Bridging the gap between prisons and society; revisiting mental health, addiction, and education

Colmare il divario tra carcere e società; rivisitare la salute mentale, la dipendenza, e l'istruzione

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Abstract

This paper explores the complexities of the penitentiary system, focusing on the mental health of inmates and ex-inmates both within prison settings and in society, as well as the societal stigma that follows their mental state. It focuses on Italy, Cyprus, Malta, and Hungary, with occasional comparisons for optimal comprehension. Additionally, the article challenges traditional views on crime, punishment, and societal reintegration, advocating for a balanced approach, combining both humanistic and behaviouristic methods, for effective rehabilitation. Another issue that is tackled is substance use inside the prison settings, addiction treatment, the cultural background that affects these attitudes and the encouragement of further education for better prevention. Finally, the subject of education inside prison settings is being discussed, which affects critically the nature and goals of the penitentiary system. Current practices are reviewed and a vision that includes enhanced education, reduced societal stigma, and evolved mental health care in the penitentiary system is presented.

Keywords: prison; mental health; addiction; education; rehabilitation.

Sintesi

Questo studio esplora le complessità del sistema penitenziario, concentrandosi sulla salute mentale dei detenuti e degli ex detenuti sia all'interno degli ambienti carcerari che nella società, nonché sullo stigma sociale che segue il loro stato mentale. Lo studio si concentra su Italia, Cipro, Malta e Ungheria, con confronti occasionali per una comprensione ottimale. Inoltre, sfida le visioni tradizionali sul crimine, sulla punizione e sulla reintegrazione sociale, sostenendo un approccio equilibrato, che combini metodi umanistici e comportamentistici, per una riabilitazione efficace. Un'altra questione affrontata riguarda l'uso di sostanze all'interno degli ambienti carcerari, il trattamento delle dipendenze, il background culturale che influenza questi atteggiamenti e l'incoraggiamento a un'ulteriore formazione su questi temi per una migliore prevenzione. Infine, viene analizzato il tema dell'educazione all'interno degli ambienti penitenziari, che incide in modo critico sulla natura e sulle finalità del sistema penitenziario. Vengono esaminate le pratiche attuali e viene presentata una visione che include una migliore istruzione, una riduzione dello stigma sociale e un'assistenza sanitaria mentale evoluta nel sistema penitenziario.

Parole chiave: prigione; salute mentale; dipendenza; istruzione; riabilitazione.

1. Introduction: the mental health approach

The penitentiary system has numerous aspects that need to be examined thoroughly, not only for the sake of shedding light into them, but, more importantly, for raising awareness and encouraging further studies and innovative methods to evolve them. In this specific section, the subject of interest will be the issue of mental health inside and outside prison settings, and how this translates into indirect attitudes, reactions, and ways of thinking, both for inmates and ex-inmates. The goal of this paper is to challenge the conventional way of thinking about breaking the law and committing a crime, the consequences of those actions and the way they are handled by those responsible for enforcing the law.

A particularly important aspect to be addressed are prevailing opinions regarding not only inmates, but also those that have served their sentence and were released back into society. The penitentiary systems that are taken into consideration are those that belong to Italy, Cyprus, Malta, and Hungary, thus societal beliefs examined will be concentrated in these parts of Europe. The problem of stigma and labelling that comes outside prison premises, along with the other side of the coin, the self-stigma and self-labelling, is a very prominent one, especially if we are considering the historical, socioeconomical and political background of each country, along with their relationship with the penitentiary institution. It certainly is an especially prominent issue, since the dynamic interaction between the penitentiary system and the rest of society is crucial to how both sides are evolving.

The added dimension of society is particularly prominent in the perception of mental health as a concept in general, since people do not lose their human identity the moment they are in prison, as opposed to how a significant majority of people may view them. To examine mental health as a general matter is quite beneficial because it acts as a base for our further developed theories about how society views mental health problems specifically in prison settings. The fact that mental health support exists in the penitentiary system is already quite an important development, but it is merely the first step in achieving a better grasp of inmates' needs.

It is also noteworthy that the psychological approach in prison always used to be inclined towards behaviouristic methods, and only recently it has started to change into a more humanistic one. The subject to be addressed in this situation is the question whether one or the other should prevail, or if in fact it is more beneficial to let both be applied in equal amounts, to achieve a specific level of balance.

Last, but certainly not least, returning to the issue of mental health support in prison, the reliability of the support needs to be questioned, as well as the true role of the penitentiary system in society. Is the system's first responsibility to keep the inmates safe from societal prejudice and focus on their well-being and rehabilitation, or to keep society safe from the inmates perceived as a threat?

1.1. Stigma, labelling and society: a punishing mirror

As previously mentioned, the dimension of society plays a crucial part in how the self-image is built in inmates. If this can be observed from a broader perspective, we can comfortably state as our theoretical basis that humans are social creatures by nature, as Aristotle has said. That can be translated into the fact that humans evolve through constant interaction. Scaling down our perspective, it is quite visible that inmates have a specific idea of how they are in character, which is a combination of the way they perceive themselves, along with how society has built beliefs and prejudices about prison. This creates a fertile environment for stigma to appear, as well as labels. Precisely because this

is the cycle followed due to societal interaction, stigma and labelling will eventually turn into self-stigma and self-labelling, which may well be transformed into an irreversible self-fulfilling prophecy. Elaborating further on this definition, it is a process where an originally false expectation leads to the confirmation of it (Jussim, 2024). We cannot always confirm whether that starting expectation matches the targeted person's personality, but expectations are not set in stone either way, so it is not considered as a suggested stance towards the inmates, since most of them are negative, so the outcome is unfortunate in most cases.

Italy, Cyprus, Malta, and Hungary are all different in the way they react to law offenders, depending on a range of factors, as is the way they are represented in media, the historical background of each country, and how each society is built. Therefore, it seems reasonable for various reactions to exist, and a different quality of stigma to be developed.

One particularly significant factor for the way society views inmates and ex-inmates is the level of forgiveness and empathy. A lack of deeper understanding regarding the state of imprisonment is a reasonable explanation for this, but in no means does it imply that it should be excused. The lack of information and contact with these marginalized groups is certainly a major and recurring issue, however it has shown significant improvement over the years. For example, the program Convicts Upskilling Pathways (CUP) is aiding ex-inmates' quality of rehabilitation, with one of its main targets being the reduction and hopefully eradication of societal stigma, and the creation of a better environment for them (Humanrights360, 2022).

Another substantial factor is the fact that inmates internalize the way the prison personnel and society is treating them, assuming the new identity they are forced to adopt due to the way they are treated. Italy has an intense sense of punishment for the crime committed, Hungary has tendencies of austerity towards the inmates' treatment , and Malta and Cyprus are societies of a much smaller and more limited scale, which results to an increased risk of the people serving their time in prison to be known among many people by name, making it significantly more difficult to adjust in society after their release. In addition to these circumstances, for example in Malta, the personnel do not care for strengthening the bond between them and the inmates, which results to a less supportive stance towards them, projecting their negative views upon them and making the distance between them greater overall (Scalpello, 2022). The self-fulfilling prophecy is the phenomenon flourishing from these circumstances, and with good reasoning. The main target of rehabilitation should be a step towards helping ex-inmates readjust to a better version of themselves, which is not achieved under these conditions. A very distinct example of this situation is that Hungarian prisons do not let their inmates come into physical contact with their visitors during their permitted visits, with a plastic wall separating them, and as a result violating their human right in respect of their private life (Benakis, 2024). The Hungarian authorities are exceptionally security centred, which results to the inmates' self-image deteriorating drastically due to the interaction they absorb from their surroundings.

1.2. Mental health perception and in-prison aid

The concept of mental health is one of many concerns, and as time goes on, the importance of it is being recognized increasingly. Its theoretical recognition differs from the practical, however, since its implementation proves to be challenging at times. Mental health literacy is significantly connected to the number of informative programmes being executed and the close contact with people with mental disorders, as is proved from a variety of research. For example, one study in Italy shows that the knowledge regarding mental disorders

correlates strongly with first and second relatives with mental issues (Pingani et al., 2019), as well as additional research in Cyprus shows that being informed from mental health programmes is helping towards a better attitude towards mental illnesses and reduces stigma (Nikolaou & Petkari, 2022).

There is an incredibly significant percentage of people who face a mental illness or multiple while incarcerated, a fact which should not be ignored. In fact, mental disorders affect 32.8% of the prison population in general, making it the most prevalent condition amongst prisoners, and these results are underrepresented, since many cases are ignored or not properly recorded, while the most common cause of death is by suicide (WHO, 2023).

In Italy, an annual report in 2019 showed that 27.6% of prisoners are in psychiatric therapy, and 41% of the pathologies are mental disorders. The penitentiary system provides inmates in Italian prisons with "mental health units," where people can be admitted for a maximum of 30 days, while the purpose of these units' existence is therapy, rehabilitation, and readjustment. Theory distances itself from practice, however, since it is mostly used as containment of the inmates and reinforces pharmacological therapy, mostly focused on the principles of order and safety rather than catering to the individual needs of each person. For this purpose, inside the mental health units there are "smooth cells" which appear as rooms that lack any type of furniture, only including a squat toilet. Even though these rooms are strongly suggested to be used by mentally ill patients only for a couple of hours, many reports have shown that there have been cases where there was containment in them for up to 20 hours (Centonze, 2021). Additionally, in a more recent topic, those who suffer from a mental illness and commit a crime, are given a custodial order, and serve their admission in the so-called Residenza per la Esecuzione delle Misure di Sicurezza (REMS). Those facilities have improved the circumstances around the mental health issue in Italy, but once again are met with quite a few disadvantages, one being the focus on a psychiatric approach, another being the lack of slots provided, making for a quite extended waiting lists, and lastly, mental and physical exhaustion of the mental health workers (Di Mizio et al., 2022). Finally, mental health staff in Italian prisons are not permanently working on the premises but are always called in when needed from outside sources.

In Hungary, Malta, and Cyprus the mental health department inside the prison settings is severely understaffed, with a ratio of 200:1 for Hungary, a 100:1 for Malta (Blaauw et al., 2000), and just one permanent psychologist in the Cyprus prison. Additionally, in 2000 it was noted that prisons in Hungary did not screen the newly arrived prisoners for mental disorders, whilst in Malta there is a separate screening process provided for substance abuse. In Hungary, there are some prisons that provide "Curing and Educating Groups," with 483 beds for inmates suffering from mental health issues, while the seriously mentally ill are examined in the "Forensic Observatory Institute" that provides 311 beds only for those coming from the prison environment. Malta, on the other hand, has a division in Mount Carmel Hospital with 18 beds for the same reason (ibidem).

1.3. Humanistic versus behaviouristic approach: a "fight" for override

The humanistic and behaviouristic approaches offer contrasting perspectives and methods for addressing issues within prison settings, particularly concerning rehabilitation, and mental health. Each approach has its unique principles, techniques, and potential benefits. For many years, the dominance of the behaviouristic tendencies regarding the penitentiary system was evident. The behaviouristic approach is grounded in the principles of behaviourism, which focuses on observable behaviours and the ways they are learned and reinforced through interactions with the environment. It emphasizes the role of external

stimuli and reinforcement in shaping behaviour and habits. Inside the prison settings, this approach can be applied through structured programmes that use reinforcement to encourage positive behaviours, teaching inmates specific skills and behaviours through modelling and reinforcement (e.g., anger management, social skills training), implementing systems where rewards are associated with positive behaviour, and using consistent and fair punishment for rule violations to discourage negative behaviour.

In recent years, the need for a more humanistic approach inside prison settings is apparent, while significant steps have been made towards this direction. This approach focuses on individual potential, personal growth, and self-actualization. It emphasizes the inherent worth and dignity of each person and seeks to provide supportive and empathetic environments where individuals can thrive. The main principle is the holistic perspective it provides, more specifically considering the whole person, including emotions, thoughts, and experiences, focused on personal growth and self-motivation rather than external rewards or punishments, professionals provide non-judgmental support and understanding, individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their decisions and actions, and to discover personal strengths and potential. This approach exists inside prisons through therapeutic programmes, that include counselling and therapy, focused on personal growth, self-understanding, and emotional healing, thus creating a supportive prison environment, rehabilitation programmes that encourage self-reflection, self-improvement, and personal development, and opportunities for inmates to develop skills and pursue interests that enhance their self-worth and future prospects.

An appropriate example of implementing a combination of the two approaches is the Hungarian prisons, up to a point, where the inmates are participating in activities including art therapy and study circles, that enhance their communication skills and heal their nervous system, along with several religious missions that encourage resolving spiritual conflicts. Simultaneously, they are thoroughly educated regarding their sense of responsibility, and, as a result, their self-esteem, to fully comprehend the weight of their actions (Hungarian Prison Service, 2020). Once again, theory has a certain distance from practice since this is only the ideal situation set as a goal.

Not one approach should prevail significantly over the other. Extremes are always harmful, and there needs to be a careful combination of both in a way that it can support every aspect of the penitentiary system. The humanistic aspects are helpful for the enhancement of the psychological and emotional support provided, as well as catering to individual needs, especially to those who suffer from mental health issues, while the behaviouristic traits can offer a structured and stable progress in the change of behaviour. Combining these approaches allows for addressing both the underlying emotional requirements and the behavioural aspects of rehabilitation, promoting a more holistic and effective approach to inmate care and re-adjustment.

1.4. Mental health reliability and prison's role in society

As was previously stated, the mental health support provided in the countries examined is not consistent or stable. There are many factors that must be considered, and diversity in the prison society urges to be cared for. For instance, in Italian prisons there is a distinct issue regarding foreign inmates. Research has shown that 31.6% of the prisoners in Italy are foreigners, and that results in this significant percentage of people having unique needs, due to the language barrier and the cultural and religious differences. Along with this issue, follows the rehabilitation problem, which is even more troubling for this group, since they do not have a home or a job to return to upon release. This also impacts alternative forms

of punishment, including home detention. Additionally, they face a double stigma, not only as foreigners, but also as ex-prisoners (Ravagnani & Romano, 2024). That plays a big part in the suicide rates inside the prison, with 15.5 in 10000 prisoners committing. Since 2000, 1240 people have committed suicide in prison, and more than 1000 acts of self-harm are recorded every year (Associazione Antigone, 2022).

There are several issues that prison personnel must be trained and informed about, especially regarding mental health. In addition to other mental disorders or general issues that inmates are facing even before their arrest, there are also the lingering mental consequences that appear inside. The most prevalent syndrome that has come to the surface as a discussion in the later years is the Post Incarceration Syndrome (PICS), or more commonly called the "prison syndrome". Even though there are no further approved theories over subtypes of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), there is an increasing discussion about approving the existence of them, with PICS included in this group. Symptoms of this assumed syndrome include intrusion, hyper arousal, persistent avoidance, emotional numbing, and they are all included in PTSD symptoms. Other not included symptoms are feelings of alienation and the sense of fleeting freedom. Naturally, it has been observed that the longer the imprisonment, the more likely it is to exhibit these symptoms (Liem & Kunst, 2013).

A representative example of lack of appropriate informing and training on prison premises regarding mental health can be found in Malta. Malta's only prison, Corradino Correctional Facility (CCF), has been accused of the lack of support provided and the disrespectful attitude towards the inmates from prison personnel, including only selected instances of special treatment that were directed to specific individuals, according to their outside connections. The main actors with most responsibility in prison are prison officers, that are not trained adequately in caring on a personalized level about inmates. It seems reasonable, since they are overworked, exhausted and they tend to project their trauma due to their line of work, along with their lack of appropriate education on the mental aspect. As a result, prisoners feel dehumanized, are not provided with the mental support needed, and that leads to more mental issues (Scalpello, 2022).

All countries mentioned aim towards a balance in terms of the prison's role in society, oscillating between keeping society safe from inmates and protecting inmates from societal beliefs. In all four of them there is an increasing interest towards the quality of rehabilitation and the reduction of stigma, but it is also a utopian theory that needs a lot of funding and support from the countries themselves to achieve it. With the stigma existing in increased levels still, the prison's role unfortunately gravitates more towards working as a form of containment of the "dangerous people".

1.5. Mental health approach: conclusions

In summary, we can conclude that the system has complex layers that need thorough exploration, particularly concerning mental health inside and outside prison settings. By focusing on the mental health of inmates and ex-inmates, this paper aims to challenge traditional views on crime, punishment, and societal reintegration. Mental health support in prisons is essential but often insufficient, especially after release. The evolution from behaviouristic to humanistic approaches within prisons suggests that a balanced combination of both is crucial for effective rehabilitation.

There is a dire need for system changes, to be able to go forth with further developments. For instance, alternative methods of punishment must be encouraged, so that the

overcrowding issue can be faced more effectively. In all the above-mentioned countries alternatives have been encouraged, such as suspended imprisonment, probation, and parole, as well as community service and reparation work. The issue derives from lack of practical use, for example in Hungary, the system is focusing more on the increase of prisons rather than implementing alternative ways of punishment, and the lack of alternative methods is showing in results of research that notes the increase of fining and decrease of social service work (Arato, 2022). In Italy, on the other hand, home detention is maintained for sentences under 18 months.

Mental health stigma must be eradicated first to move towards better mental health in prison. There are three main ways to face this issue, which are education, protest, and contact. Even though research showed that protest is not as effective, educating society about mental disorders and bringing people in contact with those suffering from them is proven to be beneficial for attitude change and eradication of societal stigma (Corrigan et al., 2001).

The prison's role in society in these countries wavers between protecting society from perceived threats and shielding inmates from societal prejudices. To achieve a balance, substantial efforts are needed to improve mental health support, reduce stigma, and enhance the rehabilitation process. This article underlines the necessity of continued study and innovative methods to evolve the penitentiary system towards a more humane and effective institution.

2. Substance use and prevention: introduction

While addressing mental health challenges and encouraging systemic alterations, the practice of effective drug programmes both within communities and prison settings emerges as a matter to be examined thoroughly. Drug programmes implemented in community and prisons have separate but interconnected objectives, with the goal of tackling substance misuse, addiction, and associated problems. Within societal contexts, drug programmes commonly cover a range of efforts including prevention, education, treatment, and rehabilitation (Smith & Borden, 2020). Conversely, within correctional facilities, programmes tend to prioritise rehabilitation, recidivism reduction, and the comprehensive support of incarcerated individuals struggling with substance use disorders (Mitchell et al., 2012).

2.1. Drug prevention in prison settings

Drug prevention initiatives in prisons aim to reduce drug use and promote healthier lifestyles. One approach involves implementing comprehensive substance abuse treatment programmes tailored to inmates' unique needs. These programmes include counselling, group therapy, instructional sessions, and relapse prevention planning (ibidem).

Such programmes address the root causes of substance misuse, equipping inmates with resources to overcome addiction, reduce relapse risk, and ease reintegration post-release. Screening procedures, like the Addiction Severity Index (ASI), assess addiction severity and identify mental health conditions (NIDA, 2018). Detoxification treatments, including medical monitoring and pharmaceutical interventions, manage withdrawal safely (ibidem).

Evidence-based treatments, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), motivational interviewing (MI), and contingency management (CM), help modify maladaptive

behaviours and foster rehabilitation (ibidem). Psychoeducational sessions enhance inmates' understanding of addiction, coping strategies, and relapse prevention (ibidem). Peer support groups, like Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), provide shared experiences and interpersonal skill development (ibidem).

Therapeutic communities (TCs) in prisons offer structured environments emphasizing mutual aid and accountability (De Leon, 2000). TCs use cognitive-behavioural strategies to promote behavioural change, address criminogenic risk factors, and prepare inmates for reintegration (Vandevelde et al., 2004). Interventions include relapse prevention plans, vocational training, and community support access (De Leon, 2000).

2.2. Society-based drug programmes

To ensure the effectiveness of drug programmes that are based in society, it is crucial to consider various essential variables. Society-based drug programmes encompass a range of activities that aim to tackle the issue of substance abuse and addiction within a particular community or society. These programmes acknowledge that substance abuse is compounded by a multitude of social, economic, and environmental issues, rather than being exclusively an individual concern.

Society-based drug programmes frequently incorporate preventive measures with the goal of diminishing the onset of drug consumption among young individuals and susceptible demographics. These initiatives may encompass instructional campaigns conducted in schools, community centres, and other public venues to enhance public knowledge regarding the hazards of substance addiction and advocate for the adoption of healthy habits. A prime example of a well-known preventative approach done in schools across numerous countries is the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) programme.

The importance of prevention and education cannot be overstated in ensuring the effective outcome of such projects. The utilization of evidence-based preventative measures that target individuals, families, schools, and communities can be beneficial in this context. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2018) emphasizes that successful prevention strategies prioritize the development of protective factors, the enhancement of resilience, and the promotion of healthy behaviours.

For society-based drug programmes to be successful, it is necessary to establish strong community support networks. Individuals who are in recovery can benefit from these networks because they help decrease the social stigma that is associated with addiction as well as provide them with a sense of belonging and connection. Support groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, play a crucial role in the process of providing those who are attempting to overcome addiction with alternatives to acquire encouragement and support from their peers.

To address the root causes of substance misuse and improve access to treatment and support, society-based drug programmes often advocate for legislative and regulatory changes. Advocacy efforts may focus on topics like drug decriminalization, expanding treatment options, and funding prevention and intervention programmes. Equally important is promoting policy and legal reforms that prioritize public health approaches. Strategies include decriminalizing drug possession, replacing imprisonment with treatment, and implementing evidence-based drug policies (IDPC, 2022).

2.3. Drug rehabilitation programmes adjusting to real-life settings

It is strongly advised that rehabilitation programmes incorporate interventions that are substantiated by empirical evidence. The efficacy of therapies such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), contingency management, and medication-assisted treatment (MAT) in addressing substance use disorders is suggested by the NIDA (2018). It is crucial that programmes adhere to the guidelines for clinical practice issued by trustworthy organizations such as the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (Samhsa).

Exhibit cultural competence by recognizing and valuing the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the participants. The principles for culturally competent therapy, as outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017), underscore the need of comprehending cultural elements that impact individuals' tendencies to seek assistance and their choices for treatment. Rehabilitation programmes can strive to meet or exceed the standards set by similar programmes in real-life settings by adhering to these principles and standards. This will ultimately enhance results for people with addictions to substances.

3. Education inside prison settings

The subject of the educational opportunities given inside prison settings is deeply entwined with the mental health issue as well, since access to education can serve as a powerful tool for rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism among inmates, as well as personal growth in general. In the world of education, prison education plays a vital role in the reintegration of prisoners in penal institutions. Its aim is to reintegrate criminals back into society in a way that minimises the chances of recidivism. Rehabilitation, reintegration, and reduction of recidivism are key to returning to society (Miklósi et al., 2023).

Lifelong learning has also become an issue for prisons. The educators want to provide inmates with the knowledge that is essential for employability, social interaction, and integration. An open and flexible approach is needed, which allows for continuous skills development (Molnár, 2020).

Different skills can be acquired in different areas. Formal, vocational, and informal education is possible. One of the most important factors in this process is the person himself, including the teachers, the prisoners, and the prison officers. To develop an effective system, it is necessary to know the background and experience of the prisoners, otherwise many problems may arise during training. A significant number of prisoners do not have the necessary skills, knowledge, education, or marketable professional skills. For these reasons, it is also extremely important that they could acquire and develop these skills during their sentence (Miklósi et al., 2023).

The cornerstone of effective reintegration is to enable prisoners to return to work as soon as possible after serving their sentence, and the most effective way to achieve this is through education. There are various reasons for early school leaving, including the fact that people from poor financial backgrounds and minorities can easily find themselves in the company of others who encourage them to drop out of school, engage in deviant behaviour or even commit crimes. For these reasons, these groups need to be treated with particular care and attitude in education to avoid under-schooling (Molnár, 2020).

Nowadays, prison educators are increasingly turning to higher education in the field of pedagogy. They are looking to acquire new expertise and to deepen their existing knowledge in the first- or second-degree course. Students regularly visit prisons to observe

how the system works, the process, quality and possibilities of education and training. This is particularly important for training in prison, as teachers have a huge responsibility. If their attitude and preparedness are inadequate, it can easily become detrimental to their effectiveness (Csóti, 2011).

The situation is similar outside the prison walls, because if educators in basic and higher education do not have the right ability, this can easily lead to dropouts, which can result in under-education and criminalisation. Reading difficulties are also a problem in Europe, with one in five young people under the age of 15 struggling with this problem and one in seven leaving school early. These factors are detrimental to their later quality of life, as under-educated young people find it difficult – if not impossible – to find a job. Lack of adequate skills and lack of employment can lead to financial problems, which can easily lead to delinquency (Torlone & Vryonides, 2016).

For people sentenced to imprisonment, one of the essential prerequisites for their reintegration into society and daily life is an adequate level of qualification, education, and skills. Formal education in these institutions also has specific input and output requirements. Prisons offer the possibility not only to complete primary education, but also to obtain secondary school or university degrees. Naturally, these qualifications build on each other, so that, in these circumstances too, training can only be completed if the person has already acquired the required knowledge (Molnár, 2020).

The existence of primary education in prisons is almost indispensable for reintegration, since without literacy and numeracy, the prisoner cannot integrate into society. Providing the necessary conditions for such studies is crucial. Emphasis is also placed on secondary education, as this also contributes to proper socialisation and job search. It is also possible to pursue higher education while serving a sentence, typically through correspondence courses. The start of this is assessed based on their primary and secondary education. Participation in higher education is not a general right for prisoners, its implementation is limited and can only be used in justified cases (Csóti, 2011).

One of the biggest difficulties in most prisons is that they are overcrowded. This leads to many other problems besides lack of space. In addition to not being able to adequately accommodate students, equipment and instructors, small classrooms can also have an impact on behaviour. The problem of a shortage of instructors in prison education also needs to be addressed, as special training is needed to ensure that they have both the right knowledge and the right attitude to help prisoners develop properly (Torlone & Vryonides, 2016).

Unfortunately, lack of familiarity of instructors with students' past and background can also be a problem, making it more difficult for them to establish a relationship. They do not have the opportunity to talk to them alone, but experience has shown that they behave very differently in the presence of others. Inadequate provision of library access can also be detrimental to efficiency, as prisoners cannot make progress if they cannot access the material. This problem may be due to the capacity of the library itself, but it may also be due to the involvement of the guards. Since prisoners are allowed to go everywhere with an escort, if the guard decides for any reason – even if it is personal – not to accompany them to the library, there is nothing they can do about it (Miklósi et al., 2023).

In smaller prisons, the lack of school supplies is also a cardinal issue for the effectiveness of learning, since if they cannot provide the right supplies for prisoners, or if they are of poor quality, it can easily be to their detriment. The motivation of the prisoners is also a very decisive factor, as it is entirely up to them to decide how much they want to participate

in education. If they lack motivation, they can easily drift away and lose interest. With the right support, they can develop a plan, a goal that will make the prisoner feel worth the effort and that they will be able to use the knowledge they have gained here to their advantage (Molnár, 2020).

Prisoners can be motivated by rewards. This can include several things, such as a minimal scholarship, more frequent showers, or even more library use, which can be a great motivation for prisoners who like to spend time reading (Augliere, 2015).

Technology is evolving rapidly and is slowly becoming an inevitable tool in education. This can pose a problem in many prisons, where funding is not available for appropriate equipment. If the necessary technological tools are not available, the quality of education itself can be significantly impaired. To ensure proper reintegration, prisoners must keep up to date with the technology that is innovating every day, as this is the only way to ensure their successful reintegration into society (Miklósi et al., 2023).

Proposals for improving the effectiveness of prison education emphasize ensuring all prisoners have access to education, training, and library facilities. Educational opportunities within prisons should be comparable to those available outside, offering a wide range of options that not only expand lexical knowledge but also foster personal development. Education should be given equal importance to work, and prisoners who choose education should not face disadvantages compared to those who work. Efforts should focus on motivating as many inmates as possible to participate actively in educational programmes. Teachers should receive professional development to employ suitable adult learning methods, with special attention given to inmates with reading or writing difficulties. Weekly access to library services is essential, and where feasible, opportunities for external education should be provided. Support should extend beyond incarceration, enabling prisoners to continue their studies after release. To achieve this, prisons must be equipped with the necessary facilities, equipment, and qualified instructors (Molnár, 2020).

Rehabilitation, reintegration and reducing recidivism are the most important aspects of criminal andragogy. Formal education in prison helps prisoners to acquire the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to reintegrate into society. Through education, they increase their chances of leading more productive lives and finding work after release, thereby reducing the likelihood of reoffending and returning to crime (Torlone & Vryonides, 2016).

Education can increase prisoners' self-esteem and confidence. Achieving certain educational goals and outcomes provides them with positive feedback and motivation. It also contributes to the development of communication and social skills, which are essential for building social relationships. As a result, their quality of life improves, which helps them to set positive goals for themselves. Studies show that people sentenced to prison who participate in formal education programmes are less likely to re-offend. The knowledge and skills acquired through education enable them to find legal sources of livelihood (Miklósi et al., 2023).

4. Conclusion

The subjects tackled in the research are fundamental for preserving a head start towards the optimization of the quality of the prison, and the life of the inmates, as well as the placement

of the prison as an institution inside the limits of the broader society. By examining how mental health issues are connected with battling addiction and implementing educational aspects in these settings, a more significant percentage of the audience is being informed adequately about the circumstances inside the prison and a better and more personal point of view is being shaped, creating less distance between them and the people inside the prisons. Thus, stigma can be lessened, and more people can contribute to a better system. Understanding deeply that every step makes a difference, and every new program helps, steady steps can be made. Finally, it cannot be stressed enough that a holistic approach is needed for every step, and both the societal as well as the prison aspect need to be always considered. Further research on all the subjects mentioned above is highly encouraged.

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