

Prison employment and its conflict with therapeutic and counselling programmes: The experiences of Czech prison personnel

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Abstract

The study investigates a specific issue in the Czech prison system: the conflict between prison employment and therapeutic/counselling programmes offered. Drawing on 55 semi-structured interviews with specialized prison personnel from 10 Czech prisons, I argue that prison employment is disproportionately prioritized over the programmes, which undermines and, in some cases, makes it impossible for the personnel to work with inmates on rehabilitation. Since the Czech Prison Service itself declares that most inmates have serious problems involving psychological traumas, drug abuse, and housing insecurity, it would be beneficial to prioritize rehabilitation programmes and then try to employ inmates. The conflict also contributes to an unsuccessful re-entry/resettlement process, which is regarded as a major problem in the Czech prison system and society.

Keywords

Czech Republic, prison employment, re-entry/resettlement, rehabilitation, therapeutic/counselling programmes

Introduction

Prison employment is often a divisive topic, as is evidenced in the mixed views expressed on this common practice. There are several positive outcomes of prison employment:

- (1) Prison employment can establish practical and social skills among inmates (Alós et al., 2015; Brown and Toyoki, 2013; Elisha et al., 2017; Guilbaud, 2010; Haney,

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2010; Silva and Saraiva, 2016; Sliva and Samimi, 2018; Pandeli et al., 2019), or even specialized ones, such as firefighting (Feldman, 2020; Goodman, 2012), which may also be useful following their release. In this sense, employment was sometimes useful merely for facilitating or inculcating ‘working habits’ or a sense of punctuality, time management, and self-discipline.

- (2) Employment can be important for an inmate’s self-esteem, identity, and social recognition (Brown and Toyoki, 2013; Feldman, 2020; Goodman, 2012; Guilbaud, 2010; Haney, 2010; Pandeli et al., 2019). Sometimes, the feeling that they are paying back to society or even earning redemption also plays a notable role in inmates’ psychological wellbeing (Goodman, 2012; Silva and Saraiva, 2016).
- (3) Employment can help inmates to cope with boredom, or, eventually, to escape the mundaneness of everyday prison life and its effects (Goodman, 2012; Guilbaud, 2010; Silva and Saraiva, 2016).
- (4) Ultimately, this employment can provide a source of income that can be spent in prison canteens, sent to family, or saved for the re-entry/resettlement process (Alós et al., 2015; Elisha et al., 2017; Goodman, 2012; Guilbaud, 2010).

Of course, these positive and rehabilitative outcomes may occur only if the programmes are ‘non-exploitative [and] well-designed’ and inmates ‘work for real employers, where [they] are paid a meaningful wage, learn social responsibility, perhaps pay reparations to victims and are encouraged to develop a sense of self-worth and reframe their relationship with employment’ (Pandeli et al., 2019: 599).

According to more critical scholars, the argument presented by Pandeli et al. summarizes the problems of prison employment:

- (1) The most pressing issue is the exploitative nature of prison employment and the precarity of inmate workers’ positions. Some US scholars (Hatton, 2018, 2019; Wacquant, 2001, 2009) assert that prison employment constitutes the covert legalization and re-institutionalization of slavery owing to the low or absent wages and ethno-racial bias in US prisons. Exploitation through low wages is a widespread phenomenon: in the US, inmates are paid €0.11 to €0.23 an hour (Hatton, 2018, 2019; LeBaron, 2008), or €1.42 to €2.00 a day (Goodman, 2012); in Brazil, the rate is €0.11 to €0.37 an hour or €1.84 a day (Silva and Saraiva, 2016); in the UK, it is €17.00 to €28.50 a week (Pandeli et al., 2019); in Hungary, €32.00 to €83.00 a month (Haney, 2010); and in France, €120.00 to €507.00 a month (Guilbaud, 2010). Furthermore, exploitation pertains not only to low wages; prison employment has been used as an instrument for getting dirty jobs done (Feldman, 2020; Goodman, 2012; Silva and Saraiva, 2016) or as a disciplinary mechanism (Goodman, 2012; Haney, 2010; Hatton, 2018; LeBaron, 2008). Typically, inmates cannot defend themselves against these practices because their rights are legally limited, and they are at a power disadvantage to prison/workplace personnel.
- (2) Prison employment is often similar to sweatshop work insofar as it is tedious, monotonous, dull, and does not offer any kind of meaningful or useful skill

development; furthermore, the transferability of the work experience and skills acquired is questionable (Bullock and Bunce, 2020; Guilbaud, 2010; Haney, 2010; Pandeli et al., 2019; Silva and Saraiva, 2016).

- (3) Recognition and the building of self-esteem are also problematic because in some studies (Feldman, 2020; Goodman, 2012; Pandeli et al., 2019) inmates felt mis-recognized owing to their invisibility and/or stigmatized visibility when doing the job. California's fire camps exemplify this: although many firefighters are state prisoners, public discourse does not usually recognize their inmate status, thereby making them feel invisible and that their work is not properly appraised. When engaging in public service jobs, they are compelled to wear vests indicating their prisoner status, rendering them visible but stigmatized, since public service work is often considered inferior. Thus, a contradictory situation is reproduced: the firefighter who saves a building is praised by the locals who, contrarily, despise them when they are doing a public service job. Hence, it is unclear how prison employment can be rehabilitative and helpful in these circumstances.

In this article, my wish is not to contribute further to the debate around whether or not prison employment is meaningful (my belief is that, when implemented properly and thoughtfully, it could constitute an important part of the rehabilitation process) but rather to demonstrate, by investigating Czech prisons, that there is another issue involved – one that has been only lightly explored by previous scholars (Elisha et al., 2017; Feldman, 2020; Guilbaud, 2010; LeBaron, 2008). The problem I wish to address is the prioritization of prison employment over inmates' therapeutic/counselling programmes and, in some instances, the direct conflict between the two. As I will be arguing, there is a strong tendency to employ inmates at any cost, leaving therapeutic/counselling programmes behind, which makes it difficult to impossible for prison personnel to help inmates work on their personal problems (for example, their psychological traumas, debts, and family problems). Concurrently, it has been proven that therapeutic/counselling programmes can crucially support the re-entry and resettlement process and lower the recidivism rate (Ferrer-Perez and Bosch-Fiol, 2018; Gideon et al., 2010; Haviv and Hasisi, 2019; Long et al., 2019; Paulle, 2017). In contrast, disciplinary and punitive programmes, based on work and/or boot camps, are not very effective (Bahr et al., 2012; Cullen, 2012).

The idea that inmates' needs and the respective therapeutic/counselling programmes deserve primary attention is embodied in the widely applied Risk–Need–Response (RNR) concept and the subsequent Good Lives Model (GLM). The RNR is well known but it is worth recalling some of the basic principles: the interventions should be implemented with respect to the persons involved and general normative principles, be grounded in solid psychological theory, have the ambition to reduce criminal victimization, be targeted at the needs of moderate- and high-risk inmates, and delivered in accordance with the capabilities of inmates involved. Andrews and Bonta (2010) define the central eight risk/need factors that must be addressed in prison programmes for the successful delivery of an intervention. The central eight are further divided into the big four (history of antisocial behaviour, antisocial personality pattern, antisocial cognition, antisocial associates) and the moderate four (family/marital circumstances, school/work, leisure/recreation, substance abuse). Within the school/work factor, Andrews and Bonta

explicitly place a major emphasis on the quality of the interpersonal relationships that take place in these institutions, not on the sole fact of whether inmates have a job or attend a school programme (Andrews and Bonta, 2010). Thus, in the RNR there is a strong tendency to prioritize how inmates see themselves and others (and, generally, society) through their psychological and cognitive dispositions, and on changing/improving these dispositions. Employment is important as an instrument that can potentially support the process but not initiate it on its own.

The GLM is a more recent approach that builds on the RNR but also introduces its critique and alternative understanding of the inmate rehabilitation process. The criticism is two-fold: the RNR is overly risk oriented and lacks more positive elements, which can be demotivating for inmates and undermine their rehabilitation; and the RNR, owing to the risk orientation, underestimates the aetiological dimension of criminal offences that have been committed (Purvis et al., 2011; Ward and Maruna 2007). Based on these delimitations, Ward and his colleagues (Ward and Brown, 2004; Ward and Maruna, 2007) define the GLM as a strength-based approach to inmates' rehabilitation, meaning that, rather than risks, whose identification is only the first step, the focus is directed to inmates' strengths that can be used to construct a positive vision of meaningful life. Meaningful life is then composed of primary goods that are crucial for every human being. The list of the primary goods has slightly changed over time; the most recent contains 11 items: life; knowledge; excellence in play; excellence in work; excellence in agency; inner peace; relatedness; community; spirituality; pleasure; creativity (Purvis et al., 2011). The goal of the GLM is to create a meaningful life plan in cooperation with an inmate and provide them with cognitive, emotional, volitional, and behavioural skills/properties so that they may pursue the plan in pro-social way (Ward and Brown, 2004). Again, employment is important but not crucial in the GLM, because preliminary (and preferably continuing to some extent) therapeutic/counselling work needs to be done with an inmate to find out the aetiology of crime, identify the risks and strengths, make a life plan, and provide them the skills/properties to realize the plan. Employment can help with making and supporting the plan, but it is insufficient on its own.

Of course, adherence to just one of the concepts is not sufficient per se, since there are other conditions that must be met for rehabilitation to work. These conditions include matching the inmates' needs to their programme (Long et al., 2019); successful completion of the whole programme (Haviv and Hasasi, 2019); a positive therapeutic climate (Blagden et al., 2016); and the quality of the programmes on offer (Paulle, 2017).

In the Czech Republic (CR), the efficiency of therapeutic and counselling programmes is selectively measured in some prisons via small-scale analyses. This is done by monitoring the number of people who had undergone a programme and were reimprisoned after their release. Although the assessment of the programmes' efficacy through the lens of the recidivism rate is often problematic (mainly because of the various significant factors that can lead to reincarceration and the non-differentiation of a committed crime – for example, Ferrer-Perez and Bosch-Fiol, 2018), these analyses are very promising. For example, 8.7 percent of people who had committed sexually motivated crimes and underwent specialized programmes in Kuřim prison between 1998 and 2011 committed the same type of crime following their release, compared with 17.0 percent of the people who had not participated in the programme (Jiříčka and Prokešová, 2012). In Ostrov

prison, where there is a specialized programme for drug users, two analyses were carried out. First, a study aimed at individuals who finished the programme between 2007 and 2008 found that the intervention sample had a 60.0 percent recidivism rate, in contrast to the control sample, which had a recidivism rate of 75.0 percent (Jiříčka and Prokešová, 2012). The second analysis focused on the three-year recidivism rate of individuals who finished the programme between 2005 and 2014: the recidivism rate was 36.0 percent (Jiříčka and Kejřová, 2015). Finally, an analysis was carried out at Liberec prison, which has a specialized programme for impulsive/aggressive individuals who had committed violent crimes. The study, carried out between 2008 and 2014, showed that the intervention sample had a one-year recidivism rate of over 10.0 percent, compared with a 50.0 percent recidivism rate among the control sample (Jiříčka and Kejřová, 2015).

Unfortunately, these numbers cannot be compared with any general recidivism rate because there are no such statistics available in the CR. There is one piece of partial research on the recidivism rate, which focuses on a one-time analysis of two-year recidivism rates between 2012 and 2014. The study is based on a sample of 4233 individuals, of whom only 808 were imprisoned prior to the research (the rest had undergone other punishments) and thus could be considered relevant to this study. Of these 808 individuals, 45 percent were reconvicted and reimprisoned (Scheinost et al., 2015). Compared with this number, it is obvious that people who finish some kind of therapeutic and/or counselling programme have a lower chance of being reconvicted and reimprisoned. In terms of international comparison, it is widely understood that the recidivism rates in various countries are not comparable owing to differing national methodologies (Fazel and Wolf, 2015; Yukhnenko et al., 2019); therefore, it is difficult to say whether the CR recidivism rate is high or low in this sense. However, reconviction and reimprisonment are regarded as major problems in the CR, as the main prison system policy document *Koncepce vězeňství do roku 2025* recognizes (Ministry of Justice, 2016), giving this issue priority. It is worth mentioning that the authors of the current document work with the ratio between inmates who are serving a first sentence and those who have been sentenced multiple times. In 2019, 63 percent of inmates in Czech prisons were serving sentences for the second or multiple times (PSCR, 2020). This number is, however, problematic for monitoring the recidivism rate and can be potentially deceptive, because it represents various factors (for example, social and policy changes) that are not directly related to the effectiveness of prison and post-prison interventions.

To lower the reconviction and reimprisonment rate and support successful re-entry and resettlement, the Czech prison system began to adhere to the RNR principle: SARPO, a diagnostic tool for assessing inmates' risk factors and needs, was implemented in the system, and it was agreed that prison programmes for inmates should be constructed in accordance with their identified needs. Nevertheless, as I will show, the conflict between therapeutic and counselling programmes and prison employment is (significantly) undermining the RNR principle and the rehabilitation of inmates according to their identified needs.

Some relevant factors concerning the Czech prison system

The Czech prison system consists of 35 prisons (all state operated) and, according to Law 169/1999 Sb., there are two prison types: secure prisons and high-security prisons.

The secure prisons have inner sections with low, medium, and high degrees of security, to which inmates are assigned based on the court's decision and the so-called inner differentiation process (basically, the screening of newcomers and the continuous monitoring of their achievements and behaviour thereafter).¹ Additionally, some prisons have other special sections:

- (a) entry sections for the intake of newcomers;
- (b) custody;
- (c) detention;
- (d) drug-free zones (with standardized or therapeutic treatment);
- (e) specialized therapeutic sections for drug users, inmates with aggressive behaviour, and other serious problems.

There are no specialized prisons, and thus no specialized therapeutic prisons. Therefore, all the special sections for therapeutic treatment coexist with standard sections in prisons (although the inmates from the therapeutic and standard sections do not interact with each other). The accommodation capacity and size of prisons is highly diverse, ranging between 227 and 1204 inmates (assuming that each inmate has a living space of 4 square metres). However, Czech prisons are notoriously overcrowded. At the end of 2019, prisons held a total of 21,448 inmates, which was 103 percent of the formal system capacity; the average degree of crowding in Heřmanice prison was 127 percent, in Oráčov 125 percent, and in Kuřim 122 percent (overall, 18 out of 35 prisons were at over 100 percent capacity) (PSCR, 2020). Typically, the buildings that serve as prisons were not purpose-built but were remodelled from buildings that had served other purposes, mainly recreational or industrial. For all the factors mentioned, the Czech prison system is highly fragmented and confusing with no or minimal standardization of conditions for the inmates.

The employment of inmates is considered a non-standard form of employment in the CR, so standard labour law is not applied; instead, regulation follows the already mentioned law (169/1999 Sb.) and government decree 361/2017 Sb.. There are three major differences between regular employment based on labour law and specially regulated employment. First, inmates do not have the right to choose their employer; they are assigned to either prison maintenance jobs, commercial jobs created by the Prison Service, or jobs for a private firm. Although they can refuse to work for a private firm, working for the prison or other state institutions is obligatory. In these cases, work refusal incurs disciplinary penalization and the imposition on the inmate of the financial costs of serving their sentence.² Generally, most inmates are doing unqualified, fast-paced production jobs. Secondly, the remuneration for work done is significantly lowered. According to the decree, employed inmates are classified into one of four levels of remuneration based on the nature of work they are doing. These levels pertain to:

- (a) non-qualified work (remuneration is then 50 percent of the minimum income in the CR,³ approximately €265 a month);
- (b) work requiring a vocational certificate (70 percent of the minimum income, approx. €371 a month);

- (c) work requiring graduation or a bachelor's degree (95 percent of the minimum income, approx. €504 a month);
- (d) work requiring a master's university degree (120 percent of the minimum income, approx. €636 a month).⁴

About 90 percent of inmates are classified into the first level (since the majority of available working positions require no or minimal qualification). The average income was approximately €170 after taxation in 2019 (PSCR, 2020), and, in the same year, the overall employment rate of inmates was nearly 59 percent. The sums are for a standard 40-hour working week, which is typical in incarceration as well as in general society, not to mention that every month the costs of imprisonment (approx. €55), repayment of debts, alimony, and savings for release are deducted. Thirdly, similar to Guilbaud's (2010) observation in France, inmates do not have the right to unionize; furthermore, their voice, as a specific group, is silenced.

Therapeutic programmes are basically divided into two types – standardized and specialized; the former are provided in the standard prison sections, and the latter comprise therapeutic communities combined with other programmes and are carried out in the specialized sections of various prisons. Standardized programmes are focused mainly on impulsive and/or aggressive behaviour and drug use, and inmates usually attend them after returning from their employment. Inmates who are accepted into specialized programmes (again focused on aggressive behaviour and drugs but, additionally, also on sexually motivated crimes) do not formally have a job because the programmes are very intensive and demanding; however, they are recorded as being employed for administrative reasons. In general, these therapeutic programmes encounter two problems.

First, there is a serious shortage of programmes; only approximately 3.3 percent of the Czech prison population participated in a specialized programme,⁵ and only around 10 percent of the population attended a therapeutic programme generally (either specialized or standardized) (Jiříčka and Prokešová, 2012; Jiříčka and Kejřová, 2015). Second, there is an ongoing shortage of personnel, meaning that the ratio of social workers to inmates is often as dire as one to several hundred (usually 200–300). The lack of employees extends to both uniformed personnel and specialists, including correctional case managers,⁶ group counsellors, psychologists, social workers, educational administrators, substance abuse counsellors, inmate recreation coordinators, and chaplains. Thus, personnel must often multi-task, which generally reduces the quality of the already scarce programmes.

In addition to the therapeutic programmes, individual inmate interviews are conducted by prison personnel, especially social workers and psychologists. These interviews focus on inmates' personal problems, such as debts, family/children, and psychological interventions. Interviews are carried out in response to inmates' requests, which must be mailed (often as a paper form to a physical mailbox) to the personnel, who then take all the requests and invite inmates to interviews as they see fit.

Overall, inmates are exploited and experience a high level of precarity because they are employed in repetitive jobs that do not improve their skills, for which they receive ridiculously low wages that cannot be used to repay debts, for alimony, or for effective savings, and they do not have basic labour rights. Furthermore, most inmates have problematic debt (the average inmate owes between €24,074 and €26,926), rendering their meagre

remuneration ineffective for repayment. In fact, their pay is low even for the insolvency process, which, if executed during their sentence time, can help inmates a lot.⁷ Therapeutic programmes are scarce and available to only a limited number of inmates.

Concurrently, the Prison Service of the CR has announced via SARPO, a diagnostic tool for screening inmates, that nearly 54 percent of prisoners have problems with alcohol and/or drug use, nearly 60 percent have insecure or no housing, 73 percent have debts that they are unable to pay, 46 percent have a behaviour disorder combined with impulsiveness, a lack of social skills, and/or have experienced other psychological and psychosocial traumas, psychosis was identified in approximately 7 percent of prisoners, and nearly 18 percent had undergone psychological treatment (Drahý et al., 2018). Thus, the majority of Czech inmates are marginalized by a set of intersecting factors and thus would have had to cope with social exclusion prior to their incarceration. The intersection between social exclusion and criminality is well documented (Farrall et al., 2010; Liem and Richardson, 2014; Maruna, 2001; Wacquant, 2001, 2009; Young, 1999); in particular, the high prevalence of psychological trauma among inmates is striking (Fritzon et al., 2020; Gold et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2015; Skett and Lewis, 2019; Stensrud et al., 2019). In the CR, similar research has begun to emerge only recently (Hejnal, 2013; Kupka et al. 2021; Mertl and Bareš, 2018; Toušek et al., 2018; Vašát, 2012), even though it is obvious that marginalized populations in the CR often have experienced incarceration, have to cope with various types of trauma, are more frequently victimized by other people and state institutions, experience material deprivation, have problems with drug abuse, have weak or no social networks, and, because they come into contact with it frequently, tend to have internalized violence as a viable means of interpersonal interaction.

In summary, it seems that the Czech prison population would be better supported via therapeutic and counselling programmes instead of precarious jobs. In reality, however, as I will demonstrate, not only is there a serious mismatch between needs and available support, which Long et al. (2019) consider to be one of the crucial obstacles to successful rehabilitation, but even the available programmes are obstructed by prison employment processes.

Data and methodology

This study draws on data created within the TERAPEUT-VTOS project focused on therapeutic and counselling work with inmates in Czech prisons. The main goal of the project, which is still ongoing, is to determine how work with inmates is done, what the good/bad experiences are, and which problems/obstacles limit the therapy and counselling provided. To achieve this, we have been visiting prisons in teams of two people (altogether, our team has three members) where we conduct semi-structured interviews with specialized prison personnel, attend therapy groups whenever possible, and write fieldwork notes from our participative observations. For this study, the main source of empirical material will be interviews.

At the time of writing this study, we had visited 10 prisons. Our sample has included all types of prisons: both secure (with all the security levels represented) and high-security ones, with and without standardized and therapeutic programmes and communities, with and without newcomer entry sections, with and without custody and detention, and

the prisons were geographically situated all across the CR. Thus the sample is very varied, increasing the validity of our research. We managed to secure 55 interviews with 8 correctional case managers, 10 group counsellors, 11 psychologists, 9 social workers, 12 educational administrators, 2 substance abuse counsellors, 2 inmate recreation coordinators, and a chaplain. The average age of the informants was 45 years (median 47.5 years) and they had been employed in the Czech prison system for 13.8 years on average (median 15 years).⁸ There were six main topics of conversation at first:

- (a) daily work routine, problems the personnel must cope with, and the needs of inmates;
- (b) the situation in prison;
- (c) therapeutic and counselling programmes and cooperation with non-governmental organizations and other entities;
- (d) specialized therapeutic sections and therapeutic communities;
- (e) the general idea of open prisons and the Czech project of open prisons;
- (f) re-entry/resettlement in the CR.

After visiting several prisons, we found that the personnel often wanted to discuss the absence of supervision and availability of further professional education, so we have added it as the seventh main topic. The issue discussed in this study – that is, the conflict between employment and therapeutic/counselling programmes – was included as a sub-topic because I had encountered this problem via one of my other studies, and it was obvious that it is an important theme. This has proven to be the case, as 30 informants spontaneously brought up the topic without being asked about it.

All the interviews were transcribed, and MAXQDA software was used to code the transcriptions. The coding process took place at several levels and in several cycles (as was introduced, for example, by Charmaz, 2006, and Saldaña, 2009). The coding process itself was guided by the qualitative content analysis process exemplified by Philipp Mayring (2000), which is distinctive because it combines deductive and inductive approaches. Thus, in the first cycle, the data were coded deductively in accordance with the ‘big’ main topics, and in subsequent cycles these big themes were modified and extended to accommodate partial, more focused, sub-themes, which were identified inductively. One of the sub-themes was the conflict between employment and therapy/counselling, which was further analysed and coded to represent the recurring views and assessments.

Conflict between prison employment and therapeutic programmes – our findings

In total, 41 informants⁹ regarded the conflict as a problem that influenced their work with inmates: 19 saw it as an critical problem, 8 as a problem, and 8 identified its existence but did not regard it as a problem; 5 informants expressed some kind of ambivalence, meaning that at one point in the interview they saw the conflict as a problem but later pointed to employment as a key rehabilitation factor, and 1 informant mentioned the conflict but did not elaborate his opinion further. Thus, about 13 informants told us that the conflict was not a problem at all for them. The last informant, the chaplain, stressed

that the conflict was not a relevant issue. These categories will be developed further in the ensuing discussion.

The conflict as a critical problem

The informants in this category often expressed their dissatisfaction that employment undermines or makes it impossible for them to do their job and work with their inmates:

We fought to have an opportunity to choose at-risk inmates to working with in therapeutic programmes when they arrive in the entry section. However, if he [an inmate] goes to work, we don't have a chance. (Boromir, more than 15 years)

It happened several times that we had inmates who were employed but wanted to join a therapeutic programme; however, the workplace refused to release them because they did not have a replacement or the inmates were handy . . . [Or] when it was an inmate who was here for the third time and he had cooked well before, he was sent directly to a kitchen. When this happens, we, at the specialized programme, go crazy; why are they sending him to a kitchen when he needs a specialized programme, and he wants to go to the specialized programme and then cook? (Libata, 11 years)

In fact, if they have a rotation of morning/afternoon shift, we struggle to find a time when they are present in the dormitory and I'm present as well because I don't want to do overtime just to catch up with someone. (Jaroboj, more than 15 years)

Sometimes, even if the personnel do overtime to access an inmate, there is a problem with overtime itself and its administration:

I need to discuss something with them [inmates] but I must wait until they get back from work. And the director doesn't like it when an inmate has a leave of absence because of counselling or anything like that. So I have to do overtime. It doesn't bother me, but other people question why I had overtime and blah blah blah. So this is disrupting my work quite a bit. (Domaslava, less than 2 years)

Personnel regarded the fight for inmates as a very tiresome and uncertain process, especially in the case of standardized therapeutic programmes that are carried out in standard prison sections because, even if they manage to motivate an inmate to attend the programme, prison employment always took priority. As a result, at one session an inmate would be present, at the next they would be absent because of work, sometimes without even informing the therapist. Myslava felt like an 'inmate chaser' rather than a therapist owing to this situation.

In the case of standardized programmes and individual interviews, the personnel tried to combine prison employment and therapy/counselling, with employment remaining as the priority. In most cases, this meant that programmes were carried out after inmates returned from their employment:

When we have [standardized] programmes, for instance ZZZ or VIT, we carry them out in the afternoon or, sometimes, at weekends for employed [inmates] to catch up. It's true that the VIT

programme is very demanding . . . so they arrive at 2 p.m. and leave at 5:15 p.m., and it [fatigue] is obvious. So we make them some coffee . . . It's no cost to us and they are excited and take it as a nice gesture from us, and it helps them a little bit. The employed inmates, I think, don't have the will for extra programmes . . . They have a difficult time, getting up early in the morning, and it shows. (Velema, more than 15 years)

Thus, a combination of employment and therapeutic/counselling programmes, where the programmes take place after employment, is not a viable option – inmates are too exhausted to take in the content.

However, problems may also occur in specialized programmes. Inmates in these programmes are not eligible for employment because of the intensity and demanding nature of the programmes. Still, one informant described how employment can disrupt even specialized programmes:

Sometimes, we're having the relaxation session [after the therapy sessions] and, suddenly, a prison guard shouts 'part-time job' in the corridor. And it's over. The part-time job takes priority over relaxation. When, for instance, five people are taken out from my group and only two of them remain, it disrupts the running [of the group] completely. (Hornusa, 3 years)

The part-time jobs are unpaid and formally they are a part of the programme so, officially, there is no conflict, except for the absence of relaxed rest for inmates so that they can mentally process the often unpleasant self-discovery facilitated through therapy.

Employment may clash with retraining, a process that should be supported by it:

Conflict arises when I come up with a proposal that I have six people who would like to attend a retraining course. They [prison management] tell me: 'And whom we are going to send to work?' (Ledan, 11 years)

This is somewhat surprising given that the usual prison employment in the CR is an unqualified job with minimal or no prospects:

Unfortunately, . . . the available jobs don't provide enough motivation for an inmate to change. He doesn't do a job that would be lucrative for him, and that he can continue doing after the release. So they are doing inferior jobs that are rather demotivating: 'I'm not going to do this anymore in my life.' (Dobran, more than 15 years)

It would be more reasonable to send inmates for retraining, which increases their chances of finding and keeping a better job, both in prison and after their release. Unfortunately, prisons often preferred short-term benefits over long-term benefits.

From a rehabilitative and long-term perspective, the most important problem that the informants raised was the pointlessness of the work-first model:

If you provide him [an inmate] with a job, that's fine, he will have a job. What is going to change in his personality? It's not going to change anything because he will be working somewhere in a factory on the conveyor belt, so he will go to work in the morning, get back in the afternoon, and the debt will continue to rise, and anyway his personality stays the same. So,

the ideal situation for us [at the specialized programme] is to work with the personality and then send them to work. Thus, they can recognize and find out where the causes are, where the problems were, what they could have done about it. Then they can deal with debts, rebuild relationships, secure post-release assistance if they are [drug] users; only then let them go to work. (Hoducha, more than 15 years)

Another informant added that the work-first approach is even more dangerous for personnel and society:

Perhaps we can call it dynamic security, right. That is, if I have established contact with that person [an inmate] and there is a possibility of getting to know him on the therapeutic level, I'm able to work with his risks. From my point of view, at the moment we are giving priority to employment at the expense of security, not just ours but also that of the public. If someone was stealing from his family because of his addiction and was being aggressive because of this addiction, we must work first with his personality and give him some self-insight, and then we can try to find him a job. (Dobran, more than 15 years)

Mirogoj had a similar view, although he asserted that, sometimes he must first work with inmates' deep trauma and then help them to establish the basic social and emotional insights to work with their risks and needs. Without insight, inmates are dangerous to themselves and their surroundings:

[Inmates with a personality disorder] can perform perfectly within standard imprisonment – they will go to work, they will follow the regime . . . they will comply with everything . . . but, meanwhile, they reassure each other that the world is mean to them. If some prison guards or other personnel reinforce them in these thoughts, it will provoke them even more and they get out more pissed, frustrated, and dangerous compared with the situation when they got here, if I may say so. (Mirogoj, 14 years)

In some cases, informants said that the work-first approach negatively influences the therapeutic/counselling programmes not only directly but also indirectly, because it undermines the particular standards and principles on which the programmes are based. Typically, prisons sign contracts with employers committing to providing a specific number of inmates ready to work and they are obliged to follow through on these commitments. A problem occurs when there is a sudden shortage of eligible inmates, yet the prison has a contract and is pushed to have high levels of employment:

He [an inmate] lapses, used drugs and got fired from a job, and, after two months, they [prison] must send him to another job again. Because there is a contract . . . we [prison therapeutic/counselling personnel] are constrained to reduce the demands on inmates, and then . . . the rehabilitation process is undermined. (Nechval, more than 15 years)

Here at [prison], inmates test positive for using drugs, but they continue working. This is because there must be employment. So they punish them by removing visits and all benefits from them, but keep them going to work. They keep earning €111. . . . that person [inmate] has a positive test on one day, and the next he goes to a job. Because they all must go to a job. And I can't stand this. (Mirogoj, 14 years)

Even inmates in the specialized sections of prisons who were not formally eligible to attend any job owing to the intensity of their therapeutic programme were influenced by these practices. The personnel felt that the motivation of these inmates could be shaken, because they were trying hard to cope with the demands of the programme, whereas the questionable actions of their counterparts in the standard sections were sometimes tolerated and overlooked when it was profitable for the prison.

Overall, this ‘work-first, everything else later’ policy is, according to numerous informants, a product of public pressure on prisons to make inmates immediately worthwhile, and also, under current conditions (when there is a scarcity of therapeutic/counselling programmes), it is the easiest way to establish at least some sort of programme for the inmates.

The conflict as a problem

Informants in this category identified conflict as an existing problem but they did not regard it as a permanent and disruptive one. They saw it as an occasional factor that, in some situations, made their work with inmates more difficult. Typically, the work with inmates had to be postponed to a time at which everyone was present at the prison:

I’m situated in the standard section where there are employed inmates, which makes it harder to work with them, and we must schedule the therapy/counselling at the time when we have the afternoon shift. Because [on the morning shift] we arrive at the prison at 6:30 a.m. in the morning and they [inmates] are already at work. We leave at 2:30 or 3 p.m. and they arrive back at 3 or 3:15 p.m. So we do any programmes with inmates on days when we have the afternoon shift. Which, taken from the perspective of an inmate who gets back from an eight-hour shift and then is asked to listen to a talk about drugs or something else, is not a very appropriate situation. (Lobek, more than 15 years)

In some cases, informants felt that employment complicated the realization of interventions and individual interviews:

I visit the communities [in specialized sections] where there is a lot of tension, and it’s good to air it, which does a tremendous job because, for instance, there has been some conflict during the night, and we can talk about it in a safe environment that prevents other conflicts from emerging. I simply see it as an unequivocally positive factor, and it would be ideal if this happened in every prison section; however, it can’t be done because of employment, when people go to shifts and such. (Litobor, 1 year)

However, even if the conflict was perceived as a non-essential problem from the point of view of some informants, sometimes they recounted narratives that pointed to the greater seriousness of the issue, as this example shows:

[T]hat inmate had an enforcement proceeding for €1,111 and they [the office] wanted to put his house up . . . for auction. It would have been auctioned for €24,074 even though the house with its land had a value of €74,074. His mother lived in the house . . . so the situation had to be dealt with quickly. Now, the inmate, coincidentally, he met me when he was getting back from a job

and told me that he had received a letter and must talk with me . . . So I was like, let's do something right away. (Zbyna, 1 year and 3 months)

On a positive note, the situation was resolved – Zbyna and the inmate managed to freeze the proceedings; therefore, the house was not put up for auction. However, it was, to a large extent, a mere coincidence that the inmate met Zbyna and was able to tell her what happened. It could just as well have turned out the opposite way – the inmate might not have been able to reach Zbyna because of his prison employment and the house might have been sold.

The conflict exists, but it is not a problem

Informants in this category admitted that they encounter the conflict sometimes, but it is not a problem because they can communicate with inmates and find a time when meeting up is possible, or instead they are able to come to an agreement with prison management to excuse the inmate for the necessary time. In one prison, there was even a formalized procedure for this:

We plan individual interviews with employment hours in mind. As for programmes, it depends, sometimes inmates are not excused, but, generally, for the ZZZ programme, inmates are excused. Recently, a quite efficient system for excusing was implemented . . . It seems to me that it's working and there are no problems with excuses. We simply report a couple of days in advance where and when inmates should be and write down the reason. If I have written down that participation is necessary, it has never happened to me that they wouldn't excuse the inmates. Sometimes, once, it happened to my colleagues that they called them that they could not fill up the shift and asked the colleagues if they really needed these two, three inmates.

It seems that this system is quite a feasible solution to the conflict, but it is obvious that it takes time to communicate everything, and, in the end, it is not certain that inmates will be excused. Employment is still ultimately prioritized, so work with inmates takes place when they are tired, the therapy/counselling is intermittent (for example, often the session took place once every three weeks), and the personnel invest energy in communication instead of utilizing this energy more effectively in direct work with inmates.

Ambivalent view of the conflict

Some informants referred to the conflict ambivalently. They perceived it as a problem at one stage of the interview but later declared that it posed no problem at all, or they endorsed the prioritization of employment as a good thing. A typical example is as follows:

They get back in the evening. . . Well, evening, some of them at 3 p.m., some at 4 p.m., and some at 4:30 or 5 p.m., right, from the workplace. And they are tired. As I said, it's tough work . . . I know because I used to do workplace controls . . . and then sending them to this session [therapy/counselling], I don't see any benefit in that. . . [Later in the interview] So I'm glad that everyone has a job here because, as it's been said, they [inmates] don't have the urge to think

about something else. They get back, lie down, sleep, or, at most, chat in the corridors and smoke, but it's calm here. (Boben, more than 15 years)

This example shows that employment is sometimes a welcome instrument to make the work of the personnel easier, and the personnel see it in a positive light, even though it is problematic in terms of inmates' rehabilitation.

The conflict is not a problem

Regarding this category, it is noteworthy that 4 out of the 13 informants did not have any problems because they worked at a specialized section of the prison where inmates were recorded as employed for administrative reasons. Thus, technically, they should not be experiencing the conflict (as stated above, this is not entirely true all the time) and, therefore, logically, should not have any problems with it. The rest of them could be divided into three sub-categories: (1) those with an enthusiastic attitude that mitigated or eliminated the conflict; (2) those who prioritized employment and, thus, did not recognize the conflict as a relevant problem; (3) those who identified the conflict as occurring, but not as a problematic situation.

The first type of informant is represented by Hajma:

I take the afternoon shift so [I can do counselling] with people who are in employment during the morning. They [the prison management] enabled me to establish flexible working hours to suit me. I have the feeling of work well done, that I can provide counselling to people who [are in employment]. I cannot accept employment as a handicap. (Hajma, more than 15 years)

Hajma recognizes the potentiality of the conflict but, thanks to her enthusiasm and work ethic (in the interview, she mentioned taking the case documentation home so that she can think about the individual cases and provide adequate counselling), she can mitigate or eliminate it. Unsurprisingly, she was the only one of her 'type' – no other informant showed such dedication.

The second type of informant is represented by Kvasej:

Prison employment should be prioritized in my opinion. Because, the way I see it, an inmate is able to . . . pay maintenance obligations, he may . . . save money for his release, he has an allowance so he can buy things at the prison canteen . . . Of course, people's view of him is different because he attends the workplace in the morning, so we know he's not doing silly things, escaping, and so on . . . (Kvasej, 15 years)

This sub-group, just like Kvasej, regarded employment as a key rehabilitation factor, wholeheartedly accepting its prioritization. For these informants, not only was the conflict not a problem, but they even refused to recognize it as a relevant issue because, in their eyes, the system was set up correctly.

The third sub-group is represented by Zemata:

No, certainly not because, for these reasons, we are here once a week for the employed. Everyone [from the personnel] is present on different days, so we can cover our inmates.

Furthermore, we have a weekend shift at least once a month . . . so I work with people for whom there is no time left . . . during that [afternoon shift] or on a Saturday. So it doesn't complicate [anything]. (Zemata, more than 15 years)

The excerpt from Zemata's interview expresses a similar sentiment to that of the category 'the conflict exists, but it is not a problem'. However, Zemata refuses to recognize the conflict entirely, because, in her view, inmates can receive therapy/counselling intermittently when there is enough time and this situation is entirely acceptable.

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the data presented, it is obvious that prison employment is significantly preferred over therapeutic/counselling programmes and there is a conflict between the two in the Czech prison system. Inmates are directed to engage in employment rather than complete a therapeutic programme and/or get counselling; sometimes, inmates are pulled out from a therapeutic/counselling programme for employment, even in the case of a group work programme, which is then disruptive for the therapy session; therapeutic/counselling work done after prison employment is hindered by inmates' tiredness; in some cases, employment prevents inmates from participating in retraining. This conflict between therapeutic/counselling programmes and employment poses a serious problem in the Czech prison system, indicating that the RNR approach to working with inmates is only formally declared and not applied in practice. Similarly, the screening process via SARPO, which should identify inmates' risk areas and needs and, in turn, inform their therapeutic/counselling plan, is often only a formality that has a minimal influence on an inmate's plan. Many inmates have other needs than employment, yet a work-first approach and policy are applied instead.

This situation can be explained by the contemporary state of the prison system, where there is a general shortage of (qualified) personnel, therapeutic/counselling programmes are scarce, and prisons are overcrowded. If we add to this the media discourse (which portrays prison conditions in a tabloid manner as better than those of an ordinary household) and the demand from enterprises for cheap and reliable labour, it is understandable that employment is the easiest and most practicable way to do *something* with inmates.

However, from a rehabilitation and re-entry/resettlement perspective, this situation is both ineffective and dangerous. Whether we apply the RNR or GLM, the core wisdom in both cases dictates that the inefficiency of the delivered therapeutic/counselling plan will function to hinder the rehabilitation process. The danger lies, as the informants asserted, in the prisonization and adaptation of inmates to prison conditions and a strict regime. Thus, inmates can attend a job and perform other duties without any problems, but this conceals their real problems, such as their psychological traumas, material deprivation, non-existent social networks, and so on. This is the reason why the work/boot camp approach does not work well. It may well be that inmates whose needs are not addressed are released from prison equally as dangerous or even more dangerous than they were at the time of imprisonment.

The fact that (post-)prison employment has its limits and is sometimes overestimated in terms of inmates' rehabilitation is also supported by research. According to numerous

studies (Ramakers et al., 2017; Tripodi et al., 2010; Visher et al., 2005; Wilson et al., 2000; Wooditch et al., 2014), it is inconclusive whether employment by itself contributes to reducing the recidivism or reincarceration rate. This implies, as Fritzon et al. (2020) stress, that intervening mainly in one domain – employment – is simply not enough for successful rehabilitation. This also corresponds with the RNR and GLM approaches to the rehabilitation of inmates and released persons. Furthermore, it was suggested that neglecting previous traumatization may result in increased employment instability (Fritzon et al., 2020; Sansone et al., 2012) and diminishing motivation of released persons, even if they are employed (Tripodi et al., 2010). It should be noted that employment stability has a greater impact on recidivism than the mere fact of whether or not released persons are employed (Wooditch et al., 2014). However, employment instability is also problematic for potential employers, who stated that some released individuals they had been employing needed therapy sessions and/or social work, which they were unable to deliver. As a result, employers had to cope with a fluctuating workforce, since released individuals often struggled and eventually lost their job (Bumiller, 2015). Thus, as some scholars suggest (McGuire-Snieckus and Caulfield, 2018; Tripodi et al., 2010), it seems that prior more intensive and extensive implementation of therapeutic/counselling interventions inside prisons would benefit inmates and also enhance their (post-) prison employment prospects.

As presented in the Introduction section, studies from various Czech prisons suggest that therapeutic/counselling programmes can have a positive impact on the success of inmates' re-entry and resettlement, provided that such programmes are available, are of high quality, are carried out in a positive climate, and match the inmates' identified needs. That is not to say that prison employment is pointless or cannot contribute to the rehabilitation process. There is evidence that prison employment can bring some positives to the rehabilitation process, helping inmates to find a sense of inclusion and recognition (Guilbaud, 2010; Pandeli et al., 2019), to feel they are a valuable member of society (Goodman, 2012), to learn social skills (Haney, 2010), to develop specific skills by doing non-tedious work (Brown and Toyoki, 2013), and to prepare for release, particularly if the work is done outside prison (Elisha et al., 2017). In this sense, prison employment has the potential to contribute indirectly to rehabilitation by 'structuring the daily lives of prisoners and in teaching behavioural patterns and habits such as self-discipline, punctuality, responsibility and evaluation of effort' (Alós et al., 2015: 38). However, at the same, employment must not be treated as superior to therapeutic/counselling programmes because doing so does not correspond to the needs of inmates, as has been proven not only in the CR but also in other countries. Moreover, evidence suggests that the programmes currently under way in the CR offer greater potential than just prison employment for increasing inmates' chances of successful re-entry/resettlement. In the case of specialized prison sections, it would be much more worthwhile if inmates first finished their therapeutic programmes and then enlisted in employment, because their programmes are demanding and cannot be combined with employment. In the case of standardized programmes, it would be feasible to split the week into working days and days reserved for counselling so that inmates do not have to attend the programmes at the end of their working day when they are tired, because in that state such a programme is pointless for them.

Unfortunately, in the key policy document *Koncepce vězeňství do roku 2025*, which introduces the guiding principles for the Czech prison system to be followed until the year 2025, there is only one sentence regarding this conflict, and, overall, prison employment is stressed and prioritized as *the* answer for all the inmates' rehabilitation needs (Ministry of Justice, 2016). However, the conflict as a specific issue needs to be addressed to improve work with inmates on their needs and rehabilitation, which should increase the chances of a successful re-entry/resettlement process and avoid reconviction and re-imprisonment. In other words, it would contribute to mitigating the problem of former inmates returning to prison, which is regarded as significant by both the Czech prison system and society.

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Notes

1. So, for example, a new inmate is assigned to the high-security section of a secure prison by a court but the prison personnel can assign the inmate to a lower-security section after some time if they are rated positively (generally have no discipline problems, fulfil the prescribed treatment programme, etc.).
2. The financial cost of the sentence is standardly paid from the public purse.
3. The minimum income is approx. €530.
4. There are no official statistics on the remuneration classification – the figures were obtained from personal communication with an informant from the Prison Service of the Czech Republic.
5. This percentage was obtained from <https://www.vscr.cz/o-nas/zamestnavani-veznu/>.
6. The work of correctional case managers in Czech prisons is specific. They should be front-line workers who interact with inmates on a daily basis, dealing with their needs and supervising their behaviour and compliance with prison norms (case managers can officially praise or discipline an inmate), and, at the same time, assess them regarding a prescribed educational and therapeutic plan. However, owing to the burden of bureaucratic obligations and overcrowded prisons, case managing, that is knowing inmates and working with them on solving their problems and needs, is severely limited and restricted to basic interactions (such as mail forwarding).
7. There are no official statistics so the numbers and information about insolvency were obtained from an interview with a prison social worker who is an expert on the inmates' debt issues and participates in a national commission that has been tasked with implementing a national debt elimination programme in Czech prisons.

8. Three informants did not state their age.
9. All the names of informants have been changed for ethical reasons. As pseudonyms, I chose old Czech names that are no longer used. Along with the pseudonym, I note the length of their work experience in the Czech prison system.

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