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HEMCOMER: RECONSTRUCTION OF RELATIONS IN FAMILIES OF FORMER PRISONERS¹

Abstract. The article focuses on the family relations of people sentenced to imprisonment. The aim of the project is to study the relations between former prisoners and their family members, particularly to define various strategies of rebuilding family relations, applied by former prisoners in the process of social adaptation. Based on the reconstruction of biographies of adult people who experienced the imprisonment of a parent during their childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, the author characterised various strategies of rebuilding relations, as well as difficulties and setbacks connected with breaking and losing the bond. The study made use of qualitative strategies of sociological analyses (biographical method). 31 narrative interviews with people who experienced penitentiary isolation of their parent (adult children of prisoners, aged between 18 and 70) were conducted as part of the study.

Keywords: prisoners' families, parental imprisonment, social readaptation, biographical methods, autobiographical narrative interview.

1. Introduction

The process of social re-adaptation is comprised of activities directed at allowing those temporarily isolated from social life (people given a prison sentence) to once again function independently in society. We distinguish five primary dimensions of reintegration of ex-prisoners into society. These are: participation in family life, professional activity, permanent residence, education and increasing professional qualifications, as well as contacts with institutions (state supervisory

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organs, charity institutions and specialist therapy centres) (Ager, Strang 2004; Kacprzak, Kudlińska 2014). Re-entry in the social, family, and professional aspect is a great challenge for ex-prisoners. Numerous studies (Akers et al. 1977; Alpert 1979; Fidelus 2012; Szczepanik 2015a; Miszewski 2016; Paterline, Orr 2016) have shown that staying in total institutions (Goffman 1961), which prisons arguably belong to, triggers a set of mechanisms of adaptation to an isolated environment. Donald Clemmer (1940) defined the phenomenon of 'prisonization' as gradual assimilation into the prison subculture, connected with assuming habits, behaviour styles and all of prison culture by inmates. For prisoners a prison becomes a 'second home', while life beyond the institution rouses fear. Ex-prisoners cannot keep up with social, cultural and technological progress. The initial months following release are especially difficult. This influences low social capital, economic difficulties, lack of perspectives and life plans, as well as lack of family support and the inability to rebuild family relations (Biel 2018).

Families are ascribed a social role in the process of re-adaptation of ex-prisoners. However, these families do not always possess sufficient capabilities of providing support. They experience numerous setbacks connected with poverty and economic degradation (Lowenstein 1984; Codd 2002; Christian 2005; Bruns 2017) as well as emotional and mental difficulties (Johnston 1995). Interfamily relations often undergo transformation, with significant problems such as interference, conditions and course of legal child custody, as well as increased risk of placing children in foster care institutions (Johnson, Waldfogel 2002; Baker et al. 2010; Turney 2014; Hald Andersen, Wildeman 2014). Children of prisoners tend to display educational difficulties (Cohran et al. 2018), as well as social maladjustment more frequently (Tasca et al. 2011). Moreover, severe stress, defective attachment and the traumatic character of the situation often result in mental and emotional disorders among children of prisoners (Bocknek et al. 2009; Swisher, Roettger 2012; Arditti 2012; Arditti, Savla 2015; Johnson, Easterling 2012).

It should be highlighted that families of prisoners face various problems during their members' imprisonment but also after their release. Families of prisoners accompany the difficult process of social re-adaptation of ex-prisoners, providing emotional and social support. Their readiness to offer support and their involvement often affect the success of the re-socialisation process as well as reduce recidivism. Taking these issues into account the author focuses on characterising various strategies and methods of rebuilding relations between ex-prisoners and their families. In light of biographical research, I reconstructed family histories, showing various difficulties and setbacks in reestablishing relations and rebuilding family bonds, told from the point of view of adult children of ex-prisoners.

2. Reasons for failure. Socio-economic problems of ex-prisoners

In *When Prisoners Come Home*, Petersilia (2003) underlines that many ex-prisoners experience setbacks because of their fewer opportunities on the labour market, connected with a visible gap in educational achievement and a low level of professional qualifications. Moreover, researchers (e.g. Petersilia 2004; Travis 2000; Atkin-Plunk, Cramer 2012) argue that former prisoners have not enough various professional skills but also experience a clear lack of support from local communities and families. Among factors which affect failures in the process of social re-adaptation we can list the following: perpetuated 'criminal status' and the stigma it entails (Atkin-Plunk, Cramer 2012), numerous formal and legal limitations imposed on former prisoners in terms of housing and employment (Hoskins 2014), lack of economic means and adverse social and living conditions (Lynch, Sabol 2001; Petersilia 2003; Petersilia 2004; Solinas-Saunders et al. 2015), as well as the tendency to take risks and to undertake activities harmful for one's mental and physical health (tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse) (Butler et al. 2004; Jarrett et al. 2006; Eshareturi et al. 2013). The failures listed above, as well as the resulting inability to achieve success and satisfy one's needs in socially acceptable manner, contribute to the initiation of an undesirable prison cycle.

Source literature clearly shows the connection between unemployment and a high rate of recidivism (Bonta, Andrews 2007; Berg, Huebner 2011). Research shows that employment constitutes an important factor which reduces the risk of repeat imprisonment among ex-prisoners (Visher et al. 2008; Berg, Huebner 2011). Finding work is not a simple task for ex-prisoners. An unstable professional history, low educational level and insufficient qualifications have a significant influence on high levels of unemployment among ex-prisoners (Holzer et al. 2003; Solinas-Saunders et al. 2015).

Financial situation is closely related with the housing situation of ex-prisoners. It is worth highlighting that obstacles and impediments in this respect have two origins – limitations and lacks of the ex-prisoners themselves – (low social competency, severed family ties, lack of financial resources), and perpetuated 'criminal status' (social stigma, hostility of local communities, legal and formal limitations). These problems are typical for former prisoners living in various European countries. For instance – according to Focus Ireland, 39% of respondents (ex-prisoners) declared that their time in penitentiary institutions was the result of offences committed due to experiencing homelessness (IPRT 2012: 19). The experience of Polish penitentiary policy indicates that approximately 40% of homeless people have penitentiary experience. However, it needs to be stressed that some homeless people commit 'minor crimes' deliberately and consciously. Criminal activity which causes minor social harm results in short prison terms (several months). This usually takes place in the winter period, when

low temperatures, adverse weather conditions and difficult living conditions in the street are mitigated for the short period of imprisonment (Kacprzak 2017).

The experience of homelessness and deteriorating living conditions influence severed family ties. As highlighted by researchers (Petersilia 2003) ex-prisoners often experience numerous setbacks in the process of rebuilding family relations. Family members who face many difficulties cannot constitute a supporting environment for ex-prisoners or they may not want to maintain relations.

Research indicates that that strong family bonds help ex-prisoners in social reintegration, finding work or housing. Moreover, support from the family decreases the rate of recidivism. At the same time, as indicated by Lynch and Sabol (2001) long prison terms influence reeducation of family contacts. We encounter a decrease in the frequency of family visits and other forms of communication between prisoners and their close ones. This in turn limits the probability of returning to one's family home after release.

Attention should be paid to contacts between prisoners-fathers and their children. Arditti et al. (2005) remark that studied prisoners exhibit a strong feeling of helplessness or complete dependence of their contacts with children on their partners (the children's mothers), who often restrict the imprisoned fathers' relations with children. Similar conclusions were drawn by Chui (2015), who stresses that the studied fathers expressed a sense of guilt because they could not provide their children with proper emotional support. It appears that the quality of bonds between parent and child is largely influenced by a broader family context (relations between both parents, the state of the family, the commitment of the parent prior to imprisonment). At the same time, despite the greatest efforts by the imprisoned parent, a significant reduction of contact is inevitable (e.g. absence of the imprisoned parent during important events in the child's life).

3. Method

3.1. Recruitment and sample description

The research was conducted using theoretical sample selection. Successive selected people (31 narrators), chosen according to the objective and direction of the study, and the analytical categories generated at each of its stages, underwent observation (Guest et al. 2006). The number of respondents allowed the researchers to achieve theoretical saturation (Guest et al. 2006; Creswell 2007; Pasikowski 2015). In order to achieve maximum diversity of cases initial minimum requirements were set up regarding respondents' characteristics. Researchers sought people over 18 years of age, who experienced the imprisonment of one or both parents during childhood, adolescence, or early adulthood. Adulthood was an absolute condition. Children did not participate in the study. Respondents were recruited through various forms of ads (placed in public

spaces, for example churches, notice boards, internet forums) and through charity institutions. Recruitment was national in scope. Respondents come from five voivodships. All were volunteers. No compensation was offered for participation. Consent was granted verbally or in written form (statements and audio recordings were archived in the Faculty of Educational Science at the University of Łódź and are in the possession of the manager and scientific supervisor of the project).

The description includes fragments and reconstructions of 20 (N1 to N20) selected interviews from the entire sample. In order to provide a characteristic of the problem I chose those narrators whose remembered the time when their parent returned home well enough to reconstruct their family history and their relations with the ex-prisoner. For obvious reasons I did not include interviews with people who still experienced imprisonment of a parent (parents serving long prison sentences), and who still have to go through the reconstruction stage. I also did not include narrators who were infants or were in their preschool stage when their parent returned home, for they do not remember the event (their narratives were not detailed enough).

3.2. Analytical approach

The interpretative paradigm (Blumer 1969) was used in designing and analysing the research. Alternatively, the approach can be described as a theoretical-methodological interaction approach, implemented in accordance with the principles of the Chicago school (e.g. George H. Mead, William I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, Everett Hughes, Ernest Burgess, Louis Wirth, Ellsworth Faris, Charles H. Cooley et al.). The most important determinants of the interpretative approach are: rejecting the principles of determinism, avoiding and abandoning experimental methods on behalf of studying phenomena in their natural context, as well as utilizing methods and techniques of qualitative studies (qualitative sociology) (Chomczyński 2012). The conviction of the importance and meaning of human interactions (symbolic interaction) and individual free will gifted with a unique identity becomes superior. In accordance with the applied theoretical concept social roles are constantly generated and modified based on human interactions and interpretations. Symbolic interactionism constituted a theoretical inspiration for the great researchers of criminal and criminological phenomena such as Clifford Shaw (1930; Shaw, Moore 1931), Erving Goffman (1959) and his concept of *The Moral Career*, Howard S. Becker (1963), and Edwin Sutherland (1949).

The methodology applied in this project is based on the sociological assumptions of biographical studies (Sociological Biographical Method). Biographical studies provide information on the narrator's past, present and on his future perspectives (Rosenthal 2012; Kaźmierska 2013). The task which lies before a biographical researcher is to obtain detailed access to the narrators'

everyday life, to get to know the perspective of the respondents and their way of perceiving specific processes, and to learn their holistic life history (Kohli 1981). In this perspective the biographical method is used to observe dynamic processes, which change in time and in various social contexts (Rosenthal 2012). The biographical perspective allows us to describe the process of social re-adaptation in a broader temporal context. Respondents recounted the first stage of the meeting with their ex-prisoner parents and displayed their years of experience of family life after their parents' release. Owing to this they formulated an assessment of the long-term consequence of the imprisonment of a parent for their daily functioning.

3.3. Research objectives

The primary objective of the research project was to provide the characteristics of the social re-adaptation process of ex-prisoners, from the point of view of their adult children. I paid special attention to learning and reconstructing the strategies to rebuild relations applied by ex-prisoners. I formulated the following research questions: (a) what types of actions are taken by ex-prisoners to rebuild relations with children? (b) how do respondents characterize the actions of the ex-prisoners? (c) what is the respondents' subjective assessment of the re-establishing of relations with ex-prisoner parents? (d) what difficulties did respondents indicate in the process of rebuilding bonds with ex-prisoner parents? (e) what reasons for failure in re-establishing relations did respondents indicate?

3.4. Data collection and analysis

Narratives were collected using biographical-narrative interviews (Schütze 2012). The technique consists in obtaining a comprehensive, highly indexical biographical story, developed and told independently by the respondent, with minimal interference on the part of the researcher. The study, according to Wengraf (2012) is meant to enable the researcher to learn a given history in the same way as it is perceived and experienced by the teller. The condition to obtain a narrative is an accurate realisation of the sequence of the interview which consists of two primary stages – (1) the main narrative stage, (2) the stage of questions including key words used by the narrator (Rosenthal 2012: 283). The narrative is recorded and accurately transcribed with the respondent's consent.

The process of analysing empirical material consisted of a two-dimensional reconstruction and data analysis. The first analytical layer was used to reconstruct the chronology of objective life events (lived-life-living-track). The objective life course of respondents was reconstructed using the chunk-by-chunk method. Life events were ordered and hypotheses on the possible paths to solve the described situations were formulated. After completing this stage, the researcher focused on reconstructing subjective aspects of the narrated story (told-story-telling-track).

In this phase the language structure, i.e. the way in which the story is told by the respondent, was analysed. The procedures of narration-biographical studies by Fritz Schütze (2012) were applied in the structural analysis. The collected narratives were divided into textual segments, taking the following into consideration: (1) theoretical comments showing the attitude of the individual towards the events; (2) background construction, i.e. stories included in the main narrative, the purpose of which is to provide explanation and sometimes to embellish the narrative; (3) masking (German: *ausblenden*), i.e. partial or complete omission of something (fragment of experience); (4) argumentative commentary, in which the narrator attempts to explain to himself/herself and to the listener problems which are not connected to the stage in the bibliography; (5) coda, i.e. a clear ending of the story and a summary of the influence of experiences conducted by the author (Schütze 2012; Wengraf 2012; Kaźmierska 2013; Kaźmierska 2014; Szczepanik, Siebert 2015).

In the second stage, i.e. structural language analysis, the researcher develops particular fragments of the text, interprets them and ascribes meanings according to biographical research procedure. All changes to the continuity of the narrative, he subject-narrator, the dominating topics, as well as breaks in the narrative, avoiding answers and linguistic devices were characterised and described as part of structural analysis. Careful structural characteristic was followed by the comparative analysis stage in the scope of all collected narratives.

To sum up, the analytic procedure applied in the author's study takes into account (1) an analysis of facts and biographical data – the objective chronologies of the biography; (2) an individual and panel structural analysis of the text; (3) an analysis of the stories of individual cases based on biographical chronology and structural analysis. During this stage, a microanalysis of the relationship between past experiences and their interpretation and rendering by the narrator was conducted. Finally, an individual and panel comparative analysis between the collected biographies and the final description of collected conclusions was conducted.

4. Results

Based on the conducted chronological, structural and comparative analysis I distinguished six significant strategies applied by ex-prisoners in their attempts to rebuild family relations in the process of social re-adaptation. In each strategy I described the behaviour of the parent (his or her actions, strategies), interpreted feelings of the narrator, and the consequences of using given strategies for the future lives of the children (success, long-term effectiveness, influence of the parent's behaviour on the life-course of the narrators).

4.1. Strategy 1: Incompetent seeking for relations

In the first observed strategy the ex-prisoner parent-maintained contact with the family during imprisonment and wanted to rebuild relations with the child and the entire family after release. He or she sought attention through very intensive marking of his or her presence in the family life. Based on the narratives of respondents we distinguished two radically different variants of this strategy.

The first variant was strict – excessively demanding parents. A strict ex-prisoner upon his or her return home tried to dominate the other members of the family (especially the female partners). They interfered in all activities and arrangements, dictating their own rules and norms of everyday functioning. This behaviour was displayed mostly by ex-prisoner fathers, who tried to establish their own style of upbringing and a repertoire of punishments and rewards without prior agreement with the other parent (the mother). As indicated by the stories of the narrators, fathers regulated and excessively monitored their children's activities, education and leisure time. They imposed excessive demands and, most importantly, they did not consult their plans with the other caregiver (who up to this point played the role of the most important caregiver). The image of the ex-prisoner parent that these narrators had was aggressive and hostile. It evoked feelings of disgust and dislike. This behaviour caused an important dissonance between values represented by both parents (inconsistent imposing of boundaries, unjustified discipline which caused fear and defiance). The narrators signalled a sense of being lost, fear and aversion. As a result, after leaving their family home they dissociated themselves from the ex-prisoner parents.

N3: And then he [father] came for Christmas... for the first time. I remember that he forbade me to watch a movie. He turned off my TV. He was still drunk. All the time... He beat us. What else? Well... When he was drunk, he hugged me and asked if I love him (nervous laugh). But I do not know...

The other variant of this strategy was displayed by excessively lenient parents. According to the narrators this type of ex-prisoner parent would try to unsuccessfully compensate his or her absence. The ex-prisoner parents did not impose any restrictions, they would allow maximum freedom, they did not control or punish children, and did not impose any obligations upon them. The parents tried to rebuild their bond through creating a carefree relation, often based on material reward for their absence (buying presents, increasing pocket money). At the same time in this case we are also dealing with an undermining of the authority of the mothers, who remain in relation with the children. We can see harmful aspirations to nullify the rules and responsibilities existing at home.

N10: Later dad left prison and took me to his place for a while... But that didn't suit either because he was with a woman. He was for me, you know, living a very frivolous life.

It is worth noting that narrators, from the point of view of time, were very critical of the careless attitude of the ex-prisoner parent. As children they eagerly made use of the privileges bestowed upon them by the ex-prisoner fathers, however, years later they stressed that lack of rules and excessive freedom contributed to their life and educational failures. Overly liberal and permissive treatment, lacking any clear rules, was deemed as the cause of their own misbehaviour and criminal activity. It is worth emphasising that this remark was expressed mostly by narrators who exhibited signs of social demoralization, and who became prisoners themselves.

N14: Honestly, I had no childhood with my father. Because he spent his entire life in prison. He was released when... I was 15. He lived on for 5 years and then he died, so we only knew each other for 5 years... [...] Throughout those 5 years he tried to compensate me for everything, I think. But there was not enough time to... He couldn't make up for 15 years in 5 years... The compensation itself wasn't really thought through. It was manifested in such a way that when my foster mother decided to punish me for something I did wrong, spank me so to speak... he would defend me... and it was wrong because for me that was a signal that I could go on doing bad things...

4.2. Strategy 2: Entangling the child in marital conflict

The next strategy concerned parents, who put their child in the role of mediator between spouses. These were prisoners who maintained regular contact with families throughout their imprisonment, and after their release focused on rebuilding their marital bonds. In this case there was an argument between the ex-prisoner and his partner/spouse. The couple tried to match and become familiar with their new lifestyles, goals and behaviours. Inability to re-establish relations resulted in frequent arguments and tensions. The narrators declared that they became passive witnesses of arguments or active participants in the conflict. Assuming an active role they interfered in the process of reconciliation and communication between parents. They took action on their own initiative or after persuasion by one of the parents. The child's main task was to respond to the needs of adults – counseling, making excuses or assuming the role of caregiver, responsible for supporting the parents and maintaining the status of family.

N2: But when dad returned... that wasn't so good either, because there were trials and what not, going to hearings. Fights started by my mum, who keeps blaming dad for their life not going the way it should, and that it wasn't as she planned [...] me and dad had this mission, we and my sister, to get her [mum] back on her feet.

This attitude was particularly characteristic of daughters of imprisoned fathers. The narrator quoted above (N2) is an interesting case. She received academic education and comes from a family of high social status. Her father committed white-collar crimes and before his imprisonment he provided his family with a high financial status. In a way the narrator appreciated and admired

his criminal activities. She interpreted them in terms of “sacrifice for the good of the family”. At the same time, she ascribed negative features to her mother. She described her as unstable, inept, quarrelsome, rapacious and dependent. She mostly emphasised her mother’s emotional and financial ineptitude, which she displayed during her father’s absence. Paradoxically, significant economic degradation destroyed the relations between mother and daughter. During the interview, the narrator frequently used linguistic devices which indicated a need to excuse and neutralize her father’s criminal activity. After his release she would eagerly mediate and interfere in their parents’ relations. She assumed the role of active mediator, clearly supportive of her ex-prisoner father. Her behaviour can be understood in terms of a mechanism of “mythologizing her imprisoned parent”. Many years after her father’s release she perpetuated that “parental myth” and maintained better relations with her father than with her mother.

4.3. Strategy 3: Irreversible family relations

The process of rebuilding relations when the narrators’ parents decided to separate or divorce and break contact completely during the period of isolation, assumed a totally different course. The respondents, as children, felt a necessity to build two separate, parallel family worlds. Most of all the expressed fear and uncertainty connected with the irreversibility of family relations and the necessity to create new ones. The first world, that of the family home, once so close and understandable, was undergoing re-evaluation. New meanings would have to be ascribed to the relations between child and released parent (as well as siblings and other members of the household). Known arrangements were being transformed. The child was given new responsibilities. Grandparents were given new privileges (e.g. the possibility to determine punishments and to control free-time, which they did not do prior to the parent’s imprisonment). The roles of family members were visibly transforming which caused unease and disrupted the sense of security and confidence. The narrators constructed a new, parallel family world with ex-prisoner parents. Re-building of relations took place in a new, foreign setting, in the presence of “others”, e.g. cohabitants, half-siblings. It is difficult to describe this as process of reconstructing relations. It would be more accurate to call it a process of building new bonds. Narrators maintained contact with both parents, temporarily living in two homes. They readily compared the situation and relations with parents “before and after imprisonment”, giving a clear signal that these were two different periods in their lives. The contacts maintained were described as neutral or positive, however, with time the very situation of building two family homes was regarded as discomforting and difficult for the child.

4.4. Strategy 4: Rejecting relations with the child

Separation or divorce does not always provide space for rebuilding and creating new family relations. Sometimes parents who started new families ignored the presence of children from previous marriages. Ex-prisoners who applied this strategy made a decision to “start life from the beginning” after their release. They would reject previous family relations, including relations with children. Narrators had a sense of abandonment. During the isolation of their partners the mothers would enter new relationships (cohabitation). They started new families, became involved in new relationships and, from the narrators’ perspective, they devoted their time to their (the narrators’) new, younger siblings. The narrators expressed a strong willingness (need) to maintain contact with imprisoned fathers. It was a manifestation of resistance against changes occurring in the family. Respondents clearly emphasised that mothers were not involved in these activities or that they would discourage the children from maintaining bonds with their fathers. The most disappointing moment for the child was the parent’s release from prison. The fathers did not seek to maintain family ties, they lived away from family homes and entered new relationships. From the narrators’ perspective the ex-prisoner fathers limited themselves to fulfilling basic parental obligations (e.g. paying alimony). In this situation the narrators felt a yearning for both parents. They felt that they had no place of their own and that they did not belong to any family. They expressed being lost, sadness and lack of understanding of the attitude of both parents.

N1: [after her father’s first prison term] So I stayed with dad, I went to second grade... no, that was with mum first. Mum took me, I stayed with her, I went to school there, I wasn’t allowed to attend first communion because I misbehaved. I was allowed to go the second time, when I changed schools. That prepared me then. I remember that mum came to church, they were divorced and dad had his... partner. Mum was also, after giving birth, I already had a step-sister.

Researcher: Did your older siblings stay with your mother?

N1: Older siblings... my oldest brother said that he would not take it and he moved in with my dad’s mum, he lived with grandma, the other brother stayed, but he was like, as if he wasn’t there at all.

In the fragment quoted above the narrator reconstructs her complicated family relations. Her parents severed their ties during imprisonment and started new families. The narrator’s older siblings had a sense of rejection and decided to become independent and move out. The narrator, who was the youngest child at the time, was still looking for a place to stay, living temporarily with her mother, her new partner and stepsiblings, or with her father and new caregiver. None of these places gave her a sense of belonging or security. She did not accept her parents’ new partners and sensed that she was not accepted either. She sought temporary help from her grandparents and distant relatives. Finally, the situation forced her into temporary homelessness. This experience contributed to her involvement in

criminal activities. As a consequence, she was placed in a detention centre for demoralised juveniles. From a temporal perspective she blames her mother for her failures, because it was her mother's decision to divorce. Interestingly, the narrator did not blame her father. As an adult she still tried to gain his attention and acceptance. Because of her experience at the detention centre, she felt a stronger bond with her father. She perceived herself as a prisoner and offender, similar to her father. She expected specific recognition from him.

4.5. Strategy 5: Constant instability of relations

The questionable form of reconstructed relations can be seen in the case of re-offending parents. Their returns are never fulfilled. Re-offenders, according to narrators, return home temporarily, each time severing continuity and family order. Moreover, they significantly fail in the eyes of children, introducing permanent instability and insecurity. They become guest-parents in the lives of children. The reconstructing these relations was merely declarative (promises of return and change of lifestyle).

N10: Well, I remember only that he came and that it was late... He came late and told me to go to sleep, that he would be in the morning. When I woke up in the morning he wasn't there, he came back late, he had to take care of something. I don't know how to say it. I was happy then. We played. It was fun.

R: Did he change for you, did you have a sense of change on his part?

N10: Let me put it this way. Maybe I never really knew him well but... he always tried to give me what I wanted... I don't know. He was always nice. Maybe I didn't know him that well. I just can't decide.

4.6. Strategy 6: Ostensible and occasional rebuilding of relations

The final strategy is that of returning, which I deemed ostensible and conditional. These returns were the most difficult to target in the biographies, as they were usually signalled in a short and laconic manner. According to the narrators their parents only signalled their presence after being released. They did not return home and would appear and disappear without any reason or information. Their occasional meeting resembled a relation with "time travellers". The parent was defined as temporary, unstable, incomprehensible.

R: How did your parent return from prison...?

N16: Once or twice, maybe.

R: Any visits, meetings?

N16: He came, that's all. Just a couple of days. They partied with mum and he went somewhere...

This strategy was particularly visible among parents addicted to psychoactive substances (alcohol, drugs). Occasional meetings were sometimes related to violence and aggression towards other family members.

N12: Prison destroyed him [the father]... That's one thing. He became a real bastard. He went out, started beating my mum... then he disappeared... It turned out that he met someone in O [name of location], he met some woman there and later died. Otherwise I didn't... I was far away from him.

Respondents emphasised the lack of the parent's influence in their upbringing, motivation to study or belonging to peer groups. Occasional meetings did not influence their everyday lives. Ex-prisoner parents were usually described as people without authority, influence or access to the "world of the child".

N15: Then father got out, showed up for a moment... and it was again about alimony, he sat there. He showed up for a moment, and what of it? He had no influence over me, because if I had my mind set...

In the case of some narrators the circumstantial character of the meetings was determined by courtesy or cultural issues (invitation to a wedding, accidental encounter at a funeral of a family member etc.). In such circumstances the encounter was not connected with any deeper relation, need or yearning.

R: And contacts with your father? Were they renewed after his release?

N18: No, he was at my wedding.

R: At your wedding?

N18: Yes. I invited him... didn't seem right not to. He live with his girlfriend in B [name of district]. I went there when I found out from uncle Dawid, my godfather. I went with my fiancée... I invited him... It was the right thing to do. [...] He was at the wedding, and then there was silence again... He was at the reception, the after party... and late puff. The he was haha and there he wasn't haha. What can I do... Nothing.

The narrators stated that the parent does not affect their adult life and that they are not interested in his fate. We may assume that the parent did not influence the child's identity. The narrators did not express longing or care. They did not want to establish or build relations with ex-prisoner fathers. They were usually on good terms with their mothers.

5. Discussion

5.1. Limitations

It should be stressed that biographical studies allow us to perform a detailed characteristic of activities in an individual perspective. The size of the sample, as well as the level of theoretical saturation of the analytical categories will surely cause objections. Pasikowski (2015: 33) emphasises that "each scientific research is connected with risk of yielding erroneous results. Mistakes may be generated by the researcher, the studied individuals, the method of measurement, data analysis, and the general method of organising the research process". In the case of qualitative research strategy one of the determinants of the studies reliability is

proper theoretical sample selection. This process is based on including successive individuals, in accordance with the direction and objective of the research project. Theoretical preparation of conclusions will be more valid when the sense of saturation of analytical categories increases (Guest et al. 2006). Measures were taken to make sure that saturation of the theoretical state takes place. Collected information duplicated with successive interviews, and did not enrich the possessed empirical data, which prompted the researcher to end the process of recruiting new respondents. However, it needs to be emphasised that achieving a desired state of saturation of theoretical data depends on circumstances, for example the amount and completeness of data, the number and contents of generated categories and analytical codes, as well as traits, methodological preferences and experience of researchers, as well as competence of the research team (Marshall et al. 2013; Pasikowski 2015). Because of this the state of theoretical saturation of analytical categories, and reaching a specific quantity regarding sample size, can be regarded as a highly intuitive and subjective process, dependent on research and methodological context. Bearing in mind these methodological limitations, the conclusions should be regarded only in the context of narrative-biographical analyses, directed at profound and detailed analysis of dynamic processes and interactions of individual cases. However, these studies should not be disregarded or discredited. Learning family biographies is an opportunity to track selected case studies and detect certain dependencies between the experience of parental imprisonment and the style of functioning of prisoners' families. This is a different perspective of observing problems in a socio-cultural context. The potential of the study lies in investigating the depth of the issue and in the possibility of a detailed reconstruction of biographical processes. It is with this attitude that the conclusions should be regarded.

5.2. Implications

Biographical studies, despite clear methodological limitations, allow us to observe important micro-processes occurring within families of prisoners. Their special potential lies in the fact that they enable us to learn the experiences of families at various stages of life, that is before, during and after penitentiary isolation. Taking into account the high rate of re-imprisonment it appears that the penitentiary system still does not possess effective means of supporting ex-prisoners. A close look at the narratives of children of prisoners regarding the strategies of rebuilding family relations constitutes an important source of information, which could increase parental and social competencies of prisoners (developing more effective programs of life-preparation after release, reflection on the role of family during social re-adaptation, drawing attention to the situation of children of prisoners, their needs and experiences).

Moreover, it should be underlined that difficulty in reaching respondents (families of prisoners) results in our lack of knowledge about the long-term

consequences of the imprisonment of a family member for the family. We know how many people return to prison, yet we still ask ourselves why that is and what should be done in order to prevent crime and family breakdown? Researchers focus primarily on exploring the experience of children during adolescence (Johnston 1995; Bocknek et al. 2009; Hissel et al. 2011) or on the experiences of the prisoners' partners (Codd 2002; Codd 2003; Szczepanik 2015b). They rarely use (to such a degree) the reconstruction of relations adults who experienced the imprisonment of a parent. In the case of the described studies, analysis of selected narratives allows us to identify various strategies of rebuilding family relations, and especially the way in which these are perceived by respondents. Narrators were critical of the actions of ex-prisoners and of their partners (mostly mothers). They associated their life failures with difficult childhood experiences, explaining their point of view. They indicated various difficulties which they experienced as children in the process of their parents' social re-adaptation (lack of permanent residency, lack of belonging, lack of acceptance for new family relations, being lost, undermining of norms and values). Their voice must be included in studies devoted to the phenomenon of social mal-adaptation among young people and the related phenomenon of crime transmission, as well as the consequences of the imprisonment of a parent for social and emotional functioning. The results also prompted me to a deeper reflection on the application and modification of techniques of neutralising crime (Sykes, Matza 1957) used by families of prisoners, especially by children who wanted to maintain contacts with the ex-prisoners. Analysis of linguistic structures obtained in the course of narrative-biographical studies allows to identify and characterise the neutralisation techniques being applied. However, this issue is left for further empirical studies.

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POWRACAJĄCY DO DOMU: REKONSTRUKCJA RELACJI RODZINNYCH W PROCESIE READAPTACJI BYŁYCH WIĘŹNIÓW

Abstrakt. Artykuł poświęcono problematyce rodzin osób skazanych na karę pozbawienia wolności. Na podstawie rekonstrukcji biografii osób dorosłych, które w okresie dzieciństwa, dorastania i wczesnej dorosłości doświadczyły uwięzienia rodzica, scharakteryzowano różne strategie odbudowy relacji oraz trudności i niepowodzenia związane z przerwaniem i utratą więzi. W badaniu posłużono się jakościowymi strategiami analiz socjologicznych, wykorzystując potencjał interpretacyjnych badań biograficznych. W ramach projektu przeprowadzono 31 wywiadów narracyjnych z osobami, które doświadczyły w przeszłości izolacji penitencjarnej swojego rodzica (dorosłe dzieci więźniów między 18. a 70. rokiem życia).

Słowa kluczowe: rodziny więźniów, readaptacja więźnia, badania biograficzne, symboliczny interakcjonizm.