

Vocational counseling for inmates as people from special risk groups

Il counseling professionale per i detenuti come persone a rischio

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Abstract

Presented text concerns vocational counseling for persons from special risk groups, based on the example of inmates. Convicts are classified as having a special situation on the labor market. Such people often adopt a passive attitude towards seeking employment. The aim is to show how career counseling is implemented for people from special risk groups on the example of convicts. The method used was a diagnostic survey. The results showed that career counseling is a significant element in the process of professional activation of prisoners. It is a good starting point for further activities, awakens the need to raise qualifications and start work, and can contribute to the effective social readaptation of inmates.

Keywords: vocational counselling; professional activation; convicts; work; special risk group.

Sintesi

Il presente contributo affronta il tema della consulenza professionale per detenuti, considerati come persone a rischio. I detenuti vengono considerati come persone per le quali si configura una situazione particolare per quanto concerne il loro inserimento lavorativo. Sono persone che spesso adottano un atteggiamento passivo nella ricerca di un lavoro. L'obiettivo del contributo è di illustrare in che modo è svolto il "career counselling" rispetto a persone a rischio, prendendo come oggetto di analisi il cluster delle persone ristrette nella loro libertà. Il metodo utilizzato è stato quello dell'indagine diagnostica. I risultati dello studio dimostrano che il *career counselling* è una componente significativa nel processo di attivazione professionale dei detenuti. È un buon punto di partenza, risveglia la necessità di migliorare la professionalizzazione, motivare allo svolgimento di una attività lavorativa e può contribuire all'efficace reinserimento sociale dei detenuti.

Parole chiave: consulenza orientativa; attivazione professionale; detenuti; lavoro; gruppi a rischio.

1. Introduction

Persons in penitentiary units are counted among groups in a special situation on the labor market. Such persons often adopt an attitude of passivity towards seeking employment, do not have sufficient qualifications and skills to navigate the labor market. Thus, they are at risk of exclusion resulting in the inability to fulfill social, professional, family roles and also at risk of returning to crime as the only way to meet material needs.

The guiding category of the study is career counseling for inmates as a special risk group implemented in the context of their professional activation. The attractiveness of this concept comes from the fact that it overlaps with such terms as occupation and professional work, human professional development, career, professional qualifications and competencies. It is important to relate the activities in this area to the specific category of recipients of counseling and activation work, that are inmates. The article shows what is the place of counseling in the system of vocational activation and its importance for the reintegration of inmates as a special risk group. Addressing this issue is justified because of the importance of effective social and vocational reintegration and the need to seek optimal solutions in this regard. In addition, there is a lack of research in the field of vocational counseling for inmates. The material fills the gap in this area. In such a perspective, in order to improve the measures taken, it is justified to indicate the importance of counseling for the process of readaptation of inmates as a special risk group. The research conducted in 2018 and now continuing on the functioning of the system of vocational guidance for prisoners in Poland indicates the functioning and implementation of diverse guidance and activation activities for convicted persons as a group of special risk. These include projects implemented in cooperation with institutions such as labor offices, local governments or the social sector, as well as in-house programs of prison staff. The results of research to date have indicated that convicts are supported by career counselors, participate in job fairs and vocational training, and take part in numerous forms of professional activation. There are both individual benefits – for inmates – and social benefits from the implemented projects, since a person leaving prison is to some extent prepared to face the challenges of the labor market in a free environment. The analysis centers around the questions: What are the forms of vocational activation of convicts as a special risk group in the context of the functioning of the vocational counseling system for inmates in Poland? What activities and projects in the area of vocational counseling for inmates are implemented? What entities are involved in this area of activities?

The research is carried out using the method of diagnostic survey and content analysis. The techniques used are an online survey, a free-form interview directed by questions. The research tools were interview questionnaires and a survey questionnaire. The research was preceded by a procedure for obtaining permission from the Prison Service authorities. Methods of analysis and elaboration of results were description, tables and charts containing synthesized research material. Important for their preparation were field notes (Gudkova, 2012; Babbie, 2009). The study population consists of the staff of penitentiary departments employed in penitentiaries and detention centers in northern Poland. A total of 71 people in all individual inspectorates completed the questionnaire and answered the questions during the interview. The study area was all penitentiary units belonging in the organizational structure to the four inspectorates of the Prison Service located in northern Poland.

2. Theoretical remark

In the conceptual constellation of the presented considerations there are three most important categories, which together form a specific sequence: vocational counselling – vocational guidance – vocational activation – effective social readaptation.

Vocational guidance is a lifelong process in which diverse structures such as educational institutions and labor market institutions play an important role. These bodies accompany a person at various stages of his educational as well as professional development. The services provided in the field of vocational guidance are a structure of mutually co-participating activities. Counseling performs educational, supportive, educational functions and its purpose is to prepare a person to make a choice of educational and professional path, recognize strengths and weaknesses, help in self-development. Counseling activities have a socio-economic dimension and their value is determined by individual (individual) factors and social qualities. In counseling activities, the most commonly used method is the verbal method used in a direct relationship between the person being counseled and the counselor (Kukla, 2012; 2016; Siarkiewicz, 2010; Sobierajski, 2013).

The value and importance of guidance is recognized in international and national strategic documents and regulations. It is part of an ongoing process that allows citizens, regardless of their age and at any point in their lives, to identify their skills, competencies and interests, make decisions about education, training and employment, and manage their personal lives in the course of education, work and other situations in which it is possible to acquire or use these skills and competencies. Vocational guidance encompasses individual and collective activities of information, counseling, competence assessment, support and teaching of skills necessary for decision-making and career management (Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies, 2008/C 319/02).

Social readaptation is a term often used interchangeably with such words as social reintegration or rehabilitation. Although they are similar in meaning to each other they are not the same. Instead, their common element is the focus on the return of a demoralized individual to life in society. The term rehabilitation is used in the text. It is the process of influencing an individual who violates norms and rules of social coexistence posing a threat to public order and order.

Resocialization encompasses the entire spectrum of activities (therapeutic, corrective, educational), the purpose of which is to change previous behavior, instill socially acceptable and desirable principles and values, shape correct social attitudes, impart knowledge, equip with competencies and skills that allow an individual who violates the norms of social coexistence to build a system of beliefs about the need to take responsibility for their own life choices and decisions. Penitentiary rehabilitation is rehabilitation in prison. Its important goal is not only to distribute specific knowledge and recommend new styles of behavior, but also to transform character habits, remove unfavorable, antisocial and antisocial attitudes conditioning antisocial and antisocial human behavior (Konopczynski, 2006; 2013; Kalinowski, 2007; Machel, 2003).

Vocational activation is an integral component of preparing inmates to leave the penitentiary unit. It is a series of activities oriented towards preparing convicts who are a group of special risk and at risk of social exclusion to return to the open labor market.

Activities in the field of activation include diagnosis of professional predispositions and deficits of convicts, assessment of their potential, educational deficiencies, adjustment of

forms of education and vocational training to a particular convict in terms of his capabilities, teaching, vocational counseling, completion of qualifications, preparation for movement on the open labor market and self-presentation. Vocational activation results in raising the professional qualifications of convicts and filling their leisure time in a valuable way, contributes to counteracting the social exclusion of convicts, enables them to make a living from work and not from committing crimes.

Relationships between the indicated concepts are shown in Figure 1.

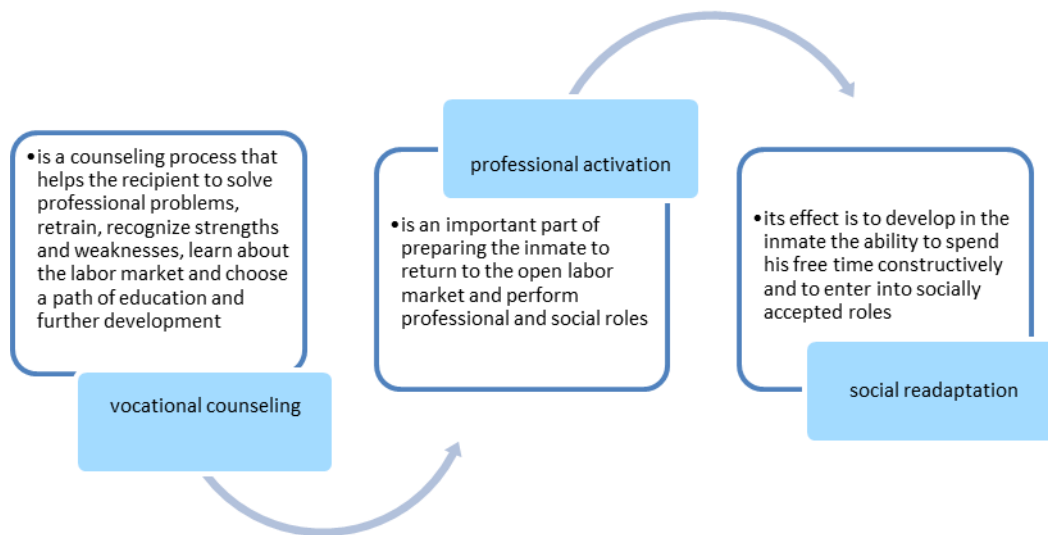


Figure. 1. Relationships between vocational counseling – vocational activation – effective social readaptation.

Under Polish law, convicts or ex-convicts can be categorized as special risk groups. Persons in a special situation on the labor market are:

- the unemployed under 30 years of age;
- the long-term unemployed;
- unemployed over 50 years of age;
- Unemployed people using social assistance benefits;
- unemployed without professional qualifications;
- unemployed with at least one child under 6 years of age or at least one disabled child under 18 years of age;
- unemployed persons with disabilities referred to as “persons in a special situation on the labor market” in the Law (Act of April 20, 2004 on employment promotion and labor market institutions, art. 49).

The complicated and difficult professional situation of the aforementioned groups is the result of a whole range of factors, both on the part of the individual and employers or the mechanisms governing the labor market.

However, the key issue inhibiting the professional activity of certain groups is stereotypes (Duda, 2010).

Career management, finding satisfying employment, setting professional goals are not easy tasks for a person. It is difficult especially under the conditions of the current reality full of

changes of economic, cultural, social nature. This is a much more complicated task for people in a special situation on the labor market including those in prison isolation.

When working with at-risk groups, a career counselor should focus on a personalized approach to each individual.

Personalizing the at-risk client is important both for the effectiveness of the counseling process and for the client himself, as it raises his self-esteem. The recipient of counseling activities feels that there is a person (a vocational counselor) who understands her difficult and complex life situation (Duda, 2010).

As it was mentioned before the importance and value of adult lifelong learning and guidance and counselling are reflected in European directives and recommendations respected also in Poland. These include the J. Delors Report of the International Commission for Education, the European Commission White Paper. Teaching and Learning. On the way to the learning society, the European Union's Blue Book - Education for Europe (follow-up to the White Paper), the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, the European Commission's report or the Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers published by the OECD (Council of Europe, 2006; Delors, 1998; European Commission, 2015; European Union, 1995; Komisja Wspólnot Europejskich, 2000; Maniak, 2015; OECDiLibrary, 2024; Ombudsman, 2024; Solarczyk-Szwec, 2014; Witek, 2008).

The indications contained in the aforementioned documents are not always reflected in penitentiary practice. The results of the research presented in this study refer to a small population and as such cannot form the basis for creating generalisations. However, it can be assumed that not all assumptions and directives are implemented in the prison reality due to the weaknesses of the penitentiary system itself, staff deficits, too many inmates or the inability to implement the systemic indications contained in the documents. In addition, it must be remembered that counselling and vocational activation is a complex and lengthy process, the evaluation of which requires time and unconventional tools. The problem may also lie with the detainees themselves: a lack of motivation on their part and a reluctance to engage in the proposed activities.

Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning and Peter Jarvis' theory of existential learning can serve as a reference point for the research conducted. Transformative learning is an adult-specific process that involves changing the way in which meaning is given to individual experience. According to Mezirow's theory, 'learning' involves changing the way we perceive and interpret reality. Concepts, beliefs, judgements and feelings are transformed. Reflective thinking plays a key role in creating these interpretations. Transformative learning occurs when a person engages in activities that allow them to perceive a different worldview. The reflective subject departs from his or her previous way of interpreting reality, makes changes in his or her own worldview and at the same time expands it. The change described is precisely a transformation of thinking. Transformations can be smaller or larger and can have a small or large impact on the life of the adult learner. Their permanence can also vary. Transformations of thinking are closely linked to a person's cognitive perspective, which consists of human experience, knowledge and socio-cultural rootedness. If the process of experiencing is consistent with the individual's frames of reference, there is no need for transformations of thinking. If, on the other hand, the 'new experience' does not fit into her systems of reference then she either 'rejects' the experience, does not believe in it, does not accept it or analyses it through critical reflection, which may lead to a change in perspective of cognition (Mezirow, 1997). The original formula, created by Jack Mezirow, has in the past and remains to this day the subject of lively discussion and deep criticism, which has resulted in multiple refinements of the

theory by the author himself. This has made the theory broader and more comprehensive (Chmielecka, 2019). Mezirow believes that critical reflection is a distinguishing feature of adult education. Only at this stage of maturity can a person interpret the validity of his or her worldview. Traditional teaching (transmission and enforcement of knowledge) is an inhibitor of the transformation of thinking. Participants in this type of education will never discover the depth of meaning, explore different worldviews and be able to achieve autonomy of thought (Ciechanowska, 2015; Mezirow, 1997; Muszyński & Wrona, 2014).

The structure used to interpret experiences is the so-called frame of reference. It is a set of human assumptions (premises) and predictions about the state of affairs subject to interpretation. In situations where the existing frame does not allow for the smooth interpretation of new experiences, it can be changed as a result of critical reflection. This can take place by changing a point of view or a mental habit. According to Mezirow, the capacity for critical reflection is the essence of adult learning and transformation is the goal of adult education (Pleskot-Machulska, 2007).

The author of the concept of existential learning theory, Peter Jarvis, places the individual, the learner who is in a particular social situation, at the centre of his reflections on the essence of learning. The main regulator of learning is the experience/social situation. Learning is directly related to the person. It is the person that is most important, not the learning outcome. The essence of this process is therefore the changing biography of the individual (Muszyński & Wrona, 2014). Jarvis' theory has undergone some significant changes over the years. The learning process is embedded in a social situation. Unlike other learning theories, it does not focus on just one selected aspect of reality. It strives for a complete description of the phenomenon of learning, thus it can be assumed to have the characteristics of a general theory containing all special cases of learning (Jarvis, 2012; Muszyński, 2013).

3. Vocational counseling for people from special risk groups on the example of inmates

In the case of people from groups at particular risk such as inmates, vocational counseling is part of their activation. Its forms are work, learning including specialized training, author's programs. At the same time, it should be recalled that although the employment of inmates is one of the methods of rehabilitation education, the rehabilitative dimension of work itself depends on the fulfillment of several conditions. Among them, the receipt of remuneration for work, the productivity of work, compatibility with the interests and qualifications of the inmate, the combination of work with vocational training, bringing social benefit, adaptation to the specific capabilities of the inmate, good organization in terms of security and supervision and evaluation of the work of inmates are important (Machel, 2003).

Work as a method of rehabilitation of convicts can be considered only when it is combined with the formation of the habit of work, the development of professional potential, the growth of knowledge, skills and professional competence (Atroszko, 2016).

Thus, the result of rehabilitation through work should be, first of all, an increase in professional skills and the formation of the need and respect for work and the conviction that it is work and not crime that is the basis for acquiring material resources (Jaworska, 2016). The European Prison Rules note that prison labor is treated as a positive element of prison rigor and is never used as a punishment. Prison authorities strive to provide

sufficiently useful work. As far as possible, the work assigned to prisoners is intended to contribute to maintaining or developing their ability to earn a normal living after release. Assignment of a particular type of work shall be made without discrimination on the basis of sex. Work that includes vocational training will be provided to prisoners who can benefit from it, especially young prisoners. Prisoners may choose the type of employment they wish to perform within the limits of employment, occupational selection and the requirements of order and discipline. The organization and methods of work in the facilities are, as closely as possible, similar to similar work in society, so as to prepare prisoners for the conditions of normal working life. Prison authorities provide work for prisoners either on their own or in cooperation with private entities inside or outside the facility. In either case, fair compensation for work is provided (Ombudsman, 2024; Council of Europe, 2024).

Analysis of data from interviews and questionnaires revealed that vocational counseling for inmates is not isolated as a separate activity but is part of the process of vocational activation in the broadest sense.

Vocational counseling is carried out as part of the author's programs carried out by the staff of the units, but also in the course of other projects that make up vocational activation including teaching, programs carried out with EU funds, employment of inmates including the government program "Work for Prisoners".

The legal basis for the implementation of these activities is the Act of August 28, 1997 on the Employment of Persons Deprived of Liberty, the Executive Penal Code Act and the Act on Employment Promotion and Labor Market Institutions, and the forms of activation of inmates undertaken and implemented in penitentiary units stem from this. Various forms of vocational activation are covered by all inmates, depending on their needs, education (or lack thereof), intellectual capabilities. The realization of activities in this area – including vocational counseling – is carried out by educators of penitentiary departments, supported by their superiors. This is included in the scope of their duties (Act of April 9, 2010, on the Prison Service).

The functioning system of activation activities for inmates is characterized by:

- timeliness and complementarity - refer to the recognition of current problems, concerns not only the situation on the labor market, diagnosis of the need for employees in specific industries or professions, forms of employment, but also such important areas as ecology, first aid skills;
- versatility - involves the training of staff in various areas including security, foreign language skills, IT, stress management which directly translates into work with convicts;
- paying attention to infrastructure – providing necessary equipment (computer, printer), access to day care centers, libraries;
- opening to cooperation with external entities.

Since 2016, the government program "Work for Prisoners" has been in operation, assumes vocational activation of inmates. It includes three main pillars: the construction of production halls in prisons, the expansion of opportunities for unpaid work by prisoners for local governments, and concessions for entrepreneurs who employ prisoners. In the study area, 12 facilities have been handed over, and about 46% of the prison population has benefited from activation (Prison Service, 2024).

The POWER program aims to increase the professional and social activity of prisoners and

increase their employability. The project is a response to the local needs of the labor markets and the professional deficits that exist there. Inmates are being trained in such professions as general construction, catering, landscaping, caretaker of the disabled, hairdresser, seamstress, welder, florist and forklift operation. More than half of the inmates are already taking up jobs while participating in the project. This form of activation was used by 350 inmates at the time of data collection (Karasiński, 2018). Another form of activation is school teaching and training and specialized vocational courses. There were 18 continuing education centers in operation. These are public institutions, operating in accordance with the Education Law. Schools that are part of the Center are adult schools that follow the same basic curriculum and programs as *freedom* schools. Course training is organized primarily for convicts completing their sentences in order to increase their chances of gainful employment after leaving prison, thereby reducing the phenomenon of recidivism. Training courses are organized in consultation with labor offices, and their scope is adjusted to the needs of the local labor market (Prison Service, 2023).

Activities carried out jointly with external entities are very complex in nature. They combine the transfer of professional content with the diagnosis of the potential and capabilities of inmates. They are also correlated with work on time management skills, writing official documents, organizing time, acquiring skills for dealing with problem situations and professional stress. They combine the transfer of professional content with the diagnosis of inmates' potential and capabilities. They are also correlated with work on time management skills, writing official documents, organizing time, acquiring skills for dealing with problem situations and professional stress. In addition, classes on assertiveness or effective group communication and self-presentation are integrated into the activities undertaken. The results of the survey indicate a comprehensive approach of the entities involved in activation activities for convicts to the process of vocational activation of inmates. These activities include a variety of components and are carried out with the help of various available tools. It should be remembered that the current situation in the labor market is associated with high instability of employment. One can also speak of a situation in which there is a temporary lack of work. Pointing out these aspects to inmates is an important element of the guidance activities carried out by educators of penitentiary departments and people representing external institutions with which they cooperate. Although it is possible to talk about the varied aspects of the proposed solutions (positive, neutral and negative), there is a growing awareness among the staff of penitentiary units and in this area, and the prevailing conviction is that activities in the area of counseling have a positive impact on inmates.

An important place in this area is occupied by proprietary programs in this area. One of the areas and activities undertaken as part of these projects is vocational counseling. The programs include meetings with a vocational counselor. Their purpose is to help recognize strengths and weaknesses, arouse motivation for change, stimulate mobilization, break marasm and passivity, life activation. These activities, as well as others in this area, result from the provisions of the law, including regulations of a higher order as well as orders of the Director of the Prison Service (Act of June 6, 1997 Executive Penal Code; Order No. 19/16 of the Director General of the Prison Service, dated April 14, 2016, on detailed rules for conducting and organizing penitentiary work and scopes of activities of officers and employees of penitentiary and therapeutic departments and penitentiary wards).

An example of the author's project being implemented is the Program for vocational activation of convicts through participation in individual and group vocational counseling classes at the Gdańsk-Przeróbka Prison. According to the assumptions of the program,

convicts are to learn to recognize their own professional potential, define professional and educational goals, form positive self-esteem and acquire job-seeking skills. The program is based on a counseling process aimed at intensifying the resolution of the inmate's difficulties.

Implementation of the activity is carried out by providing information about the labor market, employers' requirements for employees, the rights and duties of the unemployed, the services of the labor office or defining professional problems and clearly defining the goal. The project is carried out in the form of both individual and group classes. Participants in the program include convicts who are serving their sentences for the first time, adults and juveniles. It is important to take into account the specific difficulties of inmates as a group at risk.

Many convicts have low education and have not functioned in the labor market. The inmates have never been professionally active or have had a very long break in employment, often lasting several years. Therefore, the goals of the program are primarily to recognize one's own professional resources, to define educational, professional, personal goals to be achieved after release, to transform one's perception of oneself in the labor market, to show the value of taking a job legally, to build positive self-esteem. Important goals also include acquiring the ability to search for a job, prepare application documents or talk to an employer, as well as developing social skills such as assertiveness and interpersonal communication. The addressees of the program are primarily those who voluntarily express interest in participating in the project and convicts who have deficiencies and problems in terms of motivation to take up employment after leaving the penitentiary unit, inadequate self-esteem in relation to their qualifications, lack of education and/or professional experience, orientation in terms of further professional, educational plans, deficit of skills in navigating the labor market and preparing documents, conversations with employers. Implementation of the program is carried out using such methods as lecture, mini-lecture, discussion, brainstorming, modeling, role play, individual and group exercises, case study, multimedia and film projections. The designed classes include a series of eight meetings in individual or group format. Each participant takes part in two individual and six group meetings according to the program. The meetings cover topics related to identifying professional difficulties, identifying initial professional goals, assessing attitudes toward the future and the past, career planning and self-perception. The result of the individual meetings is an Individual Action Plan. Group meetings are devoted to such issues as self-presentation in relation to the job interview, the balance of professional resources, the formation of positive self-esteem, the drafting of application documents, labor market conditions and ways to seek employment, the importance of social skills in seeking and maintaining employment and functioning after leaving prison. An external entity involved in the program is the District Labor Office in Gdansk. During the meetings there is a presentation of the situation on the local labor market and employment offers, a presentation of the principles of registration in the PUP, training, the principles of granting grants for starting a business and other services of the office to people leaving prisons or the principles of granting benefits to ex-convicts. Comprehensive career counseling (carried out individually and in groups, with the participation of representatives of the labor market) is a factor that allows inmates to build a realistic, concrete vision of their professional future after release, and thus will reduce the risk of recidivism. Depending on the individual needs of the participants, the topics taken up can be freely changed (Ciesielska-Dowgiallo, 2018).

Another program used is the *Skills-Work-Future* project implemented at the Malbork

Penitentiary. This is a project in the field of vocational activation and employment promotion addressed to inmates. Implementation of the project involves the participation of persons deprived of liberty in workshop classes. Their goal is primarily to prepare them to enter the labor market and actively seek work and thus increase their chances for social readaptation and deter recidivism. The assumptions of the project also include raising the range of skills in communication, self-presentation, group work, acquiring skills necessary on the labor market in the field of job interviewing, arousing the motivation of inmates for personal development, leveling the phenomenon of learned helplessness, forming a sense of responsibility, self-control and self-discipline, awakening in convicts the will to cooperate in the formation of socially desirable attitudes, building conditions for readaptation through the creation of positive life motivation, building a proper system of values, a sense of purpose and meaning of life. The purpose of the program is also to arouse motivation to use the acquired knowledge, to make a change in the typical negative image of an employer often functioning in convicts, to shape positive self-esteem, to recognize strengths and weaknesses, to acquire knowledge about the functioning of the labor market, to learn the principles of preparing application documents, writing on the computer, self-presentation. Implementation of the program is carried out using lectures in combination with exercises, tests and trainings. A career counselor from the District Labor Office in Malbork participates in the activities of the program. The program uses brainstorming, training activities, mini-lectures introducing the issue at hand, working in small groups, workshop activities in sub-groups, group games and activities, guided conversations and discussions, and summaries of the main parts by the facilitator (Morozowska, 2011; 2015).

Career counseling activities for inmates are synthesized in the Figure 2.

Counseling activities		Joint
District Inspectorate of Prison Service Gdańsk	Interviews with inmates, POWER, training, labor market workshops, meetings with career counselors from labor offices, individual and group meetings within the framework of vocational activation programs.	Vocational guidance is a component of activation activities; cooperation with external entities; vocational courses with a vocational activation module are implemented; staff determination.
District Inspectorate of Prison Service Olsztyn	Vocational courses, prison job clubs, meetings with career counselors, open counseling days, participation in national career week.	
District Inspectorate of Prison Service Koszalin	POWER, social readaptation programs, meetings with employees of the District Labor Office, vocational activation with vocational courses.	
District Inspectorate of Prison Service Szczecin	POWER, re-socialization programs, individual meetings (depending on the needs and deficits of convicts in this area) and group "Pre-release workshops".	

Figure 2. Career counseling activities for inmates as a special risk group.

Addressed to convicts, vocational counseling in itself is not a factor of readaptation success, but the conditions in which the activities are implemented are, and this is related to a specific system of reinforcement and motivation. Inmates receive support in solving problems related to education and professional work, obtaining up-to-date information on the labor market, retraining, choosing the direction of education and profession.

Effective assistance from a vocational counselor for people in vulnerable groups should be

focused on such activities as:

- active forms of job search;
- preparation of an individual action plan;
- support in identifying the client's strengths;
- distribution of knowledge in the area of methods of professional decision-making;
- diagnosis of professional predispositions;
- positive attitude of the client to the search for work and professional activity (Duda, 2010, p. 352).

International research concerning on investigation the perceptions of prisoners regarding work rehabilitation and career counseling and provide the necessary guidance indicate that rehabilitation, education and counseling in prison is a very important factor which will prevent a future relapse in criminal activities. Imprisoned people find degree is a crucial asset for finding a job. Besides it the activities connected with activation especially seems to contribute to their future educational development and progress. Many prisoners look forward to find a job and others to continue their training, in order to expand their knowledge (Brinia & Stouri, 2016).

Results of other research shows that vocational training in custody plays important role in finding and securing work after leaving prison. Imprisoned people who had attended vocational training in prison were more likely to securing employment shortly after release (Brunton-Smith & Hopkins, 2014).

Career guidance can be used as a device to expand the range of opportunities for all people, decrease inequalities, to deconstruct the stigmatizations and the stereotypes which tend to relegate specific social categories to particular working niches. It may also offer people the chance to express their diversities and differences (Zarbo, Zammitti, Lodi, & Magnano, 2023).

Newly released data doubles down on what we've reported before: Formerly incarcerated people face huge obstacles to finding stable employment, leading to detrimental society-wide effects. Considering the current labor market, there may be plenty of jobs available, but they don't guarantee stability or economic mobility for this vulnerable population (Wang & Bertram, 2022).

4. Conclusion

Inmates belong to special risk groups. They constitute a specific group of recipients of vocational guidance activities. Their peculiar *uniqueness* derives from the fact of being in conditions of isolation, serving a sentence of imprisonment, limiting contact with the outside world. In addition, inmates are a group often educationally neglected, with deficits in qualifications, education, skills possessed. Such people are particularly at risk of exclusion from the labor market and social life.

There is a lack of research on vocational counseling for people in prisons and detention centers, and meanwhile this very large group (there are currently 73.822 inmates in Polish penitentiary units) is in a special situation on the labor market and in an unusual, unfamiliar reality for many people. They also need special support in gaining new knowledge about themselves, acquiring skills to navigate the open labor market, educational opportunities in isolation and after release.

Vocational counseling for inmates means arousing motivation for change, providing support in recognizing strengths and weaknesses, awakening the need for self-education and taking up work, implementing self-reliance and self-discipline.

Vocational counseling for inmates as a special risk group is a good starting point for further activities, awakening inmates' need to improve their skills, stimulating them to break with their criminal past, take responsibility for themselves and others, and participate in social life. It can also – extremely importantly – significantly strengthen and consolidate the conditions already in place as a starting point for breaking with a criminal lifestyle and reinforce socially desirable transformations. It is also an opportunity for effective social reintegration and sustainable return to the labor market and training as their beneficiaries.

It is difficult to state unequivocally whether there are any weaknesses or drawbacks in the solutions used. Certainly, the nomenclature used is a significant problem. By prison staff, vocational activation activities are not called a system. They are realised in multiple ways, including by self-improvement of the staff, but they do not form a structure. Moreover, in the implementation of projects in the area of activation, the staff faces difficulties. These include the diversity of the intellectual level and age of the convicts and the problems of adapting the pace and level of work to the capabilities of the participant. A significant difficulty is also the lack of flow of information between individual units on the implemented activities. In addition, personnel and financial deficits are a very serious problem. The issue is the lack of sufficient material resources for the implementation of convict activation projects. Although all educators implement readaptation programmes – including in the field of professional activation – staff shortages hinder the implementation of the whole available spectrum of activities.

According to an educator from one of the detention centres, it would be better to delegate a person from among the staff who would be responsible only for the area of professional activation, including guidance and counselling. This would enable individual meetings with detainees, which would consequently translate into the effectiveness of readaptation projects. In the opinion of the counselor, individual counselling brings better results than workshops and group work. It is possible to adapt counselling activities to individual needs.

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