

Effects of Imprisonment on Romanian Offenders' Lives

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Activity Report

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ACTIVITY REPORT

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According to the objectives outlined in the working plan, in the period between January 2014 and August 2014, four activities were carried out: 1) data collection; 2) interview transcription; 3) creation of the SPSS datasets; 4) the attendance of the summer school on statistical analysis. All these activities were conducted under the Objective 1: the elaboration of the methodological framework of researching the effects of imprisonment. The last months of the year (September 2014 – December 2014) were devoted to analyzing and interpreting the qualitative and quantitative data according to Objective 2: the evaluation of the impact of incarceration.

First activity. Data collection

This activity started in 2013 when both an exploratory and a pilot study were conducted. Based on a qualitative research methodology, the exploratory study was carried out in July 2013 and aimed to identify the key aspects that would be addressed in the main research. The pilot study was undertaken in December to test the validity of the quantitative research instrument (the questionnaire for inmates), and also to identify the potential practical problems that might intervene in the activity of data gathering. 10 questionnaires were face-to-face administrated at Giurgiu Prison and 80 were self-administrated, collectively, in groups of 8-10 inmates gathered in one room at Timisoara Prison. Following this study, some questions were dropped out from the questionnaire, while others were reworded; face-to-face interviewing technique was chosen for administrating the questionnaire in the main research.

The quantitative data were collected in four prisons: Timisoara Prison (27.01.2014 – 01.02.2014; 03.03.2014 – 07.03.2014); Giurgiu Prison (10.02.2014 – 21.02.2014; 04.08.2014 – 08.08.2014); Craiova Prison (18.03.2014 – 04.04.2014), and Tulcea Prison (05.05.2014 – 17.05.2014).

The inmates were proportionally selected with the overall number of inmates incarcerated in these prisons, according to the time they already spent in detention: long-serving prisoners, who had spent in prison more than five years of their current sentence, medium-serving prisoners, who had served between two and five years of their term and short-serving prisoners, who had served less than two years of their sentence. In order to have groups of roughly equal size, long-serving prisoners were over-represented in the sample at

both Giurgiu and Craiova. Also, at Tulcea, only this category of prisoners was recruited for the study. The initial sample consisted of 320 participants to whom a questionnaire was administrated: Giurgiu (n=85), Craiova (n=91), Timisoara (n= 99), Tulcea (n=48). For all respondents who gave their written consent, additional data on disciplinary behavior and other information about their institutional status were further collected via official records drawn from the prisons' electronic database. 94% of the survey participants (305 of 323 inmates) agreed that their electronic files to be consulted. In 25 cases, some incompatibilities were found between official data and inmates' questionnaires with regards to several socio-demographic variables; therefore, they were dropped from the database. The final sample includes 280 inmates for which both questionnaires and official data were congruent. Of these, 38% have been in prison for less than 2 years of their current term, 32% have already spent in prison between 2 and 5 years and 30% served more than 5 years.

When possible, I also intended to administrate a separate questionnaire to prisoners' life partners before or after they visit their spouses in prison. Unfortunately, the prison administration didn't allow me to conduct this activity in prisons. On the other hand, the inmates were the only persons entitled to provide the contact details of their life-partners; however, more than half of the prisoners (54%) were reluctant to provide such information. Only 53 out of 113 prisoners who were staying in touch with their life partners at the time of the interview (46%) did that (in most cases, they provided the mobile phone numbers). Of these, 6 have provided foreign phone numbers and therefore, their partners were not contacted. One provided only an email, and another one – a home address. Their spouses were also not contacted. The partners of the remaining 45 respondents were contacted; over half of the women (n= 24) agreed to answer by phone to the questionnaire.

The qualitative data were collected in three prisons: Giurgiu Prison (02.07.2013 – 24.07.2013); Rahova Prison (24.04.2014 – 29.04.2014), and Gaesti Prison (09.06.2014 – 13.06.2014; 29.07.2014 – 01.08.2014). 50 inmates were interviewed using a semi-structured, in-depth interviewing technique: Giurgiu (20 interviews), Rahova (15 interviews) Gaesti, (15 interviews) (20 more than I initially proposed). All the interviews were audio-recorded resulting in a total number of 110 hours of recording. Of the participants, 18 were already short-term imprisoned (less than 2 years); another 18 were already middle-term imprisoned (spending between 2 and 5 years behind bars), and 14 were incarcerated for more than 5 years. 15 were about to become eligible for conditional release in less than one year. 4 have already been discussed in the prison commission and their release has been postponed. The interviews were conducted in different rooms provided by the prison staff: individual offices

of prison psychologists or social workers, offices of wardens, classrooms and dining rooms. The average length of the interviews was 114 minutes (almost 2 hours); the shortest lasted less than one hour and the longest – more than 8 hours.

Also, when possible I planned to interview the inmates' life-partners. As none of the inmates who kept in touch with their spouses provided their contact details, I conducted three interviews with the life-partners who participated in the quantitative study. Although I intended to interview all the 24 women who responded to the questionnaire, the majority refused directly or indirectly (have not answered anymore to the phone, or invoked various reasons for not participating such as being out of town or having familial problems). One of the interviewed women, aged 45 years was the concubine of a male incarcerated at Giurgiu Prison for drug traffic. The second woman aged 28 years, housewife, was living for 7 years in cohabitation with an inmate incarcerated at Craiova Prison. The third woman is 22 years old; she married in prison a year ago with one inmate also imprisoned at Craiova Prison. These interviews were conducted in public places (parks and cafes). The average length of the interviews was 1.8 hours, the shortest lasted less than one hour (58.87 minutes) and the longest – 2.8 hours (169.89 minutes).

The research ethics was obviously taken into account in the activity of data collection. Thus, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its objectives, the procedure of participants' selection, the voluntary character of participation, but also about the fact that they can refuse to take part in the research without being sanctioned. Also, the inmates were informed that the data they provided via interviews and questionnaires, as well as the data drawn from their prison files will be analyzed only for the purpose of scientific research. The confidentiality of the responses and the anonymity of the participants were guaranteed. All the participants signed an Agreement and the informed consent.

Second activity. Interview transcription

Transcriptions of 50 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with inmates for three prisons (Gaesti, Giurgiu, Rahova), covering various topics related to the impact of imprisonment: how the inmate become involved in crime; the first contact with the prison environment; the experience of current incarceration; perceptions of personal change in prison; the quality of marital relationships before and during imprisonment; the quality of relationships with children before and during imprisonment; the quality of friendships before and during imprisonment; education, employment history and development of human capital during imprisonment; future plans (*in Romanian*).

Some interviews were fractured in several parts due to multiple interruptions caused either by the inmates' program (lunch, visits, travels to court etc.) or by the working program of the prison staff. Also, some interruptions were caused by the inmates entering to the rooms where I conducted the interviews, as they were curious about the activity I carried out. The transcription of these interviews has been done chronologically, using a single MS Word document. For the interviewer interventions, the "I" notation was used, while for the interviewee' interventions was used the notation "R". Efforts to accurately reproduce the interview content were made. However, when a word or a phrase was not understandable, the expression (*not understandable*) was inserted in the text. An impressive number of over 900 pages edited in MS Word were collected. The transcripts of the three interviews conducted with inmates' life-partners were also performed.

Third activity. Creation of the SPSS datasets

Two data sets (*in Romanian*); both contain 280 cases (inmates incarcerated at four prisons: Craiova, Giurgiu, Timisoara and Tulcea). The first one includes approximately 600 variables and is based on self-reported data collection via questionnaires administrated to inmates in a face-to-face survey. It includes an array of variables associated to familial background; the offending history; history of drug/alcohol use; experience of current imprisonment; relationships with life partners before and during imprisonment; relationships with children before and during imprisonment; relationships with friends before and during imprisonment; education, employment history and the development of human capital in prison. The second one includes approximately 200 variables and is based on official records drawn from the prisons' administration electronic database. It includes variables associated with the institutional status of the inmates. For the purposes of analysis, these two data sets could easily be merged as both include the questionnaire number and also a set of common variables (i.e. the name of prison, the prison regime, type of crime, length of sentence, and the date of inmate birth). A third dataset containing only 24 cases (of inmates' life-partners) was also created. It includes over 200 variables: socio-demographics, variables measuring the quality of couple relationship before and during men imprisonment, and variables describing the relationship with children.

Fourth activity. Attendance of Summer School on Statistical Analysis

Between 07 and 18 July 2014 I attended two courses at Essex Summer School in Social Science Data Analysis and Collection, UK. The first class, *Mathematics for Social*

Scientists – Part I, lasted 15 hours. The lecturer of this course was Dr. Chris Saker, senior lecturer in Pure Mathematics at Essex University. The course included 10 lessons approaching topics such as: linear functions, quadratic functions, linear regression, exponential functions and logarithms, elements of trigonometry, and differentiation. The second course, *Applying Regression* lasted 35 hours and was lectured by Dr. Jeremy Miles, behavioral psychologist at RAND Corporation. It included 15 lessons, structured in three parts. The first part was devoted to the theory of regression and approached the following topics: models in statistics, models based on more than one parameter, the sampling process, and introduction in multiple regression models. The second part focused on the analysis of regression and approached topics such as: categorical predictor variables, the assumptions of regression, non-linear regression, count variables, moderators, mediation and path analysis. The third part was a brief introduction in longitudinal multilevel models of analysis. The exercises and the statistical analyses were conducted in STATA and Excel.

Fifth activity. Elaboration of the methodological report

Methodological report includes the description of the field research preparation: gaining access to prisons, the exploratory and pilot study; and also the description of prisons in which I conducted the research; the participants; the research instruments; and the ethical principles that guided the research. It also includes six Annexes: the interview guide for inmates (Annex 1), the interview guide for inmates' family (Annex 2), the questionnaire for inmates (Annex 3), the form of official data collected from prison' electronic database (Annex 4), the questionnaire for families (Annex 5), the socio-demographics of interviewees (Annex 6). The report is available in Romanian (16 pages, plus the aforementioned Annexes).

Sixth activity. Qualitative data analysis

The analysis of qualitative data was conducted manually, using the thematic analysis method. Various themes and sub-themes were identified for each main life-domain potentially affected by imprisonment: criminal activity; human capital and perception of future opportunities for employment; relationship with life-partners and children; friendships. However, given the richness of the material collected (over 900 pages of transcriptions), the Atlas T.I. qualitative data analysis software was bought; it will be used to organize the data and to support the process of data interpretation in further (more thorough) analyses.

Seventh activity. Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data analysis was mainly performed in SPSS statistical software. The first step consisted in analyzing the frequency and the percent distributions, as well in the computation of the descriptive statistics of each variable included in the datasets. The second step consisted in more advanced statistical analyses (most of them were run in Stata statistical software). For example, *multivariate logistic regression* was employed whenever the dependent variable was dichotomous (i.e. the prevalence of prison misconduct; the attendance of vocational courses in prison (yes/no); the separation from life-partner during imprisonment (yes/no)). Also, *negative binomial regression* was performed whenever the dependent variable was a count variable with over-dispersion and a pronounced positive skewness of its distribution (i.e. the frequency of prison misconduct; the number of days worked in prison). Whenever it was the case, the robust standard errors were used to correct for heteroscedastisty. For the purposes of statistical analyses, several variables of the datasets have been recoded.