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Ex-convict stigma caused by the social re-adaptation process

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EX-CONVICT STIGMA CAUSED BY THE SOCIAL RE-ADAPTATION PROCESS

Polski tytuł: Stygmatyzacja byłych więźniów jako skutek procesu społecznej readaptacji

Streszczenie: Społeczna readaptacja byłych więźniów to bardzo skomplikowany proces, na który wpływ ma wiele różnych czynników. Artykuł ten prezentuje koncepcję społecznej stygmatyzacji zarówno jako zjawisko, jak i proces. Osoby z kryminalną przeszłością od zawsze są piętnowane bez względu na zmiany w swoim zachowaniu po wyjściu z więzienia. To zaś ma wielki wpływ na kształtowanie nowej tożsamości, w której nadal pozostają przestępcze rysy, a nawet są w pewien sposób wzmacniane. W tekście prezentowane są możliwe rozwiązania problemu stygmatyzacji byłych więźniów, który ma wiele negatywnych skutków społecznych.

Słowa kluczowe: readaptacja, stygmatyzacja, byli więźniowie.

Introduction

Recently, an amplification of the discourse of various conditions of the social stigmatisation process might be seen. It should be emphasised that this phenomenon is not new, yet in Poland scientific research in this area emerged as late as in the 1990s and, undeniably, there is a necessity for its continuation. Although problems related to the results of

stigmatisation have always been noticeable, the isolation of Poland in the Communist period from the achievements of the world literature on this subject made the theory of social stigmatisation largely inaccessible, thus making it impossible to develop solutions for minimisation or complete eradication of the results of this phenomenon. Taking into consideration mainly negative circumstances which accompany stigmatisation process, there appears a necessity to conduct theoretical and empirical analyses of the subject. This phenomenon is uncommonly complicated and it regards all people – without exception. Everyone, depending on his or her situation and on the current social relationships, may be a stigmatised person, or a stigmatiser. As Goffman points out “A stigma relates not as much to a set of particular individuals which could be divided into two groups: those stigmatised and the normal; it is rather about the ubiquitous social process in which each of these individual plays both of these roles, at least within certain relationships and at some stages of life”¹.

This article views the concept of social stigmatisation as both a phenomenon and a process. In the scope of this analysis, it has been essential to examine the concepts which accompany social stigmatisation, or which are often used interchangeably with this term. It has been necessary to define the terms of sigma and stereotype more precisely as substituting one for the other is not always proper.

I will dwell more extensively on the concept of social stigmatisation in the context of the social re-adaptation of former prison inmates.

Stigma, stereotype and prejudice – explanation of the concepts

As it was mentioned in the introduction, apart from the term “stigma” other terms appear and/or are being used interchangeably; among them “stereotype” and “prejudice” are the most commonly used. What are the differences and common elements of the phenomena denoted by these

¹ E. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall 1963, p. 137-138.

terms? First of all, the concepts of stigma and stigmatisation will be examined.

Terminological concepts of stigma and stigmatisation

The theory of stigma has been created by Erving Goffman. Although his first work appeared almost fifty years ago, and after it a number of other studies have been published in this thematic area, it would be most improper to ignore the apt and thorough descriptions of social stigmatisation presented by him.

A “stigma” according to Goffman is a feature or an attribute which disqualifies a person from full social acceptance; it is also a set of convictions about people possessing a feature or an attribute of this kind. This distinguished sociologist openly stated that: “ Each society establishes its own means of categorising persons and [...] a set of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories”². Individuals affected by a stigma, “are those who possess a social attribute which disqualifies them deeply. As the result, they are considered to be deteriorated”³. In the process of creating stigmas the role of a group ought to be distinctly emphasised. Individual preconception about particular members of a group concerning a certain feature might not turn into stigma. Only a preconception shared by all members of the group cause this certain feature to turn into a stigma. This remark is an acknowledgement that the society plays a considerable role in each person’s life, constructing stigmas which have an enormous influence on the further functioning of the stigmatised person. Goffman strongly points out that “according to our assumptions, we do not believe that a labelled individual is an accomplished person. Consequently, we use different forms of discrimination towards this person and, as a result, we successfully decrease, often even unconsciously, his life chances. Thus, we imperceptibly build our own labelling theory – an ideology which

² Ibid., p. 31.

³ Ibid., p. 3.

explains the inferiority of the labelled person and certifies to a threat represented by him"⁴. In everyday social situations very often we see confirmation of these opinions. Individuals who are typecast in the society as stigmatised, for example former prison inmates, regardless of their current behaviour, are perceived as a group deprived of respect and recognition. They are considered to be a type of people who can be treated worse than other members of the society. Crocker, Major and Steele argue that "a labelled person is a person whose social identity or the fact of belonging to a certain social category puts the completeness of his human nature under doubt – such a person is perceived by others as an inferior, crippled or handicapped individual"⁵; they emphasise that "labelled people possess (at least according to the opinion of the others) a certain attribute or a feature in a particular social context"⁶.

Thus labelling is a phenomenon which is characterised by dehumanisation and depersonalisation of another person. We realise how complicated it is to defend ourselves from the consequences of collective stigmatisation. Furthermore, one should be prepared for situations in which each of us may yield to the influence of a group and become an individual stigmatising others, or, reversely, oppressed by a group and stigmatised.

Terminological concepts of a stereotype and stereotyping

Stereotypes are often analysed in terms of social psychology. In parallel to the issue of stigmatisation, studies of the problems concerning stereotyping have had their revival in recent years.

What are stereotypes and what is the process of stereotyping conditioned upon? Analysing the literature dedicated to the issue of human behaviour, it may be concluded that the term of stereotype was intro-

⁴ E. Goffman, *Piętno. Rozważania o zranionej tożsamości*, trans. by A. Dzierżyński, J. Tokarska-Bakir, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2005, p. 35.

⁵ J. Crocker, B. Major, C. Steele, *Social stigma*, [in:] *The handbook of social psychology*, ed. by D.T. Gilbert, S.T. Fiske, et al., vol. 2, McGraw-Hill, Boston 1998, p. 504.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 505.

duced by Lippman in the year 1922. Lippman defines a stereotype as a "mental image" which helps a person to cope with the complexity of the social surroundings by the method of its simplification⁷. This definition is too broad. Later on a number of new definitions of a stereotype appeared, stressing diverse and the most significant aspects from the perspective of their authors. Their presentation listing the particular theoretical approaches will allow for transparency. Thus, referring to the classification presented by Boski, from the point of view of macropsychology (indistinguishable from the sociological approach), stereotypes are "presumptions widespread in one group about distinguishing features of another group"; from the perspective of social cognition, a stereotype is: "a cognitive schematic image of the social group and its members in the mind of an individual"; however, according to cultural psychology, a stereotype is "fallacious and inadequate pseudo-knowledge concerning other ethnic groups"⁸. The definitions of stereotype which refer to the macropsychological approach are burdened with many generalisations, simplifications. Especially the assumption that there is "grain of truth" in each stereotype certify to the imprecision of such definitions. Thus, within this group of definitions (the macropsychological approach) there is no agreement as to the justness of stereotypes. Lippman maintained that stereotypes are products of erroneous mental processes which usually lead to wrongful convictions. Many other scientists researching stereotypes have shared this opinion, interpreting stereotypes as products of erroneous mental processes caused by irrational processes and excessive generalisation. There is also no agreement as to the perception of the roots of stereotypes. Campbell underlined the role of a misguided cause-effect perception⁹. He noticed that stereotypes may appear as a result of behaviour of an individual representing a specific

⁷ C.N. Macrae, Ch. Stangor, M. Hewstone, *Stereotypy i uprzedzenie. Najnowsze ujęcie*, trans. by M. Majchrzak, M. Kacmajor, A. Nowak, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 1999, p. 228.

⁸ P. Boski, *Kulturowe ramy zachowań społecznych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. 491.

⁹ D.T. Campbell, *Stereotypes and the perception of group differences*, "American Psychologist" 22(1967), p. 817-829.

ethnicity, but not as a result of the real causes of an event. Additionally, stereotypes may be used to rationalise or explain hostility towards a particular person or a group. The problem of falsehood and truthful knowledge ingrained in stereotypes seems to have been aptly described by Brigham¹⁰. He pointed out that "a stereotype is a generalisation about a group or its members, perceived as unfounded by an objective observer. A stereotype may be perceived as unfounded when it reflects erroneous mental processes or excessive generalisation, when it is inconsistent with the reality, too rigid, when it involves wrong attribution patterns or represents rationalisation for prejudice or for discriminative behaviour". Thus, he emphasises the pejorative role of an emerging stereotype.

Within the social cognition movement (cognitive orientation theory), which has been dominant for a few years, the issue of accuracy of stereotypes, as well as of their negative aspects, was omitted. In defining a stereotype, the main focus is placed upon its role in information processing and information schematisation. "From the cognitive perspective, a stereotype is a cognitive structure which encompasses knowledge, convictions and expectations of the observer who relates them to a group of people. Stereotypes are abstract knowledge structures which associate a social group with the set of behavioural characteristics. As such, stereotypes are expectations which govern information processing of the group as a whole as well as of its individual members"¹¹. In another, albeit a simpler explanation of the same convention, stereotypes are defined as "cognitive categories applied by the observer while processing information about other people"¹².

Such an approach obviously omits the issue of a stereotype's accuracy and falsehood. And if it were not for the consequences which mainly arise from a stereotype's inaccuracy, this issue would probably

¹⁰ J.C Brigham, *Ethnic stereotypes*, "Psychological Bulletin" 76(1971), p. 15-38.

¹¹ D.L. Hamilton, S.J.Sherman, *Perceiving persons and groups*, "Psychological Review" 103(1996), p. 342.

¹² D. Hamilton, T. Trolier, *Stereotypes and stereotyping: An overview of the cognitive approach*, [in:] *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism*, ed. by S.L. Gaertner, J.F. Dovidio, Academic Press, New York 1986, p. 128.

not require a more extensive analysis. Though I believe that stereotypes should be considered from both sides, as a cognitive structure which encompasses knowledge, convictions and expectations, and from the point of view of the emotions which accompany them. Bogdan Wojciszke has stated that "a stereotype is a scheme which represents a group or a type of people singled out because of an easily distinguishable feature denoting their social identity such as sex, race, nationality, religion, social origin or profession"¹³. Yet, he has also pointed out that this scheme is "excessively simplified, over generalised (all members of a group "are" identical) and immune to changes resulting from new incoming information; it is also socially accepted and it forms an element of the society's culture"¹⁴.

I strongly share the Fiske's opinion, which contains a reservation that: "the cognitive approach to stereotyping is not adequate in the context of interracial relations. [...] First of all, it does not take into consideration the fundamental problems connected with intentions, motivations and conduct. [...] Until recently, many motivating factors have been omitted from the cognitive approach with the aim of proving at any cost that stereotyping is a standard process"¹⁵. Although this leading representative of cognitive psychology has referred to relations in a group of people representing different races, I believe that the observations made by her also bear relevance to other types of human contacts. If it were accepted that what we know about the others is a stereotype and, conversely, that stereotypes match real knowledge, then certainly it would not be a beneficial conclusion. A stereotype may not be a priori regarded as a certainty. While analysing a stereotype, its accuracy or falsehood should be taken into consideration. There are stereotypes which overlap with real knowledge based, for instance, on social research, but also there are stereotypes which totally diverge from the truth. It should be remarked that the

¹³ B. Wojciszke, *Człowiek wśród ludzi. Zarys psychologii społecznej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2009, p. 68.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ S.T. Fiske, *People's reactions to nuclear war: Implications for psychologists*, "American Psychologist" 42(1987), p. 114-115.

influence of both of these types of stereotypes (i.e. Those reflecting and contradicting real facts) may have a diverse impact on the behaviour of the stereotyped person. This depends on both subjective and objective factors. If a stereotype diverges from the truth but does not depreciate a person, it is accepted with indifference and it does not cause any negative consequences. In an opposite case, when it diverges from the truth and it depreciates the person inner tension sets in, which in most cases is relieved through destructive behaviour, either externally or internally directed. If a stereotype reflects the truth but it imposes a negative image of a person, it also adversely affects the development of a stereotyped individual. It seems to be that a stereotype reflecting the truth and conveying a positive bias gives rise to the least troublesome situations. Notably from the pedagogical point of view, an analysis of each stereotype is needed in terms of its convergence with the reality. Especially that stereotypes breed prejudice and stigmatisation of individuals. This is confirmed, for example, in the case of people with prison records. It is standard to view this group of people through the prism of their past convictions, which breeds prejudice against them and stigmatises them. Thus, there is a necessity to rebut stereotypes not confirmed by the reality, especially if they adversely affect the functioning of a person. Also everyone should be prepared from his or her early childhood to face stereotypes, specifically in situations when they diverge from the reality and contain unfair judgment.

Also definitions produced by the third movement – the movement of cultural psychology, confirm these assumptions. “From the perspective of cultural psychology, a stereotype is an ecological mistake consisting in that personal–psychological features are being assigned to social groups and categories which are appropriate for the description, assessment or interactions of individuals but not of groups. These features are expressed in informal language and they are often strongly value-laden. Nevertheless, each personal feature, including those described in the language of academic psychology, once assigned to social categories

composed of numerous members, is a fault and a stereotype"¹⁶. From this perspective, a stereotype is defined as erroneous and inadequate pseudo-knowledge about other ethnic or national groups, not congruent with the reality.

Then it is clear how problematic and complicated is arriving at a definition of a stereotype. Summing up the research and remarks presented above, I have adopted the following definition:

Stereotypes are convictions about social groups; they form a cognitive structure which embraces knowledge, convictions and expectations of an observer about a certain social groups. They are resultants of the specific cognitive scripts, as well as of affective and socio-motivating mechanisms characteristic of a person creating the stereotype.

The cognitive concept of prejudice

The notion of prejudice often appears in reflections about the subject of stigma. Stigmatisation of a certain individual is accompanied by prejudice. Allport defines prejudice as "antipathy based on an erroneous strong generalisation. It can be felt or expressed. It can be referred to a group as a whole, or as a unit, or as a representative of this group"¹⁷. Brigham defines prejudice as a negative attitude which (on the basis of various criteria) is perceived as unfounded by an external observer¹⁸. However, Jones describes prejudice as "fallacious attribution of a group feature (stereotype) to the separate member of this group neglecting (1) the aptness of the group stereotype as well as (2) the possibility of referring the group feature to a certain individual"¹⁹. Researchers of prejudice emphasise that prejudices and other attitudes contain cognitive, affective and volitional aspects.

¹⁶ P. Boski, *Kulturowe ramy...*, p. 493.

¹⁷ G.W. Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, Addison-Wesley, Oxford 1954, p. 9.

¹⁸ Comp. J.C Brigham, *Ethnic stereotypes...*, op. cit.

¹⁹ E.E. Jones, *Interpreting interpersonal behavior: The effects of expectancies*, "Science" 234 (1986), p. 288.

Cognitive elements of prejudice are usually connected with the existing negative stereotype about “others” and also about ourselves. As a rule self-stereotyping comprises positive characteristics. Emotional elements usually include hostile feelings, rejection, and often hate towards “others”²⁰.

Smith’s point of view is interesting. He suggests not to treat prejudice as only negative attitude, but to consider it in the categories of the wide range of social emotions²¹. Similarly, B. Wojciszke determines prejudice as “a negative or (rarely) a positive attitude towards members of a group which is being maintained because they are members of this group”²².

To sum up the reflections about stigma, stereotype and prejudice presented above, it may be concluded that these terms denote some shared aspects. Most certainly the term stigma may denote such conduct as displaying prejudice and stereotypes. “A stereotype is a collection of opinions about members of a category of people, and prejudice is an emotional attitude”. Prejudice may influence creation of stereotypes, and the existence of stereotypes may result in prejudice. Both deviant prejudices and deviant stereotypes contribute to the creation of a stigma and they cooperate with it. Stereotypes strengthened by prejudice can “trigger tendentious choice and tendentious processing of information about the labelled person; provoke affective reactions such as disgust, anger, anxiety and fear, or lead to discriminatory actions”²³. A stigma is decisively a wider notion than a stereotype and prejudice, because it includes more general attributions concerning the character and the identity. “It encompasses a reaction to a deviation, treated as an individual feature and as a feature of a group to which the person belongs”²⁴. In everyday inter-

²⁰ Comp. G. Mietzel, *Wprowadzenie do psychologii*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2003, p. 361-362.

²¹ E. R. Smith, *Social identity and social emotions: Toward New conceptualizations of prejudice*. [in:] *Affect, cognition, and stereotyping*, ed. by D. M. Mackie, D.L. Hamilton, CA: Academic Press, San Diego 1993, p.297-316.

²² B. Wojciszke, *Człowiek...*, p.68.

²³ M Biernat, J.N. Dovidio, *Piętno i stereotypy*, W: T.F. Heatherton, R.E. Kleck, M.R. Hebl, J.G. Hull [in:], *Spółeczna psychologia piętna*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 115.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

personal relations it is difficult to define clearly if what is seen is prejudice, a stereotypical perception or stigmatisation. Undoubtedly none of these ways of conduct is proper, but stigmatisation of another individual has the most devastating effect. As Jones and his collaborators remarked: “the dramatic nature of the labelling process consists in attaching the label of deviants to people; such a branding process usually has a destructive effect on emotions, thinking and behavior”²⁵.

Stereotype <----->Prejudice
Stigma

Even though the main subject of this article is the issue of stigma and stigmatisation, I consider the above presented remarks concerning stereotypes and prejudice to be very important for the analysis of this subject. Firstly, as I have mentioned, their display accompanies the formation of stigmas, and secondly, while taking measures aimed at reduction of stigmatising reactions, attention should be also paid to solutions which would facilitate prevention or reduction of prejudice and stereotypes. I assume that these three terms **prejudice – stereotype – stigma** are inextricably connected to each other.

Stigmatisation and destigmatisation – implementation in the context of social re-adaption process of individuals with criminal record

Stigmatisation of individuals with criminal record in the process of social re-adaptation

A label – or a stigma – is a social construct existing in the minds of both the labelled and the labelling. Present-day research on stigma

²⁵ E.E. Jones, A. Farina, A. Hastorf, H. Markus, D. Miller, R. Scott, *Social stigma: The psychology of marked relationships*, Freeman, New York 1984, p. 4.

stresses not only its contextuality but it also notes the dynamics of this process, as well as its significance for the labelled individual and the labelling “normal people”. Consequences of labelling are being especially strongly emphasised. What is being noted, apart from disfavouring and exclusion, is that the labelled individuals are deprived of their humanness and, consequently, are being treated in a manner which would not be allowed if applied to a “proper” human being. This is not only about the material aspect, but also about restricting their right to experience the, so called, derivative emotions (characteristic only of human beings) such as hope, sorrow and disappointment. Individuals from out of one’s own group – the others – are more commonly attributed with the ability to experience basic emotions (such as anger or fear) which animals are also capable of. That is why “normal” members of their own group are perceived as more “prototypical people”, while individuals excluded from that group are seen as the less endowed with human nature²⁶. The observations presented above impose the necessity to undertake measures primarily aimed at elimination of the phenomenon of stigmatisation. And if the phenomenon still occurs, solutions should be adopted to prevent its negative effects. Some reflections about the possible solutions to be adopted in relations between stigmatised and non-stigmatised people are further presented on the example of individuals with criminal record and former prison inmates. After they have left correctional facilities, such people are being treated by their surroundings – those around them – as “others”. Although they have already served a custodial sentence, they are still being assessed through the prism of the criminal offence they have committed. The label of a criminal, applied to former prison inmates, has become so strongly ingrained in the minds of the society members, and especially the closest ones, that functioning in this surroundings not only does not positively influence the individual’s conduct, but – on the contrary – it strengthens the former inmate’s belief that this is his or her “role” is to be a criminal forever.

²⁶ Comp. S. Demoulin, R. Rodriguez, A. Rodrigues, J. Kaes, M. Paladino, R. Gaunt, B. Cortes, J.P. Leyens, Emotional prejudice can lead to infra-humanisation “European Review of Social Psychology” 15(2004), p. 134-145.

What should be addressed here are the premises of symbolic interactionism according to which "an individual's personality is formed through social interactions. That means that any manifestation of self-awareness and self assessment of a person is not a manifestation of his or her sheer autonomy, but to a greater or smaller degree, it is related to how the individual is being perceived and assessed by the others"²⁷. Every former prison inmate who wants to start a new life as a free man (or woman) in compliance with defined social norms, needs supporting signals from those around him or her conveying acceptance and acknowledging the development of his or her new non-criminal identity. Otherwise, if such individuals feel reluctance and are faced with lack of approval or even with indifference, they get easily discouraged and distrust chances for a change of their identity. Observation of behaviour of the individuals in a group reveals an exceptional self-sensitiveness. Even lack of interest and passiveness on the part of the others is being perceived by former inmates as criticism of their behaviour. They are convinced that they are still being perceived as criminals, which without doubt consolidates their criminal identity even further. They are helpless and defeated when faced with the "social audience", and the only way out in this situation is provided by integration with a criminal subculture. Such a situation strengthens identification with criminals and consolidates the individual's distorted system of values. In this case re-adaptation process – being a continuation of the resocialisation process initiated in the correctional facility – will be disturbed in non-prison surroundings and, therefore, a relapse into behaviour characteristic of the period before the prison term may even be expected.

Bronisław Urban distinguishes the following stages in a criminal career (B. Urban uses the term a deviant career):

- 1) **labelling an individual as a deviant person**; the society gradually starts assessing and identifying the individual as a deviant person;

²⁷ B. Urban, *Wzmacnianie procesu destygmatyzacji ex-dewianta jako warunek re-adaptacji społecznej*, „Rocznik Komisji Nauk Pedagogicznych” 57(2004), p. 148.

- 2) **change of attitudes and expectations of others towards the deviant person;**
- 3) **change of social acceptance or rejection by friends and family;**
- 4) **internalisation of the deviant's label and acceptance of the identity by the person;**
- 5) **initiation of social interactions with the rehabilitated identity;**
- 6) **entrance into other social groups and relapse into crime (deviant acts)²⁸.**

In the case of individuals who have just left prison, usually behaviour characteristic of the fourth stage may be observed. Though, as an effect of a prison resocialisation programme, the criminal identity might have been undermined, it has not been destroyed, as in the isolation behind the bars it is difficult to reject the criminal identity and start perceiving oneself as an ex-deviant person when the identity is being re-strengthened by the surroundings and by the signals received by the prison inmate. Development and consolidation of behaviour patterns described in the fifth stage, which are connected with initiation of social interactions with the rehabilitated identity, would be an optimal solution. However, the change from the deviant's to ex-deviant's identity is possible when an individual is personally involved in this transformation, with concurrent support of the social surroundings. This would be connected with destigmatisation. To enable this change of identity rejection of the previous identity is required first. Many authors describe this process as destigmatisation which is characterised by a "purification" during which the defective "I" is replaced by the moral or normal "I". This purification can either be made within sanctified or secular norms, or it can be transcendence. In this process the previous identity does not disappear but rather a new identity is being developed"²⁹. During the identity change process the way of fulfilling previous social roles is also transformed. Bronisław Urban underlines that the change of roles is not ef-

²⁸ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

fectured by a one-time decision, but it is a process in which the following stages can be distinguished:

1. **doubts as to rightness and usefulness of the previous role;**
2. **a search for and an assessment of an alternative role;**
3. **a change of opinions and establishment of an ex- deviant role**³⁰.

In the case of former confinees, behaviour patterns characteristic of the first stage are most common. Under the influence of a resocialisation programme conducted in the correctional facility, these people have doubts as to the rightness of criminal acts. Even more – they are pondering rejection of their previous criminal behaviour, yet they have difficulties in finding of an alternative role. Not all of them know what they want to do in their lives, they feel helplessness, and – first of all – they fear assumption of a new role. My experience gained so far in work with former prison inmates allows me to state that these individuals have big doubts as to the possibility of fulfilling new social roles, and therefore the process of reprogramming their previous criminal identity is disrupted.

It should be remembered that identity viewed as a specific form of subjectivity, is "created" by socio-cultural circumstances of our acts and our lives, which at the same time demand its existence and give birth to it"³¹. The fact that „identity is a social, i.e. „socio-genetic” phenomenon should be accounted for³², therefore only functioning in natural socio-cultural conditions fosters formation of subjectivity. According to this, only resocialisation in an open environment facilitates effective work on an identity. Moreover, an identity cannot be gained once and for all. Everyone risks an identity crisis and no one can be completely secured from identity dispersion. An identity is never fully stable and it cannot be solidified once and for all. A person is never fully aware of whom they are, whom they would like to be, or whom they could be. The problem

³⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

³¹ Comp. A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja” i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2002.

³² Comp. J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, C. H. Beck, München 1992, p. 130.

of identity is based on an intensified experience of randomness, disparity and variability; on the experience of reality as a temporary and dynamic area of possibilities, in which radical doubt has become the core of self-reflective and self-critical thought³³. Throughout our lifetime we continue strengthening our identity and, referring to the theory of symbolic interactionism, the key role in this process is being played by performed and interpreted gestures which are the carriers of conventional meaning. Only an active involvement of an individual in his or her social surroundings helps them solve identity problems. Sheldon Stryker emphasises that people live their lives in local social networks. Accounting for the fact that a person plays many roles in various networks, he or she has also multiple identities. These multiple identities are organised into the **hierarchy of enhancement**. People display those identities which are on the highest level of the hierarchy of enhancement. Thus, identities are meanings connected with roles which are played by individuals in the network, when structure and culture of the network define which identities can be developed. That is why resocialisation practice needs to prepare the custodees to execute social roles in compliance with accepted social and cultural frames. Therefore, it is necessary to assign roles to confinees, the execution of which would foster consolidation of identity. It should be pointed out that, on one hand, these roles should be in compliance with the inmates' internal desires and aspirations. On the other hand, regardless of the age and experience of the inmates, this should prepare them to execute specific life tasks. Diverse activities in the framework of the, so-called, creative resocialisation are infallible methods which could be used for this purpose³⁴. However, it should be recognised that each person has his or her own area of creativity. In the resocialisation process it is necessary to search for this personal area of creativity which would allow an individual to feel competent in the role

³³ Comp. M. Makropoulos, *Kontingenz und Selbstungewißheit. Bemerkungen zu zwei Charakteristika moderner Gesellschaften*, [in:] *Anschlüsse. Versuche nach Michael Foucault*, ed. by G. Dane et al., edition diskord, Tübingen 1985.

³⁴ Comp. M. Konopczyński, *Metody twórczej resocjalizacji*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2008.

executed by him or her, thus strengthening his or her identity. This can be provided in the form of rehabilitation drama and sports or music activities. Yet, this purpose may be served by any other form of activity which the individual is comfortable with and which is the most important for him or her. Stryker underlined the role of individual commitment to the display of identity within a social network. The more a person is committed to a certain activity, the better results may be expected in terms of consolidation of the identity resulting from the execution of a certain role. He also noted the importance of the number of individuals in a given network – “the higher the number of people in the network, whom a certain identity relates to, the bigger is the commitment to this identity”³⁵. In the resocialisation practice, it should be remembered that it is necessary to provide such activities which would be characterised by a certain depth and the applicability of which would not be limited to one and the same group. No project should be superficial, because – as it is still being heard – “these people are not going to achieve anything worthy anyway due to their past prison experience”, and no project should be limited to the assessment of people with the same background. It is also inadmissible to provide solutions consisting providing work which is not specifically useful for anyone.

The above mentioned Stryker’s position regarding the mechanisms of identity formation is shared by McCall and Simmons. They argue that “the self is composed of many identities which form a hierarchy, but the hierarchy is rather defined in the categories of significance than of exposure”. The difference is not only about semantics, because the organisation of a hierarchy of significance is a reflection of a given person’s ideal self, i.e. a reflection of his or her desires and priorities. The identities which are located high in the hierarchy of significance are, therefore, personifications of values and other moral considerations. The significance of an identity in the hierarchy structure still depends on the extent to which a given person: 1) receives support for a certain identity from

³⁵ J.H. Turner, J.E. Stets, *Socjologia emocji*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. 136.

the others, 2) is committed to and has invested in this identity, (i.e. how much of self-esteem and buy-in is at stake), 3) receives internal and external awards on account of his or her identity³⁶.

In view of the need to strengthen the identity of the custodees, it should be remembered that it is necessary to:

- 1) support individuals providing them with feedback confirming the purposefulness of the initiated activities;
- 2) create conditions conducive of activities which give pleasure and satisfaction to the participants and make them feel needed in the community (e.g. to involve prisoners in the action of strengthening levees in the case of the impeding flood in May and June 2010);
- 3) conduct various social campaigns presenting people with the criminal record as valuable citizens, emphasising their merits, servicing the community, etc.;
- 4) prepare the inmates to execute professional roles through enabling them to gain and upgrade professional skills. It is important to secure that the obtained or upgraded professional skills are congruent with the demand on the labour market, thus increasing their employability. Even if, after leaving a correctional facility, they are not always able to find a job, the belief that their professional preparation is in keeping with the current job offers most certainly increases their motivation to search for an employment. It is also important to make sure that the area of the inmates' professional training reflects their personal interests and abilities. All too often it can be observed that various forms of professional training are being offered without considering requirements of the current labour market and/or technological changes;
- 5) prepare them to execute family roles. Prison inmates are often fathers, husbands, brothers, sons (mothers, wives, daughters, sisters). In their lives as free individuals they have not always had a chance to execute their family roles properly. Even if they have been executed properly, a stay in a correctional facility certainly may dis-

³⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

rupt family ties. That is why during a stay in a correctional facility activities conducive to nurturing, reconstruction or creation of good family relations should be encouraged. This will help a given prison inmate to believe that he or she is going to be capable of performing the roles after the prison term is over. The project “Fairy tale reading” is an example of solutions strengthening the role of a father. In some correctional facilities inmates read fairy tales which are recorded and then delivered to their children.

The above mentioned solutions help individuals with a lost or distorted identity to start a process of consolidating their selves. Self-belief and self-acceptance are the basis for creation of a new identity, which is a prerequisite of a destigmatisation process in individuals with criminal record.

Rejection of criminal identity – a basis of a destigmatisation process

Erich Fromm remarked that “our moral problem consists in the man’s indifference to himself. This means that we have lost the sense of significance and uniqueness of the individual, that we have turned ourselves into instruments serving purposes alien to us, that we experience and treat ourselves as commodities, and that our own powers have become alienated from us. We have become things and so have our fellows. As a result we feel powerless and despise ourselves for our impotence. Since we do not trust our own powers, we have no faith either in ourselves or in what we could create with our own powers. We have no conscience in the humanistic sense, since we do not dare to trust the power of judgment. We are like a herd going down a road and trusting that it must lead to a goal since the others have also taken the same road. We are walking in the dark and keeping up our courage because we hear everybody else whistles as we do”³⁷. The above opinion well reflects the

³⁷ E. Fromm, *Niech się stanie człowiek*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2005, p. 185.

existence of a present-day man. Also in their behaviour towards „the Others” – the stigmatised – people are not guided by their own personal feelings resulting from their own reflections, but they are being directed by their surroundings.

The term “identity” is used in common language and in psychology to denote a set of values and goals structuralising the life of an individual. The ethical aspect of identity implicates moral responsibility and concern for one’s own future. Human existence and the identity related to it may be defined by four notions, interrelated and pertaining to ethics: freedom, choice, responsibility and commitment. Freedom and the resulting possibility to make decisions and choices are connected with responsibility for oneself, for fellow human beings and for the community. The responsibility relates to commitments and demands. A person without commitments does not have responsibilities and, as a result, he or she is also deprived of freedom.

A self-identity is always a social identity. It is a process of becoming, which always involves one’s attitude towards oneself and the others. “Identity appears to be “something” which must be developed rather than revealed; a result of our efforts, a “goal” to be achieved; something which first must be stuck together from pieces, or chosen from a number of available wholes; then it has to be strived for and protected”³⁸. Zygmunt Bauman’s words aptly reflect the essence of work on strengthening the identity of people subjected to the resocialisation process in various dimensions. Resocialisation efforts should encompass activities aimed at revealing, forming and strengthening the custodees’ “pieces” which will aid the development of their identities. Moreover, analysing the issue of identity from the perspective of inmates staying in a Readjustment Centre, it turns out that upon leaving prison they experience a true identity crisis. As a matter of fact, they do not know who they are. It is behind the bars where they had their own world and their own lives. Now they are feeling lonely; they do not belong to anyone

³⁸ Z. Bauman, *Tożsamość. Rozmowy z Benedetto Vecchim*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2007, p. 18.

or anyplace. What is needed is search for those pieces of identity which will form basis for the development of identity and will be strengthening in a broader sense. This is not an easy task, and for several reasons. The main of them include:

1. **Attachment to a deviant identity.** Short and long stays in confinement are conducive to consolidation of a deviant identity – “I am an offender, I am a criminal, I am a thief”. Because they think this about themselves, they are convinced that people around them will also view them as such.
2. **An onset of the identification process.** The mechanism of identification is a powerful stratifying device imposing strictly defined divisions. This mechanism works for former prison inmates. Practically they are totally unable to choose their own preferences. It is the society which imposes a certain identity on them and a past stay in prison is a determining criterion defining the nature of this identity. They may disagree with this identity, they may feel hurt by it but they cannot erase it. The society treats them as “others” not allowing for a chance to modify this identity. At the same time, they are not capable of and not strong enough to stop the identification process - to get rid of humiliating, stereotyping dehumanising and stigmatising identities.

It is often being stressed that what is essential is the creation and consolidation of an identity during stay in prison. Job training and provision of work, school graduation, hobby development – all these activities are definitely most needed. Yet it should be noted that after they have left prison the people are in a state of suspension between two contrasting types of identity, criminal and non-criminal. It depends not only on them which of these opposite poles they approach. Making numerous choices and rejections they are filled with anxiety, insecurity and fear. They do not know if they will manage to fully maintain a new identity. At the same time they are aware that if this process fails, they are doomed to their old and usually unwanted identity. The feeling of fear is not always destructive. However, if it is accompanied by stigmatising attitudes of the society denying them the right to aspire to an identity different from

the previous – i.e. the criminal - one, they resign from the already initiated efforts and activities. They are often even doomed to be denied any kind of identity which they might desire or strive for. They are treated as an inferior class whose essence of identity “is defined by the lack of identity, obliteration or rejection of recognised individuality, and deprivation of a ‘face’ which would warrant being awarded ethical duty or moral care. A member of such a category is an outcast from the social space in which one could search for an identity, choose, create, estimate, accept or reject it”³⁹. The following observation made by one of a former prison inmate is revealing and confirms the above. When, after he has left prison, he was distributing flyers he spotted his friends, thieves. He did not want to meet them because, as he confirmed, he was ashamed of his new occupation. He was not strong enough, or convinced of the rightness of his new lifestyle to confront his new identity with his previous one, characteristic for his former colleagues. In this case it is uncertain how long he will be keep to his new legitimate occupation. This is definitely an example of the, so-called, brittle identity. This term describes well the essence of identity of people who are back in an open environment. Brittleness is a term used to define physical properties of materials, “A material is **brittle** if, when subjected to stress, it breaks without significant deformation (strain)”. In the case of people with criminal past, a brittle identity is vulnerable to the impact of various external and internal forces, which are mutually complementary. The task of resocialisation in an open environment is to consolidate this brittle identity. This task is even harder nowadays when “such attitudes as care for coherence, adherence to principles, following precedents and faithfulness to the logic of continuity, rather than one of variables and instant opportunities, do not appeal to the majority of inhabitants of the liquid modern world”⁴⁰. The lack of coherence and rigidity of social life, following rules and faithfulness to them through the lifetime are not attractive in modern life. What has become attractive are unceasing changes, char-

³⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

acteristic of the liquid phase of modernity This does not facilitate the process of consolidation of a brittle identity, for which a better setting used to be provided by a stable society with clear rules and active social control. Currently, the society does not feel responsible for its members and mutual relations are dominated by power and superiority consisting in “avoidance of setting goals, evasion, universality and changeability, embarrassing others with unpredictability of actions”⁴¹. The society refuses to cater for the needs of its members and not everyone successfully copes with this situation, which is especially difficult for individuals reorganising their identities, such as former prisoners. Without external social support – comparable to a supporting, stable structure of various kinds – a brittle identity will fall into pieces like a sand structure not regularly watered to strengthen its stability. A person needs society as an authoritative point of reference which would point to the right direction and will help to build a new identity. This role is often, albeit partially, fulfilled by people who work with socially inapt individuals. These are usually probation officers, counsellors in various centres, psychologists, etc. Yet, even their top quality work is not capable of replacing the role assigned to the society in the resocialisation process.

In the resocialisation practice the primary task is served by efforts aimed at reconstruction, creation and consolidation of a personal and social identity. The starting point for these activities should be provided by an endeavour aimed at transforming an individual into a fully developed person in control of his or her life and integrated with interpersonal and social communities. In resocialisation practice what is being emphasised are means, abilities, possibilities and potentials of an individual which will provide basis for the construction of his or her new identity. An inmate must not be treated as an object; he or she must be a participant and self-responsible subject of this process in order to overcome fear, uncertainty, anxiety about the future life, as well as to overcome social and existential alienation.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 50.

People who work with former prison inmates (mainly probation officers, counsellors and social employers) should be inspirers, facilitators and consultants. Such approach will help the custodees regain control of their lives in its various aspects, in both private and social spheres of life.

Activities strengthening destigmatisation of former prison inmates

Participation in well organised individual and group activities supported by the community is conducive to construction of an identity. Foundations for this are provided by the development of one's own personal abilities, completed by external circumstances. To sum up, as regards the above mentioned strengthening of an identity, what should be emphasised is the necessity to conduct activities in an open environment among others, in the following forms:

– self-cognition – basis for the creation of identity

Self-cognition is a crucial precondition for the reconstruction or creation of identity. In psychoanalysis the sense of a personal identity is the most important criterion of psychic health. The sense of identity (sense of oneself) is a feeling of synthesis and connectivity; it is a precondition for rational perception of reality and for an emergence of "I" with its stable attitude towards values, moral principles, gender awareness, etc. Thus, this is a precondition allowing a mature person to execute the universal tasks, common for the whole humanity, i.e. to work and to start a family, thus contributing to the continuity of one's own kin group, culture and society. From the point of view of psychoanalysis, the ability to succeed in one's love life is the most important life goal, which at the same time gives growth to his or her identity⁴². In resocialisation practice with former prison inmate, (though this group of people is not exceptional as regards deficiencies of self-cognition), their emotions must

⁴² Comp. Z. Freud, *Wstęp do psychoanalizy*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1984.

be extensively talked about. Various situations may be conducive for such dialogues. The most difficult thing to do is to overcome resistance against expression of one's emotions and feelings. They are often unable to name the emotional states they are going through.

– building an identity through work and activities

One of the fundamental solutions helpful in obtaining and consolidation of one's identity is being active and providing work. Activity and work generate relations between an individual and the outer world, between an individual and other people and between an individual and his or her life goals. These activities influence changes in the individual's state of mind as well as boost his or her financial and social standing. Everyday challenges created by work improve the quality of life. Facing these challenges a person can fulfil his or her desires and structure his or her life. For most of us work is a key constituent of our identity. It breeds satisfaction from being self-sufficient and, what is also important, it allows for satisfaction of consumer needs.

That is why in the case of former prison inmates, a chance to do a job is an essential factor consolidating their identity. In view of the situation on the present Polish labour market it must be acknowledged that this is not always possible. Yet, by no means has this released us from the obligation to undertake steps in search of various kinds of activities available for those people. The need should be emphasised to stimulate those interested to look for various forms of activities even if these are unpaid. Activities undertaken by the "Patronat" centre provide a good example of such solutions, in which the residents themselves search for jobs, but at any time they may count on the support of counsellors or other colleagues.

– building identity by means of strengthening family ties

The upkeep and nurturing of family ties is a very important problem for a majority of inmates during their stay in a correctional facility and after they have already been released. Unfortunately, in this sphere

there is a lack of solutions which would allow for strengthening of an inmate's contacts with his or her family. From the perspective of legislative rules - the penal code and prison regulations – a different conclusion might be arrived at. “In rehabilitation of the inmates, in respect of their rights and while requiring them to perform their duties, priority is being given to work, especially when it contributes to the acquisition of appropriate professional qualifications, as well as to training, cultural, educational and sports activities, and to the upkeep of contacts with families and external world; as well as to therapeutic measures”⁴³. There is also an acknowledgement that: „inmates who have formal custody of children, staying in educational care facilities, should – to the extent possible – be incarcerated in correctional facilities located as close as possible to the place of residence”⁴⁴, “in rehabilitation programs the following facts are established in the first place: the type of employment and training/educational background of the inmates, their relationships with families and other close persons, free time activities, chances for execution of their commitments, and other measures needed to prepare the inmate to rejoin the community”⁴⁵, “an inmate serves the sentence in a correspondent correctional facility located, to the extent possible, close to his or her place of residence. Relocation of an inmate may be effected only due to legitimate reasons”⁴⁶. Even the provisions quoted above show that the issue of strengthening of the inmate's contacts with his or her family has been acknowledged and accounted for in the Polish law. Unfortunately, these provisions are often not being put into force, which consequently results in a total breakdown of the inmate's contacts with his or her family. As a result of failure to keep up good family ties (provided that these have ever existed) or to take measures aimed at establishing and strengthening of those ties during the period of confinement, the already released inmates will never be able to get back to family life. As already mentioned above, there is a need to enhance

⁴³ The Executive Penal Code, Chapter X, Section 1, Art. 67 §3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Chapter X, Section 3, Art. 87, § 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Chapter X, Section 3, Art. 95, § 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Chapter X, Section 3, Art. 100.

practical solutions aimed at strengthening the inmate's ties with his or her family as early as during his or her prison term. Currently, activities are taken consisting in securing the inmate's contacts with children in holiday periods or on the occasion of the Children's Day. Most certainly such types of activities should not be occasional but measures should be taken to allow for regular contacts with the inmate's family. Also after the prison term, solutions are needed to facilitate rebuilding family ties. In fulfilment of this duty different types of mediation activities are very helpful. Observing former inmates returning from prison, I have noticed that usually both former inmates and their relatives are afraid of the first encounter. Out of fear, neither of the sides initiates the first meeting. Often what is enough is an assistance of a middleman, a mediator who helps them to overcome mutual fears. Certainly there are also cases where a long-term family therapy is needed to facilitate establishment and recreation of mutual trust. This certainly requires introduction of systematic solutions encompassing work with the family. Now this gap is being partially filled in by various types of organisations (such as the „Patronat” Association, “Sławek” Foundation), which are not capable of satisfying needs of all families in this area. And yet, a family, as the fundamental and the most intimate social group, could provide for the best environment for the construction and rebuilding identities of its members. The activities mentioned above related to self-cognition, being active, providing work and strengthening family ties form the basis for the process of forming, supporting and consolidation of personal and social identity of everyone.

– **Creation of circumstances which could facilitate acceptance of inmates by other people.** Acceptance by the others provides basis for self-acceptance. Thus, in a prison environment there is a need to introduce such activities which would allow prisoners to feel accepted by other people, such as by undertaking various caretaking activities serving children and the elderly, such as repairs, cleaning or snow removal.

– **Increase of prisoner’s contacts with the outer world** – An increase of contacts of stigmatised and not stigmatised people facilitates interaction. That is why isolated individuals should also have chances of frequent contacts with people from the external environment, such as with their families, as well as with student volunteers, therapists and psychologists. Only such close social and personal contacts can breed better acceptance. Only then can they feel appreciated and more self-confident which will also have an impact on their interactions after the end of the prison term.

– **Debunk myths regarding prisoners** – this is a task mainly for the mass media which are a powerful tool capable to doing this. Programmes are needed to inform about inmates’ activities, their occupations, work which is being provided by them, etc. This would allow for an increase of knowledge about life behind the bars and could neutralise negative experiences of stigmatised people.

– **Modification of teaching programs** – There is a need to supplement curricula of academic faculties preparing social workers so that they would include information about lives and needs of people incarcerated in correctional facilities as well as about problems occurring in contacts with stigmatised people.

Conclusion

Social re-adaptation of people with criminal record and former prison inmates is a complex process conditioned by various factors. It should be noted that the group of factors with heterogeneous nature impacting the situation of former prison inmates also includes circumstances connected with the process of social stigmatisation and its consequences. Individuals with criminal record have always been victims of social labelling irrespective of progressive changes in their behaviour. Labelling attitudes of social surroundings do not contribute to the elimination of criminal identity, but – on the contrary – they consolidate such

an identity, thus complicating construction of a new social- and self-identities. In the context of the solutions presented here concerning the problem of the stigmatisation of former prisoners, the society needs to realise the negative consequences of this phenomenon. For this purpose, the solutions suggested in section 4, aimed at destigmatisation, are of a special interest. Implementation of those activities would certainly contribute to reduction or complete removal of the stigma attached to former prisoners.

Abstract: Social re-adaptation of people with criminal record and former prison inmates is a complex process conditioned by various factors. This article views the concept of social stigmatisation as both a phenomenon and a process. Individuals with criminal record have always been victims of social labelling irrespective of progressive changes in their behaviour. Labelling attitudes of social surroundings do not contribute to the elimination of criminal identity, but – on the contrary – they consolidate such an identity, thus, complicating construction of a new social- and self-identities. In the context of the solutions presented in the article concerning the problem of the stigmatisation of former prisoners, the society needs to realise the negative consequences of this phenomenon.

Key words: re-adaptation, stigmatisation, former prisoners.

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