111
rebellion	6.929	.284	24.441	.000		
Years in prison	.078	.034	2.295	.024	.224*	.050
domestication	13.399	.506	26.462	.000		
Years in prison	.074	.023	3.166	.002	.302*	.091
conversion	8.058	.351	22.950	.000		
Years in prison	.070	.034	2.072	.041	.203*	.041
cold calculation	16.694	.502	33.239	.000		

Note: N = 102; B-value—the regression equation coefficient used to predict the dependent variable based on the independent variable; BS (Standard Error)—the standard error associated with the coefficients; t—the value of the t-distribution; p—two-tailed significance level; Beta*—the standardized Beta coefficient, and thus the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient (R) between the variables; R^2—the coefficient of determination for the linear regression.

Source: own study.

The tested linear regression models explain the variability of the dependent variable (constant) through the variability of the predictor. In all cases—where the independent variable is the number of years spent in prison, and the constants are the five adaptation strategies (withdrawal, rebellion, domestication, conversion,

cold calculation)—the ANOVA test allowed for the application of linear regression and the estimation of the model.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between withdrawal and time spent in prison is $R = -0.417$, with $p < 0.001$. This is a negative and statistically significant two-tailed relationship at the 0.01 level, with moderate strength. The relationship is inversely proportional: as time spent in prison increases, the probability of using the withdrawal strategy decreases. The coefficient of determination is $R^2 = 0.174$, The model explains 17.4% of the variability, but the fit is unsatisfactory, as the convergence coefficient $\alpha = 0.826$. Therefore, 82.6% of the declining tendency to use the withdrawal strategy must be explained by other factors beyond time spent in the penitentiary institution.

In the remaining cases, there are also significant linear relationships between the correlated variables. All of these are positive, two-tailed statistically significant at the 0.01 level, and directly proportional, meaning that as time passes, the likelihood of using the following strategies increases rebellion, domestication, conversion, cold calculation. Linear determination coefficients R^2 suggest that model fit in all cases is poor, with coefficients of convergence unsatisfactory for: rebellion $\alpha = 0.889$, domestication $\alpha = 0.950$, conversion $\alpha = 0.909$, cold calculation $\alpha = 0.959$.

The increased likelihood of prisoners using the rebellion strategy should be explained in 88.9% by factors other than the mere fact of being in penal isolation. However, in 11.1% of cases, we can be confident that with the passage of time, the use of this adaptation strategy will increase.

The increased likelihood of inmates using the domestication strategy should be explained in 95% by reasons other than imprisonment itself. Over the years, the use of this strategy is expected to increase by 5%.

The growing probability of prisoners applying the conversion strategy should be explained in 90.9% by the prediction of other factors than incarceration. In 9.1% of cases, the passage of time will lead to increased use of this technique.

The elevated likelihood of using the cold calculation strategy by inmates in isolation should be explained in 95.9% by factors other than imprisonment. Time spent in isolation will contribute in 4.1% of cases to prisoners potentially using the cold calculation strategy.

Conclusions

If we abstract away the individual causes determining a prisoner's behavior—that is, the psychosocial conditions—and treat their functioning in the prison environment as the sum of all their experiences, it becomes evident that the very fact of being in a penitentiary institution will initially lead them to apply the withdrawal strategy. However, over time, this type of adaptation will no longer

be dominant, and we can be 17% certain of this fact. The remaining forms of adaptation used by prisoners in a penitentiary institution, over time—that is, as they gain increasing numbers of interactional experiences and environmental orientation—will contribute to a more frequent application of the rebellion strategy in 10%, the domestication strategy in 5%, the conversion strategy in 9%, and the cold calculation strategy in 4% of cases. The coefficient of determination is not particularly strong, but we are not speaking here of clear-cut cause-and-effect relationships, but rather of a kind of situation that will inevitably occur as a result of functioning in the prison environment.

Discussion

It is important to note that as time progresses, the use of the withdrawal strategy decreases, while the use of other types of adaptation increases. The studies have shown that prisoners begin their stay in prison with withdrawal, and only after some time does their way of functioning change, leading them to adopt other adaptive strategies.

It has long been known that at the beginning of their time in a penitentiary institution, prisoners experience trauma related to the shock of isolation and the new, unfriendly conditions in an unfamiliar environment. Research on this subject so far has been qualitative, indirectly allowing for a valid conclusion about the temporal conditions. However, this conclusion was only deductive. This report empirically demonstrated, for the first time, that the withdrawal strategy is a characteristic form of adaptation in the initial period of a prison sentence. Furthermore, it showed that, as a result of environmental experiences, other forms of adaptation emerge secondarily, with their use increasing over time, while the use of withdrawal diminishes.

Withdrawal can be understood psychologically as a way to camouflage one's immature emotionality (Sykes, 2007), but in these analyses, it was considered from a sociological perspective as a restriction of activity caused by the isolation situation, in line with the research of Schmid and Jones (1990), who argue that the mere fact of being in prison does not automatically mean that an individual will be accepted and gain status in the prison environment. Instead, they are identified as someone outside the system, an outsider. This situation leads to the marginalization of the prisoner. Goffman (1961, p. 286) writes that when a person is uninformed—that is, when they lack knowledge of what might happen to them—the most important goal for them becomes psychological survival. As a result, all attention will focus on living cautiously and seeking useful information. When this is combined with the pain of imprisonment, loneliness, and the desire to escape from the suffering caused by the loss of freedom, emotional disturbances may arise, leading to activity inhibition, or withdrawal. When an individual's

adaptive abilities are insufficient to cope with internal experiences and the environmental conditions, the issue of rehabilitation becomes critical. The question then arises about how to implement patterns of adaptation to the environment in a way that prevents the individual from reaching a nervous breakdown. In American prisons, there are five times more individuals with mental health issues than in the general population (Kupers, 1999). This issue is even deeper, as it is systemic. The current prison policy causes trauma to the incarcerated individuals, who become angry, aggressive, and prone to severe emotional problems (Shalev, 2014). According to reports, among prisoners, rebellion increases by 11%, which is a form of opposition to the system, while conversion rises by 9%, leading to pragmatic pretenses of functioning properly. Both of these techniques should show a downward trend due to the rehabilitation efforts carried out within the system.

Research by Zamble and Porporino (1988) showed that, at the beginning of their prison sentence, prisoners experience significant suffering. Over time, most of them retain the ability to cope, both on a behavioral and developmental level. Just because someone is coping does not mean they are not suffering. Therefore, it seems necessary in the rehabilitation process to focus on creating programs that teach prisoners how to cope in the prison environment and develop skills they can use in life after release (Dhami et al., 2007).

Proper use of social rehabilitation in the early stages of serving a prison sentence can have significant implications, as disciplinary offenses in prison act as a bridge to a further criminal career, directly determining it (Gendreau et al., 1996). Meanwhile, participation in prison educational programs and maintaining family bonds are significantly linked to a reduced level of recidivism (Hairston, 1991; Gerber, Fritsch, 1995). As long as the process of readaptation in the Polish penitentiary system is not reformed, the effects of social rehabilitation will be occasional, and recidivism will remain high.

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