

# Effectiveness of Treatment Programmes Applied to the Convicted Who Abused a Family Member

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## Abstract

The paper presents the results of a survey on the recidivism of convicted offenders under Article 207 of the Polish Criminal Code who were subjected to the treatment and educational programme for perpetrators of domestic violence during their stay in prison. The survey covered 182 men serving absolute custodial sentences for abusing a family member. Five years after the last convict left the penitentiary institution, a recidivism rate was developed on the basis of data obtained from the Criminal Register and the Prison Service.

In the experimental group, 37.3% of people were re-sentenced within 5 years of leaving prison and in the control community 55.0%. The results obtained may indicate differences in recidivism depending on whether the convicted person participated in a programme for violent offenders or not.

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## Introduction

The literature draws attention to the significant recidivism rate of convicted offenders. Among first-time offenders, the five-year re-offending rate is estimated to be around 40%, with almost 45% of re-offences committed in the first year after leaving prison [1,2] Leszczyńska. Even higher recidivism rates are indicated by data on crime among repeat offenders [3]. Consequently, measures are being taken to reduce it. One method is to develop legal models aimed at combating recidivism [4]. The most common legal solutions include: increasing criminal sanctions for the act, increasing the responsibility for acts committed under the conditions of recidivism, introducing post-penal measures, etc.

The second impact pathway used to reduce recidivism is corrective and therapeutic interventions. Such activities are undertaken both in custodial conditions and in penitentiary isolation [5].

This article presents the results of a survey on the effectiveness of treatment and educational programmes targeted at persons serving a custodial sentence for an act of abuse against a family member. The treatment and educational programmes are part of the whole system of preventing domestic violence, complementing therapeutic forms of intervention with perpetrators. Education and treatment programmes usually last between 3 and 6 months. These interventions are mainly of an educational, socialising, upbringing nature, aimed at changing attitudes by organising the convict's activity in the direction of his/her noticing his/her problems and releasing in him/her the will to solve them in a socially approved manner. Participation in such a programme is not a form of psychotherapy and cannot be equated with it [6].

This article presents the results of a survey on the effectiveness of the Duluth treatment and educational programme. The effectiveness of the programme in this case was measured, inter alia, by analysing the recidivism of those convicted of abusing a family member who had been subjected to a treatment and educational programme for perpetrators of domestic violence during their stay in prison.

## Correction Programmes for Perpetrators of Violence

The most well-known and widespread treatment and educational programme for violent offenders is the Duluth programme [7]. The programme was developed to reduce domestic violence by men against women. It was developed by Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar, put into practice in 1981 and widely used in the United States for over 20 years [8]. According to the assumptions of the programme, adult men who use violence against their partners, admit their acts, accept responsibility for them and commit themselves to systematic participation in the programme (the obligation is to sign a so-called contract) are admitted to the programme.

In the Duluth model, it is assumed that the perpetrator's use of violence stems from the need to control other people, especially his partner, and to gain power over her using various forms of violence. According to this thesis, an effective way to eliminate this behaviour is to change the need to control, to change the tendency to dominate others. A cognitive-behavioural approach is taken into account in actions aimed at eliminating violence, teaching the perpetrator to change attitudes, control aggression and develop a partnership with the victim.

At the beginning of the programme the participant has an individual conversation, fills in a detailed questionnaire on the history of violence, which serves as an initial diagnosis of the problem for the facilitator and for the perpetrator to learn and understand the cyclical nature of violence and its dynamics, and to develop a so-called safety plan.

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During the programme, the participant acquires a thorough knowledge of the causes, types, forms and dynamics and cyclical nature of violence and participates in the development of its definition. She learns that the facilitators treat violence as an intentional act and its commission as an act of conscious choice [9]. Programme participants attend 8 sessions on aggression with the following topics:

- no violence,
- not endangering others,
- respect,
- support and trust,
- responsibility and integrity,
- sexual "respect",
- partnership and negotiations
- equity.

During the session, the respondents are asked about their attitudes, expressing their opinions about power, control, relationships with women, defining their role in aggressive behaviour and are asked how they evaluate the consequences of their behaviour from the women's perspective. It is about getting to know the attitudes and thinking of men. Possible cognitive psychology-based interventions aimed at changing attitudes and thinking patterns are presented, and practical models for alternative to aggressive behaviour are outlined. A basic prerequisite for the effectiveness of the programme is both the willingness to change and taking responsibility for one's behaviour, as only then is change possible. Corrective training sessions are devoted to teaching and/or training in communication-oriented skills and skills alternative to aggression and in assertive behaviour, as well as how to resolve disputes and use social support. Participants who are mentally healthy and do not show signs of addiction, to alcohol and to intoxicants and psychotropic drugs can be admitted to the programme. The programme is delivered in groups of 8-12 people and includes two individual sessions and 11 group sessions.

It should be also noted that in the United States, exclusion on the grounds of addiction or various kinds of mental disorder is complied with more rigorously than in Poland. Men are generally not accepted (admitted) into the programme until they have undergone so-called screening for addictions (alcohol, drugs) mental problems and behavioural disorders. In Poland, the most commonly accepted condition is to remain sober during the programme.

### **Effectiveness of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence**

The evaluation of the effectiveness of treatment-education programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence is not clear-cut [10]. One of the first studies of the effectiveness of the Duluth programme was conducted by the National Institute of Justice in 2003 [11]. A meta-analysis of 21 randomised trials on the effectiveness of the Duluth programme found that the programme had little or no effect on reducing violent recidivism. Little or no difference was found between the experimental and control groups in terms of recidivism. Both programmes found no change in participants' attitudes about domestic violence. For example, there were no differences between the experimental and control groups when it came to views on the role of the woman in the relationship; in both groups, participants did not consider wife-beating to be a crime or that the state had the right to interfere in family affairs. The survey also pointed out that trainers do not have good tools to measure changes in attitudes or behaviour of participants, and

observed that the length of the programme can have a positive impact on reducing the scale of re-offending. According to the survey, the Duluth programme did not change the attitudes of offenders and had little impact on their behaviour. Offenders who participated in the 26-week programme had fewer complaints filed against them than those whose programme lasted 8 weeks, but these differences were not statistically significant. The survey found that 6 months after the verdict, the experimental group sees the women as slightly less responsible for their (i.e. the perpetrators') aggressive behaviour, even though the men in this group still see their partner as "somewhat" or "equally" responsible for the "incident". The National Institute of Justice suggests that the programme "appears to be eradicating" aggressive behaviour during class activities, but does not ensure the sustainability of this change.

In 2012, the Washington State Public Policy Institute conducted a survey of the effectiveness of 34 treatment programmes for domestic violence perpetrators, which included the Duluth Model. In the accompanying review of the literature in this area, there was a finding that the educational impacts of treatment programmes have little or no effect on reducing violence recidivism [12]. Witkowska-Paleń [10] came to similar conclusions, indicating that, in general, the effectiveness of educational and treatment programmes in shaping perpetrators' attitudes and beliefs about the violence used is relatively low. She stresses that this may be related to their insufficient motivation to participate in such interactions during their sentences, and in particular to treating their participation instrumentally, as a pass to apply for early conditional release from prison.

The literature of the subject points out that initially the sole aim of the programme was to reduce recidivism of violence which did not fully understand the relationship between the mechanisms of change according to the programme and its impact on the offender's behaviour. Therefore it is so important to capture the entire catalogue of factors to understand why and on whom the programme works [13].

The evaluation must be also concerned with the assessment of the process and programme variables, its integrity and implementation as well as the characteristics of the group of participants and many other measurements (psychological, behavioural and needs). It is therefore very important to establish what we mean by a programme 'working', what is the measure of its effectiveness and on what basis we determine it. It is not easy to define success, identify reliable sources for its evaluation, determine the most appropriate length of programme application and catamnesis, and develop reliable tools for evaluating its outcome [5].

### **Methodology**

The survey aimed mainly at showing the effectiveness of treatment and educational programmes applied to the people convicted for domestic violence against a family member. The recidivism rate was used as one the KPI measures applied to the programme. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the introduction of corrective measures was intended to reduce recidivism.

The survey covered 182 men born after 1 January 1960 with a final end of sentence falling no earlier than 31 December 2014 and no later than 31 December 2015. On the basis of the statistics of the Central Board of the Prison Service, its staff at the beginning of January 2014 compiled lists of all male convicts meeting the above-mentioned

criteria, currently in prisons where programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence were to be implemented. All trainers working in these establishments were given lists of prisoners from which they were to draw individuals for testing. The procedure used was to ensure a random selection of participants. The convicts were offered participation in the survey in turn, with those assigned odd numbers (1,3,5) offered participation in the experimental group and those assigned even numbers (2,4,6,) offered participation in the control group. All surveyed participants were required to sign a consent to participate in the survey, in addition, those in the experimental group who were to undergo the rehabilitation intervention were required to sign an application to participate in the programme. A total of 102 men assigned to the experimental group and 80 to the control group agreed to participate in the survey.

It should be emphasised that people who participated in the programme addressed to perpetrators of domestic violence in the last year and in the last six months participated in the Aggression Replacement Training (ART) were excluded from the group of potential survey participants. The aim was to limit as much as possible the factors that could disturb the results of the survey.

The survey was carried out in fifteen penitentiary units in Poland. Before and after the programme, survey respondents (from the experimental group) completed a set of psychological questionnaires to measure aggression and these were: A.H. Buss and M. Perry's Aggression Questionnaire (AQBP) - version AQBP'07 (Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire Scale - 1992) - translated and adapted by Lucyna Kirwill with permission from A.H. Buss and the Polish adaptation of the STAXI-2 Self-Assessment Questionnaire to survey the state, trait, expression and control of anger [14].

The survey in penitentiary institutions was carried out from February to June 2014 and in January 2015 the last survey respondent left the prison.

Five years after the surveyed prisoners had left prison, further surveys were carried out. Recidivism was verified. The point of departure for the project was the survey question whether people who participated in the treatment and educational programme for perpetrators of violence in penitentiary institutions are less likely to commit crimes related to domestic violence after leaving the institution, and thus less likely to return to penitentiary institutions. For this purpose, data from the National Criminal Record on recidivism and information from the Central Board of Prison Service concerning stays in penal institutions in the surveyed period were analysed.

In addition to recidivism, the nature of the act for which the subject was re-sentenced and the time elapsed between leaving and re-entering prison was taken into account.

### Analyses results

The analyses presented below present the collected five-year empirical material on 182 men serving a sentence of absolute imprisonment between 2014 and 2015 for the crime of abuse of a family member. As a result, it was possible to obtain complete data on recidivism and 172 repeat offenders from 182 respondents.

### Analyses results

Five years after the last convict left the penitentiary institution, a recidivism rate was developed on the basis of data obtained from the

National Criminal Register and the electronic system of convicts of the Central Board of Prison Service.

In the experimental group, 37.3% were re-sentenced within 5 years after leaving prison, and in the control community 55.0% of the subjects. Accordingly, 15.7% of convicts in the experimental group and 28.4% of those in the control group were repeatedly sent to prison in the five-year period under survey.

These differences were statistically significant, which means that people who completed the programme for perpetrators of violence in prison were less likely to reoffend after leaving the institution ( $\chi^2(N=171, df=1)=5, 570, p=0.018; \Phi=0.180; p=0.018$ ) and were less likely to return to prison ( $\chi^2(N=183, df=1)=4.348, p=0.037; \Phi=0.154, p=0.037$ ). In both cases the strength of the relationship was weak.

The time elapsed between the participants leaving the penitentiary and their re-sentencing was also analysed. As mentioned earlier, the highest recidivism is observed in the first year after the convict leaves the penitentiary. In the empirical material analysed, no such relationship was observed; this may be due to the duration of the proceedings, which is not fully reflected by the date of re-sentencing. However, the experimental group had far fewer convictions in the first period after leaving prison than the control group (Figure 1).

The analysis of data on the types of acts for which the subjects were re-sentenced did not confirm statistically significant differences between the type of act committed and the treatment and educational programme attended or not ( $\chi^2(N=182, df=2)=5.124, p=0.077$ ). So, it was not confirmed that there is a link between not reoffending to abuse a family member and completing the Duluth treatment and educational programme for perpetrators of domestic violence. It should be noted, however, that a result within the statistical trend was obtained, which may indicate that with a larger population surveyed the result could be significant.

### Measurement of aggression before and after the programme

In addition to recidivism, psychological indicators were analysed referring to the effectiveness of treatment and educational programmes and factors that increase or decrease this risk. Therefore, as already mentioned, the same participating prisoners were asked before and after the treatment interventions to complete a set of psychological questionnaires measuring aggression and anger expression and control. The obtained results seem to be interesting from the perspective of the effectiveness of the interventions that the convicts are subjected to and their impact on their subsequent behavior after leaving the penitentiary institution.

Measuring aggression with the A.H. Buss and M. Perry Aggression Questionnaire (AQBP) before and after the programme showed statistically significant differences at the level of one dimension of the aggression-anger structure. It turned out that men who participated in the programme for perpetrators of domestic violence felt less anger after completing the programme ( $t(91)=2.185; p=0.031; \text{Cohen's } d = 0.228$ ) -  $M=18.02$  and  $M=16.88$ , respectively. Similar results were obtained by measuring with the STAXI-2 Self-Assessment Questionnaire to survey the state, trait, expression and control of anger. Men who completed the Duluth programme had lower post-training scores on both the perceived anger and inward-directed anger scales ( $Z=2.269; p=0.023; r=0.168$ ). These results suggest that

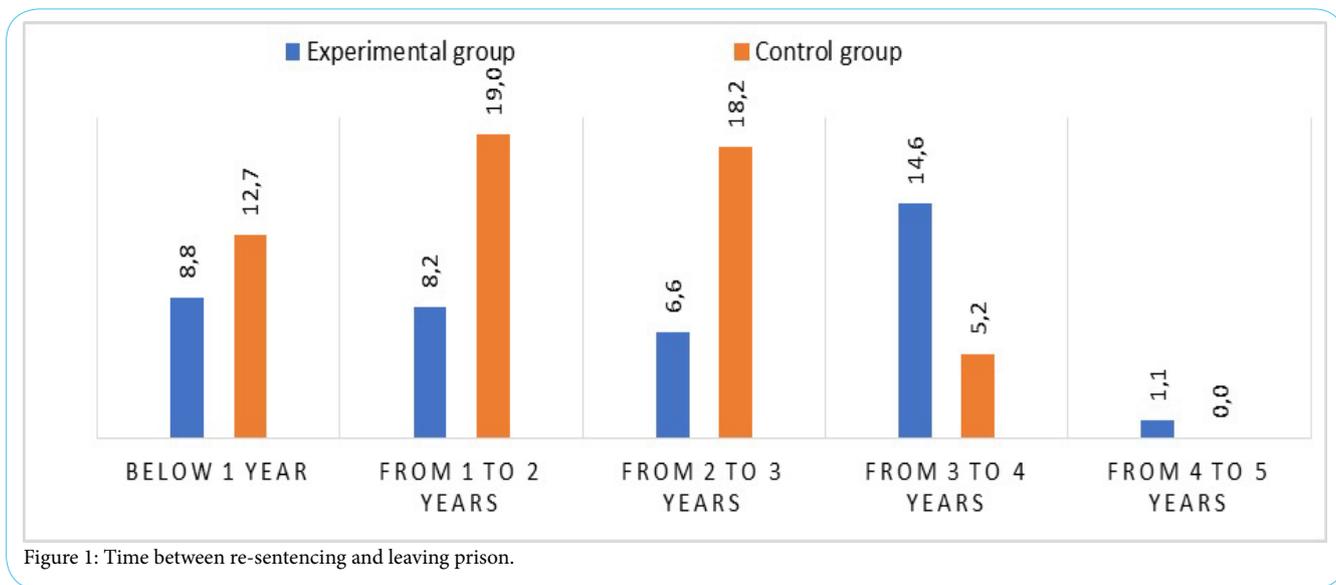


Figure 1: Time between re-sentencing and leaving prison.

people who have completed the programme are more able to control their aggressive behaviors, both those directed outward, toward other people or objects, and those directed inward, involving the internal experience of anger. With regard to the other dimensions of aggression: physical and verbal aggression and hostility, on the grounds of analysis of averages, a slight decrease can be observed, but these differences are not statistically significant.

**Environmental factors and the process of rehabilitation**

Looking for factors that promote recidivism or those that support the process of readaptation of convicts leaving the penitentiary, information related to the course of the rehabilitation process in the penitentiary institution and accompanying environmental factors were analyzed.

One factor that may be related to recidivism is the institution of conditional early release. Probation is often imposed on those who

take advantage of such an arrangement. It was supposed that people subjected to such control and at the same time support after leaving the institution would be more motivated to function in the society (also in the family) according to the law.

It is worth noting that regardless of the method of completion of the respondents' sentence, the percentage of recidivism was lower in the group that completed the programme for violent offenders. Differences are particularly pronounced in the community that has left prison due to parole. In the experimental group, those with no criminal record accounted for 70% of the respondents subjected to conditional early release. Unfortunately, the survey was unable to collect information on whether respondents were put under probation supervision during the probation period. Indeed, such a solution could explain the result obtained, namely, the treatment process started in prison and the continuation of treatment and control activities at large during the probation period (Figure 2).

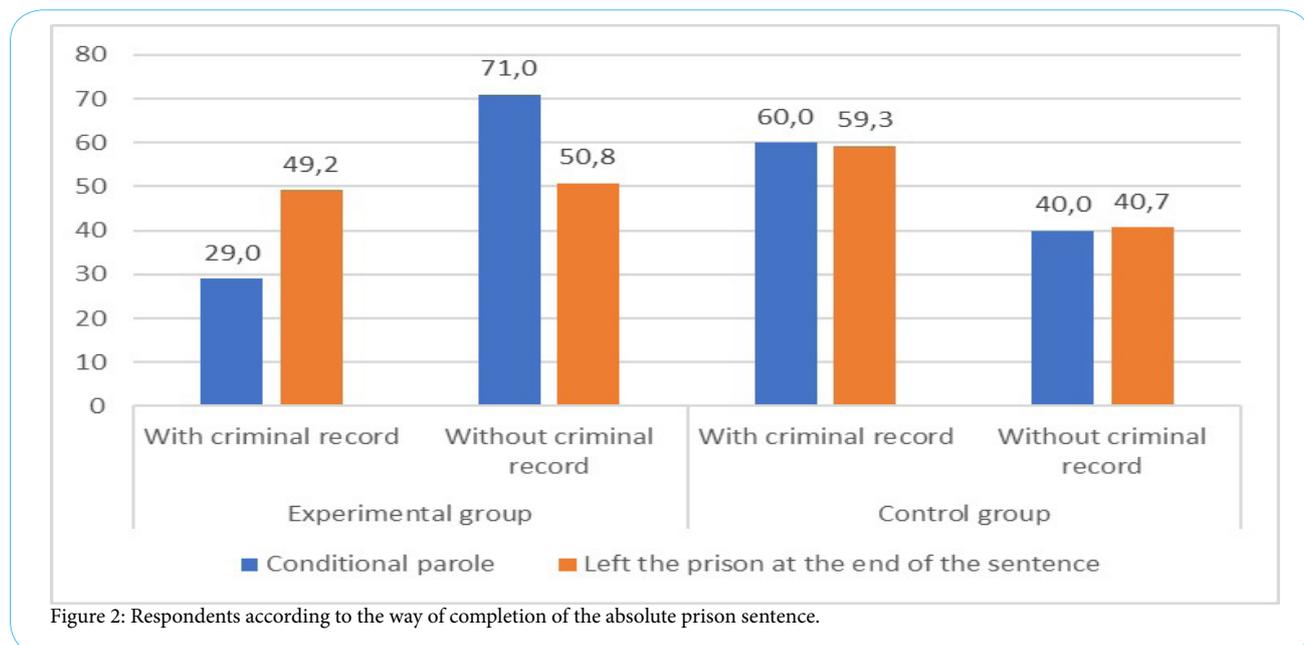


Figure 2: Respondents according to the way of completion of the absolute prison sentence.

The way in which a prisoner functions after leaving prison is influenced not only by the influence, he or she has received in the treatment process, but also by appropriate preparation for functioning after leaving the penitentiary. One of such elements is the permission to use temporary releases. These temporary releases may involve permission to visit relatives, for instance, or they may be connected with work outside prison or participation in therapeutic or treatment and educational activities. The respondents, regardless of recidivism, did not differ in the number of temporary releases, with an average of 3 temporary releases per inmate.

In the search for factors conducive to recidivism, the data on contacts of convicts with people outside the penitentiary were analyzed. Having a support network, family and non-family relations can promote proper functioning in the society by receiving social support after leaving prison.

In the surveyed group, the most common form of contact between the convicts and the "outside world" was by telephone and letter. A significant percentage of respondents also had direct, regular contact with people outside of prison in the form of visitations.

The analyses performed indicate that among the respondents who did not return to crime we observe significantly more different forms of maintaining contact with the so-called outside world. The surveyed population also included individuals who did not maintain contact with any individuals outside of the treatment facility. Interestingly, none of these individuals had a conviction in the experimental group (Figure 3).

From the perspective of on-going survey on the effectiveness of treatment and educational programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence, it is worth referring here to the results of psychological survey. According to the measurement of perceived aggression and anger, after the programme, participants report a reduction in the level of aggression and anger directed outwards. Therefore, inmates who maintain contact with their families (often the same people who experienced the violence) can make these connections, attempt to repair or correct behaviors and relationships with the loved ones.

Thus, in the context of analyzing the recidivism of those convicted of abusing a family member, it seems important to note with whom the convicts-maintained contact while incarcerated. A significant number of prisoners, as mentioned above, maintained contact with their violent family members, and after leaving prison planned to return to their former place of residence - often including the victim. It was presumed that those convicts who returned to their families after serving their prison sentences were more likely to be violent and to re-offend.

The analysis of recidivism data indicates that those respondents who maintained contact with their partners and children or parents in general were less likely to re-offend during the surveyed period. Specific differences between the experimental and control groups were observed in terms of contact with children and partner (Figure 4).

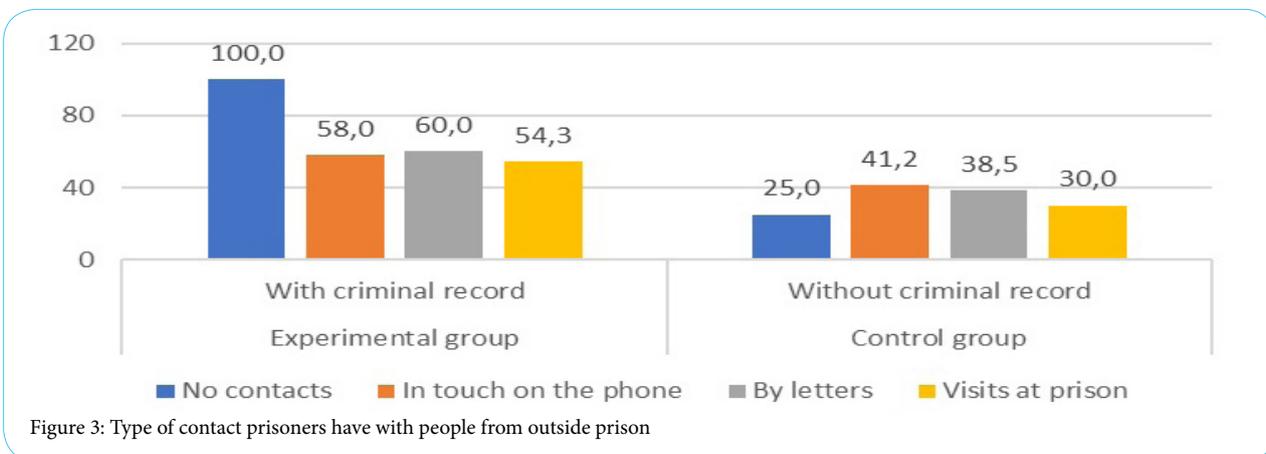


Figure 3: Type of contact prisoners have with people from outside prison

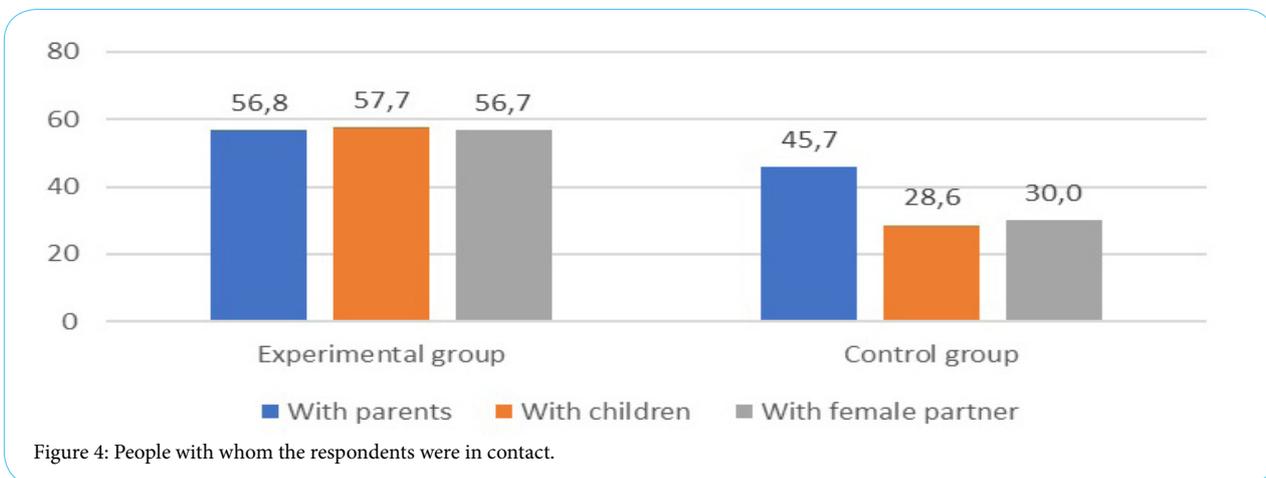


Figure 4: People with whom the respondents were in contact.

Detailed analysis of the data did not confirm that convicts who maintained contact with their partner during their incarceration were more likely to return to acts under Article 207 of the Criminal Code. It should also be emphasized that the survey failed to collect information on who the victim of a subsequent crime was in a situation where there was a repeat conviction of the respondent.

The vast majority of the men were single (35.1% single, 22.5% divorced), with the remainder in relationships at 27.5% formal and 15.4% informal. It is worth emphasizing here that some of the convicted persons lived in a common household with the victim, including those who were formally separated or divorced.

There were no differences in educational background between respondents based on recidivism. An assumption was made that those with better job skills were less likely to become re-offenders after leaving prison. More than half had secondary education (basic vocational 49.5%, secondary 8.2%, higher 0.5%).

During their stay in the penitentiary, the convicts gained the opportunity to complete their education and obtain specialized courses, training to increase their employability after leaving the institution. Only two convicts took advantage of the opportunity to supplement their education (one completed a basic vocational school and the other an elementary school). Vocational courses were taken by about 10% of the respondents. The training courses offered are usually concerned with: paving course, plumbing course, carpentry course, computer literacy course, landscaping maintenance course, finishing works course, exterior facade plasterer course and welding course.

An important aspect in estimating programme effectiveness, especially among perpetrators of domestic violence, is dependence on alcohol or other psychoactive substances. As emphasized in the literature, in many cases it is alcohol that plays a triggering role in aggressive and violent behavior by lowering inhibitions associated with emotional and behavioral control [15,16].

It is noteworthy that most of the respondents had a problem of addiction or risky use. The experimental group had 90.2% addicts and the control group had 81.3% addicts. Interestingly, only 20% of respondents had made any attempts related to therapy, mostly while incarcerated. Analyzing the data in terms of recidivism in the experimental community 87.8% of the subjects were recidivists and in the control group 84.8%.

As emphasized in the literature, one of the effective rehabilitation interventions can be work [17]. Not only does it provide a constructive use of time while incarcerated [18], but it allows for the accumulation of needed funds for current expenses or those that can be used after leaving the facility [19]. For organizational reasons, not all convicts in Poland have the opportunity to take up employment while in prison. It should also be emphasized that not all inmates are interested in this type of opportunity. The majority of inmates entered employment during their incarceration (60%). Of this group, a significant portion of the inmates had the opportunity to take up employment within the prison (83%), while some outside the prison (15%).

## Summary

Domestic violence offenders in penitentiary isolation are most often subjected to educational and treatment measures targeted at

them. The discussion of the effectiveness of such measures is an ongoing issue in the literature. However, there are no conclusive studies confirming or ruling out the effectiveness of such measures. It is most often emphasized that treatment and educational programmes are worthwhile because at least some of their programme participants had a chance to notice their problem and start themselves to address them [6].

This paper presents analyses of recidivism up to five years after leaving the penitentiary institution by the persons convicted of abuse of a family member, subjected in prison to the impact of the treatment and educational programme for Duluth domestic violence perpetrators. It turned out that 37.3% of people in the experimental group were re-sentenced within 5 years after leaving prison, and 55.0% in the control community. The deliverables may therefore indicate differences in recidivism depending on whether the convict participated in a programme for violent offenders or not.

Analyses of the time elapsed between survey respondents' leaving prison and their re-sentencing did not confirm the relationship of higher recidivism in the first year after leaving prison, but this may be related to the nature of the act committed and the length of court procedures. However, it was observed that the experimental group had significantly fewer convictions in the first period after leaving prison than the control group. According to the survey, as time passes after therapeutic interventions are completed, a decrease in their impact is observed [20]. This would be justified by the results obtained, as the recidivism of those who participated in a treatment programme for violent offenders in prison increased over time. In the control group, those against whom similar measures were not applied, recidivism was highest in the first period after leaving the penitentiary.

Arguments for the impact of treatment and educational programmes on reducing violent behavior can be provided by analysis of psychological indicators. This is because the survey measured aggression and anger in surveyed respondents before and after the Duluth programme. The results of psychological studies show a decrease in the level of perceived anger and aggression. People who have completed the programme are more able to control their aggressive behaviors, both those directed outward, toward other people or objects, and those directed inward, involving the internal experience of anger. Over time, however, these effects may become blurred [9]. The trainers of treatment programmes suggest that individuals who have completed a correctional-education programme attend a refresher module from time to time to consolidate and refresh the knowledge and skills they have acquired.

Certainly, other psychosocial factors that affect the course of the treatment process or the motivation of the convicts to participate in the activities cannot be omitted in the analyses. Factors to be found outside the prison, related to the family environment in which the violence occurred, are also quite significant.

In addition, in the experimental group it was noted that convicts who completed the programme for perpetrators of domestic violence - not punished in catamnesis, significantly more often maintained during their stay in prison, contacts with people outside the institution (very often with a partner, children, parents). Detailed analysis of the data did not confirm that convicts who maintained contact with their partner during their incarceration were more likely to return to acts under Article 207 of the Criminal Code. It should also be emphasized

that the survey failed to collect information on who the victim of a subsequent crime was in a situation where there was a repeat conviction of the respondent.

An undeniable impediment to the treatment process is the dependence on alcohol or other substances; in the populations studied, these groups accounted for over 80%. This is also significant from the perspective that most of the acts that were committed by the male respondents occurred after the use of alcohol.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth noting that while the magnitude of the recidivism of respondents is high, differences in recidivism were observed depending on whether or not they completed the Duluth programme. It also did not confirm that there was an association between not returning to the crime of abusing a family member and completing the Duluth treatment and educational programme for domestic violence offenders. But, a result within statistical trend was obtained. Undoubtedly, the presented results concerning the return and effectiveness of treatment and educational programmes require further survey and empirical verification. In addition, the existence of well-known and ever-present issue of addiction should be noted. A significant portion of the surveyed group (80%) was addicted, and only a few had attempted treatment with the majority while being in prison. It seems that in order to take full advantage of the rehabilitation process, an integral and fundamental element of the impact on convicts (not only those who have served a sentence of imprisonment for abuse of a family member) should be the inclusion of a therapeutic process involving the treatment of addiction.

## Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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