

REFLECTIONS OF INCARCERATED YOUNG ADULTS IN A ROMANIAN DETENTION CENTER

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Sergiu-Lucian RAIU

Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Faculty of History and Geography, Department of Humanities and Social-Political Sciences, 13 University Street, 720229 Suceava, Romania, e-mail: sergiu.raiu@atlas.usv.ro

Abstract

Objective. Young people deprived of their freedom in the custody of education centres or detention centres are aged between 18 and 21, according to the criminal law. The aim of the study is to examine, through structured interviews with young people in a detention centre, how they experience incarceration.

Method. The data collection is based on face-to-face structured interviewing. The study includes a group of 22 young people, all males aged 18-22 years, from a detention centre in Romania. They answered about their perception of the activities/programmes they are involved in, their relationship with colleagues and staff and what they would like to improve in the youth detention system.

Results. Young people experience the period of incarceration as a challenge they have to face because of the daily routine. Phone communication with loved ones and work and sports activities are what most ease their longing for home and family. They feel betrayed by their friends in the free world and no longer want to be part of the entourage that causes them problems. They long for freedom and family and would like to have the possibility to work, and, and benefit of outings in the community.

Conclusions. Intervention programmes for young offenders should focus on promoting healthy lifestyles, positive behavioural change and education programmes aimed at explaining prison policies and practices regarding young offenders' rights and teaching them how to follow up on abuse allegations.

Keywords: youth, incarceration, detention centre, experience of freedom deprivation, resources, resilience.

Introduction

This analysis aims at contributing to the understanding of how young people in detention perceive the prison environment both in terms of their relationship with their peer group and with experts and supervisors, as well as their opinion on the conditions in the detention centre and their motivation to be released. From the perspective of executive-penal legislation, 'young people' are the prisoners aged 18-21 (Art. 42 (1) Law 254/2013). The juvenile is criminally sanctioned as an adult and there is no leniency given to the minor in terms of criminal liability. The custodial sentence is served either in a detention centre for minors and young people, an educational centre or an adult prison. Romania has 4 detention centres exclusively for young people, including 2 re-

education centres in Buziaş and Târgu Ocna and 2 detention centres for minors and young people, one in Craiova and one in Tichileşti-Brăila (NAP, 2022). Young offenders sentenced to prison must be given more attention, an intervention focused on their real needs and the aim must be to prevent them from acquiring elements specific to the prison environment. Their activities should focus on maintaining a permanent bond with the outside social environment and on developing desirable social skills. Prison stress, tension, lack of coping mechanisms and behavioural disengagement can lead incarcerated young people to commit extreme acts, even taking their own lives. Between 2010 and 2014, 502 inmates died in prison, 85% of whom died of various illnesses, and 73 committed suicide, 40 of whom were aged 18-25 (Crînguș & Ciurbea, 2022, p. 169). Moreover, a 2019 World Health Organisation (WHO) report also draws attention to the increased risk of suicide and self-harm among the prison population. In the absence of unified measurement of health indicators of the prison population across the EU, the health status of the incarcerated population is unknown. The WHO report 2019, p. 46 points out that the prison population must not be forgotten or left behind, and prison health must be seen as part of broader public health policies and 'creating a health-promoting environment in prisons in which individuals receive high-quality health care that is of an equivalent standard to that in the community' is needed.

Based on a meta-analysis of the scientific literature to investigate the characteristics of adolescents who adhere to social structures such as cliques and gangs, Ciurbea, Cavanna, and Rada (2021) show that the most common predictor is the criminogenic neighbourhood, which may encourage adolescents to take up the antisocial behaviour model, and join a gang.

Young people in educational or detention centres need special attention. If in the case of a multi-offender adult the chances of cognitive restructuring are low, in the case of a young person sanctioned for the first time one can hope for a 'new start' (Toma, 2020, p. 92). Although in recent years the National Administration of Penitentiaries has continued to diversify the standardised offer of educational, psychological and social assistance programmes and activities, the number of programmes focused exclusively on youth issues is small. At the end of 2021, 89 programs were included in the offer: education (55 programs, out of which 10 for minors, 2 for youth, 4 for women), those of psychological assistance (13 on specific assistance, 5 on general assistance and 4 on therapeutic communities), and of social assistance programs (7 programs and 5 types of social treatment groups) (NAP, 2022, p. 26). Young people deprived of their freedom feel the negative effects of incarceration (Foster & Gifford, 2005). Compared to those incarcerated later, youth involved in the justice system are more likely to experience difficulties finding employment (Apel & Sweeten, 2010). For youth who have been through the juvenile justice system, the number of entries into the system is associated with the risk of engaging in risky behaviours, increased substance use, and risky sexual behaviours (Voisin, Kim, Takahashi, Morotta, & Bocanegra, 2017). In the case of young people deprived of their liberty, the longer period of incarceration has effects on health status in adulthood, which can be precarious and manifested by depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation and functional limitations (Barnert et al., 2017). Youth who have been incarcerated are less likely to continue their education after release and more likely to reoffend or be supervised in the community compared to youth who have no involvement with the law (Aizer & Doyle, 2015). Placing youth in detention instead of probation can increase the likelihood of recidivism (Loughran et al., 2009) and hinder healthy psychosocial development (Dmitrieva, Monahan, Cauffman, & Steinberg, 2012). Youth who have passed through the detention system face difficulties in successfully transitioning from adolescence to adulthood (Abram et al., 2017). They are unlikely to complete their educations (Aizer & Doyle, 2015; Hjalmarsson, 2008), more

likely to have long-term health problems and psychiatric disorders (Foster & Gifford, 2005), and to have limited social support (Zwecker, Harrison, Welty, & Abram, 2018).

Material and methods

Purpose and methods of research

The purpose of the study is to examine, based on structured interviews how young people in detention centres experience and manage to go through the period of incarceration.

The research question is to find out how young people in detention centres perceive the period of deprivation of liberty. The research aims to determine what are the difficulties that young people experience in detention centres and what are the resources and factors which help them be resilient and overcome the stage of deprivation of freedom.

In this respect, the following objectives were proposed:

- (1) Describing a day in detention as perceived by young people in custody in a detention centre;
- (2) Revealing the pleasant and useful aspects, but also the less pleasant activities carried out in the detention centre;
- (3) Understanding the reason why youngsters consider some people as their resources and others as difficulties during the detention period;
- (4) Revealing the hardships and the difficulties experienced by young people in custody;
- (5) Identifying the changes they would make in the detention system and their perception of the staff in the system;
- (6) Exploring their motivation to be released from prison and their perception of how society could support them in their social reintegration.

Data collection instruments

The research method used in this study is the sociological interview-based survey. The research tool is the structured interview guide that includes 12 questions.

The questions refer to:

- (1) What does a day in the detention centre look like for you?
- (2) What things/activities do you enjoy the most?
- (3) What are the things/activities you don't like?
- (4) Who are the people you particularly like to talk to?
- (5) Who are the people you try to avoid?
- (6) Is there a certain time of day that you enjoy?
- (7) What kind of activities do you think are helpful for you?
- (8) What do you find most difficult in the detention centre?
- (9) If you had to change something at the centre/your program, what proposals would you have?
- (10) What do you think the staff here should do more for you?
- (11) What do you think society should do more for young people who have been deprived of their freedom?
- (12) What motivates you to get out of here?

Samples

The sample of the study is one of convenience, with 22 interviewed young men, aged between 18 and 22 years, with the average age being 19.09 years. The interviews took place in a detention centre for young people, spread over two days, in one of the rooms intended for socio-educational activities. Depending on their availability, incarcerated young adults were asked if they wanted to participate in a study and were accompanied to the interview place by a supervisor.

The interviews were recorded with a tape recorder and later were transcribed, the average duration being 16 min. The young people were informed about the study by being presented the purpose and importance of the research and received an information sheet and a consent agreement for participation in the study.

Results

A day in a detention centre for young people in custody is a problematic day, as they mentioned and can be read below, with difficulties, irregularities, an ugly, horrible day, it is also a challenge, it can be both a good day or a not a good one, a day which passes very quickly or very slowly, boring, but also fun, a habit, some got used to days like these and they became a routine for most of them.

Beyond the fixed timetable and strictly planned activities on time intervals such as the morning or evening call, the three daily meals, the two time intervals for going out in the morning and in the afternoon, the hours of socio-educational activities from the first part of the day and the three hours of work activities, the young people in the detention centres also talk about the sports activities they do with great pleasure, the daily moments when they can talk on the phone with their loved ones or those they spend in rooms socializing, playing or watching TV.

The young people say that it is difficult for them, that they are locked up, they have no freedom and they miss their family back home. They talk about stress, thoughts, and some people are bothered that they ended up being locked up. "*Sometimes it passes very quickly, sometimes it passes very slowly,*" says (G. I. C., 20 years old). "*It seems like a horrible day to me. A day away from my loved ones, my mother, my family, a hard day*" (M. C., 19 years old). "*I hate that I'm locked up, I can't see my family (...)*" (M. V., 19 years old).

Some say that at first it was difficult for them, but over time they began to forget about the family, about everything outside: "*I got used. I have created a routine, I have a circle of people I get along with.*" (D. A., 19 years old).

Others say they have created a daily routine to make time pass more quickly. Most of them talk about work, that they go out to clean, in the hallways, in the garden, to dig, to sweep, some work in the laundry, in the kitchen or serve their colleagues' meals. "*It has become a habit for me. (...) I got used, I learned the things here, I work outside. I stay outside from morning to evening.*" says (R.V., 22 years old). They have the right to talk on the fixed telephones installed in the corridors of the detention centre or in the outer yards, where they talk to their loved ones, family or relatives. They go out to different programs, to socio-educational activities, to sports activities.

They walk outside in the yard where they socialize with other inmates. "*It's ok. We have a lot of activities. They take us out for activities, we have sports activities. Time passes slowly and it is difficult, we think about our homes, our families*" is the opinion of (H. I., 19 years old).

They are talking about strict rules that must be followed, prohibitions and that they feel that somebody has power over them. "*I made a daily schedule, a routine that I try to do every day, not to feel the time (...) with sports activities, with getting some fresh air, with shopping*" says (A. D., 18 years old) and (B. V., 18 years old), says that: "*I made a daily routine, which I can... I got used as if I were at home (...) I calculate my time and the activities I distribute each of them during the day and let my time pass as quickly as possible*".

Young people spend their time in the company of roommates with whom they socialize and do playful activities together. "*It's a day, it can be good, it can be less good, it happens how*

you make it. (...) We play a game of rummy, a game of chess, we talk," says (P. I. A., 18 years old). *"It can be boring sometimes, but it can also be fun. We have activities, we go out to work. We work, our day goes by. We still play with each other, another card, another backgammon, another rummy and that's how the day goes by"* is the opinion of (D. A., 19 years old). Another young man, (A. P., 18 years old), says that: *"(...) I rest in the room and I watch TV, I look at the ceiling (...) in the evening we watch the news"*.

Some young people consider that the period of detention represents a challenge for them, in which they have to change, to realize the mistake they made: *"A day here is like a challenge for us to change, for the mistake we made, it's very hard here. (...) You realize the consequences of the deeds you did"*. (U. E. F., 20 years).

Asked how they spend their time in the detention centre, some find the period boring due to the daily repetitiveness of the same activities.

"I try to go out everywhere, but you don't really have anywhere to go because you just get bored of the same routine every day. That you have nothing to do. You go outside, you come from outside, you stay, you eat, you come, you dine, you go to bed. Then again outside, stay in the room until the evening, then until the morning you only see nothing" says (M. I., 19 years old).

Those on the open detention say that they spend their time in the rooms of other colleagues where they engage in board games.

"I sleep more, I wake up, I go to other guys in the room. I drink coffee with them, play a game of backgammon. We're playing craps (...) It's a bit boring, honestly, but that's the situation, we have to comply..." (D. A., 19 years old).

"I play cards, a game of rummy. (...) I have friends from other 2 cells that I talk to (...) we sit there, we tell each other our stories". (M.V., 19 years old).

When they are released from their cells, for most of the young people, the main concern is to communicate with their loved ones at home. *"You check with your family at home. That's in the first place"*, testifies (T. B., 19 years old), and (A. V, 18 years old), says that: *"I talk on the phone (...) we sit, we talk, they sometimes take us out for activities, we go out to the yard for a walk (...), we call home to talk to the family, we talk to each other"*.

During the warm season, it is a habit for many of the youths in the detention centre to socialize with their peers through the exterior windows of the buildings. The windows are always open and full of young people who communicate with each other from the windows, sometimes all day long. (C. A. M., 19 years old), says: *You go to the window, sit in the window, put the table in the window, make a 3 in 1 if you have a coffee and smoke a cigarette (...)*. And (O. P. G., 18 years old), says that he also spends the day of detention with: *"sports... activities, I stay, I talk to the people on the window, to the guardian, after that we watch TV (...) we write, we take a book, a notebook, we write whatever comes to mind"*.

But what makes young people feel useful and spend their days with a purpose is their work activities and their desire to get involved in as many activities as possible.

"Different activities, I try as much as possible to communicate with people who understand me or who are with me. I try to do all kinds of activities as much as possible. (...) not to feel that I'm here, that I'm closed and I can't do... being young, I have a lot of energy. And I try to kill my energy through different activities" says (A. D., 18 years old).

"I have two jobs (...) I still go out in the yard, I read a book, I watch a movie, some news, I play a game". (B.V., 18 years old).

"When I go to work, time goes by faster" (G. I. C., 20 years old).

"As much work as possible. Looking for as much work as possible...cleaning, tidying my things. I organize my things, I wash my clothes" (U. E. F., 20 years old).

The days are monotonous, the routine gives the young people the feeling of boredom. *"Every day is the same monotony. We do the same things. There are more beautiful days, more ugly days"* is the opinion of (N. M. R., 19 years old). Another young man, (P. I. A., 18 years old), says that: *"Every day here is the same. I mean, whatever you do, it's the same thing,"* or *"for me, every day I spend here is the same. It's a wasted day. It's a day of my lost life"* says (M. C., 19 years old). Others consider that *"here one day two, three are good, the rest are bad"* (D. A., 19 years old).

Young people look forward to the days when they do certain activities, sports for example, which they do three times a week, or the days when they receive visits from family. For example, (U. E. F., 20 years old), says that he enjoys a certain day of the week, namely *"Tuesday, when they take us out to football, it's the easiest day for us because we have many activities"*, and another young man has the same opinion: *"Tuesday, today... Wednesday and Thursday. Because we have sports, we go out for sports, we play football, tennis, we socialize (...) I still like the days when my family comes to me. That's it."*

If some people like the morning *"in the morning, after the call when I participate in activities, sports activities, when I go out"* as (M. C., 19 years old), says, for others the most appreciated periods of the day are those moments that bring them peace and these are usually afternoons and evenings. *"In the afternoon you can sit more quietly. There aren't many people around here anymore, it's just the hustle and bustle from the beginning of the day"* says (A. V., 18 years old). (D. A., 19 years old) says that *"I am happy when I arrive in the evening and another day has passed. There are days that are more difficult."* And (G. I. C., 20 years old), believes that *"I like the evening better, because I know it goes by faster. I go to sleep, I watch another movie, it passes, so I have nothing to do during the day"*. Or (A. D., 18 years old) says the same thing: *"in the evening. That the evening is the quietest here. It is not the groups that are smaller, of minors"*.

Others dislike weekends because they are the only days of the week when they are not involved in activities. Several young people referred to this aspect. *"I don't really like weekends, because it's boring, everyone sleeps. That there are no activities, there is nothing (...) it gets harder because there is boredom. If I can't sleep, I do sports"* says (M. V., 19 years old). Another young man, (B. V., 18 years old) says the same thing: *"The weekend is the hardest as it were, the weekend is the hardest because there is no activity, there is nothing, only air and telephone"*.

For those on a closed detention, the pleasant moments of the day are those when the door to their room opens and they can go outside. *"I like it when the door is open. (...) when I can go on the phone, on the computer and go to the rooms of other colleagues (...) the evening call comes and opens it again and, in the evening, then you can go out to the hallway"* confesses (A. P., 18 years old). Another young man states that: *"In the evening, when I open the doors in the evening. then... I go out into the hall, I walk in the hall, we go from room to room, I meet other colleagues... I go into their room, we drink a coffee, a juice, we laugh at each other, that's how we are (...)"* (P. L. C., 19 years old).

Work activities that make time pass faster or moments when they can talk on the phone with loved ones is what comforts young inmates. Communicating on the phone with loved ones gives them a sense of peace. They say they are taken out for gardening activities, a space in the inner yard with flowers and lawn and where they dig, rake, mow, do some kind of farming. Some mentioned socio-educational activities where they learn how to behave, how to speak, learn to write, read, are explained and improve their vocabulary.

"When I go to the speaker, on the phone and talk to my family (...) I talk to my parents most often, to my mother and father and to my girlfriend. (...) when I talk to my loved ones, these are the moments that calm me down, because from all the tension and all this madness here, I go to the phone, in a place where it's quiet and talk", confesses (C. A., 19 years old), and (M. I., 19 years old) says: "when I go on the phone. I'm happiest only when I get on the phone or when I hear that my wife has come to visit, otherwise..."

Some have discovered that they have skills for cooking or for construction work and have even come to enjoy it. *"I've learned new things. I didn't know how to cook food. I didn't know, now I know. I'm an expert at cooking. Anything. I know how to make soup, I know how to make beans, I know how to make peas (...) now if I knew there was no one at home, I wouldn't die of hunger, I wouldn't wait for them to make it for me. I would cook it myself. (T. B., 19 years old) or (R.V., 22 years old) says that: "I renovate the rooms that are damaged by other colleagues (...) I like doing this thing. And after I finish my work, I like to play football"*

Those who are in closed detention appreciate the fact that they are not only kept in rooms, that they are taken out to work, some wishing to be able to go out to work even more: *"on the one hand we are glad that we have more activities to go out from the room, we are also taken out to the garden, to work (...) to pass the time."* (A. V, 18 years old). C. A. M., 19 years old, says: *"I'm trying to do something, to achieve something (...) I feed the inmates, we clean the hallway, when there's a room to renovate, I don't renovate it by myself and I clean it."* And M. V., 19 years old, says he likes to: *" go to work (...) at the service, on duty, collect garbage, plaster, paint, work at the gate, at the food block, as hairdresser... I painted the walls"*. Another young man in custody in the detention centre, (P.I.A., 18 years old), says: *"going out in the yard, to pass your time, don't just sit in a cell, because your time passes very slowly when you only sit in the cell. When you leave the yard, you walk around, you go to a room, you talk to another inmate"*.

Some like reading or doing sports, especially football, table tennis or foosball, and say this motivates them. *"I read. We have a library right here near you (...) I've read, I've read, since I've been here, I've read. (P. L. C., 19 years old). (B. V., 18 years old) "certain activities, group communication (...) some activities are really nice and educational and we can learn something from here" or (U. E. F., 20 years old) says: "Sports, for example football because it helps me sometimes forget that I'm here. It helps me very much"*.

For some it is important that they have a place to pray: *"The fact that I participate in the activities helps me a lot. There are communication activities, creative activities, the fact that I have a place where I can go out and pray, for myself and for what I need"* (M.C., 19 years old).

The socio-educational activities carried out by the staff from the social reintegration department, by educators, psychologists and social workers are the activities that young people consider to be the resources for their rehabilitation and development.

"Social activities. It teaches you to reintegrate, to find a job (...)" (A. V, 18 years old).

"It teaches you about reintegration into society, how to rehabilitate, it teaches you how to have an income. From my point of view, it gives me pleasure, I do it with pleasure because I want to learn new things" (T.B., 19 years old).

"a program and we have to say what we choose from our life, what we want to do with our future... I'm in a program where they teach us how to go to get hired, to go to an interview, not to have criminal records" (O. P. G., 18 years old)

"Psychological, group activities... They give us a control sheet; they explain to us... we had a workshop about anti-violence... for an hour and there are programs of 12 or 24 sessions.

You are allowed a minimum of 4 excused absences. At the end, you receive 30 credits for the 24-session program. The meetings are twice a week" (A.P., 18 years old).

The things that some incarcerated young people mentioned as their dislikes are the boring topics of some activities and mainly being locked up.

"I don't like prison, because I'm locked up here" (T. P., 21 years old). "We spend more time in the cell. And it's better when they take us outside. It not so monotonous." (N. M. R., 19 years old).

Some people don't like anything *"it's a closed environment, it doesn't favour me, this closed environment, I don't like the people around me, some are perverted (...) it provokes me to fight with him, to report me, so that I can take my postponement longer..." (C. A., 19 years old).*

The environment is another inhibitory factor for incarcerated youth. Sometimes the people in whose company they have to spend the period of detention makes them cautious:

"...that I'm surrounded by people with whom I wouldn't have had a chance outside, I wouldn't have looked for friends... that I can't be myself and I can't be open and surrounded by friends. (...) that everyone is seeking their own interest (...)" (N. E. V., 20 years old).

"I try to avoid the companions because there are quite a lot of them, I try to avoid conflicts and all those that could certainly harm me in the future" (A. D., 18 years old).

"To avoid the prisoners (...) there are many who challenge me." (M.V., 19 years old).

"Entourage. I mean, I don't like to have friends like that... because I didn't know when to say stop to people like these, I ended up here (...) now I avoid having so much contact with certain people who I know would influence me" (M.C., 19 years old).

Some feel they have been treated unfairly, that they are provoked by their colleagues and this makes them have a permanent state of discomfort *"everyone should be equal (...) as I am your equal, so I want those around me to be as well (...) to stop arguing, to stop swearing, to mind their own business, to stop making reports" (O. P. G., 18 years old)*

Some complain about degraded and unsanitary accommodation conditions:

"The windows are not ok (...) the rooms are dirty (...) all the rooms are not whitewashed well, the wall swells, dampness on walls (...) we have bed bugs (...) they gave us itchy blankets that are made of rough wool" (C. A. M., 19 years old).

"In this penitentiary we die faster than we can live. That is, we get sick much faster. There are bedbugs in the room (...), there are also cockroaches" (C. A. M., 19 years old).

The attitude. (...) they don't really give us good food (...) there aren't many activities, they don't put us to work, they don't make us work (...)" (P. L.C., 19 years old).

The fact that they are locked up makes him homesick and remorseful:

"You miss home the most. That there are no possibilities to see them daily (...) The thoughts of what you did torture you more" (M. I., 19 years old).

"...that I can't communicate with other people as I would like and that you are very far away from your family and that you realize the mistakes that you have made and then you feel very guilty" (U. E. F., 20 years old).

Others are satisfied with what they live in the detention centre *"I like all the activities and I always go out with joy; I give my best to every activity I am called to" (P. I. A., 18 years old) or "I don't know. I didn't see anything I didn't like here" (R.V., 22 years old).*

The resource people for youngsters in the detention centres are mainly staff: educators, psychologists, social workers, nurses and doctors from the medical office or supervisors. Because often these are the ones who understand them, with whom they can communicate whenever they have something on their mind. Inmates learn from them. For some of the young people and their

roommates, other detainees who have experience in such centres or the older ones represent their support, those who still support them, and for others it is just the family, the people who are outside and who are not near them in that environment.

"I have family members, relatives with whom I keep in touch and visit me" (A.P., 18 years old).

"I made myself say a friendship correspondence with some people, other people have a different character and I found myself talking and chatting with some people who match me and my character" (P.I.A., 18 years old).

People with a negative influence on youngsters are identified to be the other young people around them, those who serve their sentence alongside them. They prefer to talk to those who have experience in the detention system compared to newcomers. They prefer not to communicate with those who challenge them and test their character.

"I try to avoid all the inmates here (...) the surroundings here are not good (...) they are even more dangerous and it is not good. Many times, I try not to get into too many discussions, too many friendships, after that it comes to others" (A.V., 18 years old).

"Here it is better to avoid people than to talk to them (...) I try to avoid the entourage" (M. I., 19 years old).

"(...) they are, they are department heads, I don't really talk to them like that. It sometimes annoys me a little" (R.V., 22 years old).

"I don't create my own entourage (...) Some call me, but I don't want to, I don't join their entourage" (T.P., 21 years old).

Difficulties in the detention centre

The changes they want are aimed at socio-educational and work activities. The youngsters mentioned that these can be more diverse and they can be more often involved in activities. The motivation behind this spirit of activism is that the time passes much faster when they do something. In order for this, they want more activities. They have a predisposition towards knowledge and want to learn as much as possible.

"...to go out to more activities. To do more activities in a room like here. To let me write, to make notes from these, to tell me more things, which I don't know, to find out" (G. I. C., 20 years old).

"...they should put everyone to work (...) many would like that. Many beg to be taken out, but there aren't enough supervisors to guard them all the time, all of them. There are enough programs" (M. I., 19 years old).

"I would implement as many activities as possible. I would have as much work done as possible" (U. E. F., 20 years).

They also mention the fact that the phone calls should be free of charge because many of the young detainees are from deprived families who do not have the opportunity to support financially young people in the detention centre. The changes desired by the young people also target the staff members and fellow inmates who are expected to behave better, to be responsible, non-aggressive, not to get involved in conflicts with each other, to respect each other, and that there should be justice and a fair system of punishments and rewards.

There are also some young people who are satisfied and say that they wouldn't change anything: *'I can say that this detention centre is a good one. (...) Here you have a different kind of freedom, you can go out to work, it's completely different from what I've seen in other places. I*

mean, I wouldn't want anything else that is new here" (P.I.A., 18 years old) or "everything is good here like this. They have any conditions, they have good food, you have nothing to change here like this (...) if I know how to do my punishment here, it's much easier for me (...)" (R.V., 22 years old).

Staff

Young people need to be understood by staff. They need to be listened to and helped. They want dedicated supervisors and staff members who can teach them more, talk to them more; to understand them, listen to them and help them.

"... to be more understanding, to take into account the fact that we are children, we came here as children, we are still children, no matter what age we are, as long as we have parents, we are still children and we did not come for pleasure" (N.E.V., 20 years old).

"To respect us (...) not to mock prisoners, to talk to us as if they were talking to their own children" (C. A. M., 19 years old).

Some young inmates believe the supervisors favour some detainees:

"They are 'in partnership' with some prisoners. I don't like that either. Do justice to all. Not only to some. To do justice to all prisoners, not only to some" (M. V., 19 years old).

"To get more involved (...) in our development, I say that it wouldn't be as they say on television that we are the scum of society (...) I say that good people can come out of prison" (P. L. C., 19 years old).

Young people also have words of praise and appreciation for the staff. Some believe that they are taught well, that the staff puts good words about them at release commissions. They feel helped, supported, they consider the supervisors wise people who do their profession within the limits of the law.

The relation between incarcerated young people and the society

Society judges them. This is the opinion of the young people in custody in the detention centre and they want people to be nicer, understand them and stop labelling them, that not all people who have been in prison are bad people:

"To get involved, to teach us... to look at us like people (...) to think that they could be in our place, by chance" (A. V, 18 years old).

And (C. A. M., 19 years old), believes that society should:

"... stop judging us. Because they judge a book by its cover. Perhaps many of us have been judged unfairly. Maybe some of us didn't do anything. Maybe some of us made a mistake. Most who are here, didn't do it because they wanted to. It was a mistake. It happened (...) Some of us may have had a difficult problem in the family, we didn't have it any money (...) some urge us to steal, others to kill, but we don't kill for pleasure or because we want to. By mistake".

" Society should be more understanding (...) that we deserve a second chance. It should be easier for us to get hired somewhere, to be better seen than we are, only that our country judges us a lot" (A. D., 18 years old).

M. I., 19 years old, who faced a humiliating experience, confesses:

"I would like only one thing. To shut their mouth somehow, to stop judging me because I went to prison. That's it. Stop judging me. (...) Many avoided me, they gossiped about me, many from the entourage, that you were in prison... many... there were some who shouted to me, on the

street <You, criminal>. But I kept walking... I put my head down and walked away, because I didn't have any other choice".

Young people talk about the detention centre as a harsh, tensed, stressful environment where people often get angry and don't think about the consequences. I'm talking about the groups inside the centres that are not always trustworthy and where everyone has their own interest. They regret what they did, value freedom more, and feel the years spent in the detention centre as a waste.

"I give them a piece of advice. Don't do anything stupid because you are going to waste your days, your years in here. I lost 3 years of my life, so I'm sorry" (T.B., 19 years old).

"(...) And decided to be good, to take care of my family. And I only want this time here to end and to buy a house in the countryside..." (M. V., 19 years old).

"I regret what I did. Now I will appreciate the freedom more" (A.P., 18 years old).

There are also young people with strong character, young people with an activism in them that makes them look at the years of rehabilitation spent in the detention centre as a stage that strengthened them:

"If I were to take it now from the beginning, I would change a lot in my life. I'm preparing for society, I'm reading, I'm learning... It's going to be a while until we settle in, until we find a job, it's going to be the matter of signing, let's sign, it's going to be a little more difficult" (C.A., 19 years old).

"It doesn't disadvantage me at all that I did what I did, that I got here, because I know how to handle the situation and to integrate into society. That depends on the person." (D.A., 19 years old).

The motivation to leave the detention centre

Their main motivation to leave the detention centre is to be with their family, both the family of origin and the families that some of them started.

"For the family. Nothing else. And I have to make up for the time that I lost here. A lot of promises I made outside, especially to my family (...) I'm waiting to be free to fulfil them all" (B. V., 18 years old).

M. I., 19 years old says that *"(...) I have a child at home. My wife is pregnant"*, and H. I., 19 years old, states: *"The family and that I had a girl outside and I have a child with her and I haven't spoken to her anymore and I want to go back to her"*.

There are young people who want to build a future for themselves, who consider finding a job, forming a family and a home a priority for their achievement in life:

"You live in vain if you are not free. To go out, to have fun, to start a family, to have a house, to get my card, to get a car" (N.E.V., 20 years old).

"I really want to go out, look for a job. To be like young men today: to have a car, a house of mine, not to live with my parents" (R.V., 22 years old).

T. P., 21 years old wants *"to do my time, to go home faster. I want to rebuild my life, start a family. I want to work, make an animal farm and mind my own business, help my family"*.

For some young people, the period of detention changed their character. They say that they managed to rehabilitate themselves, using their willpower and the strength of their minds and now they are able to succeed in life:

"I changed my behaviour because outside I was different from how I am here. Here I am calmer, more patient..." (D. A., 19 years old).

Discussions

In the scientific literature and in the analysis of the social control policy, the prison has been the target of much criticism over the years and its importance has begun to decline. Even one of the most important authors who has written about the role and functions of prison, Michael Foucault, considers prison as an "institution of death", although he has never contested its role in providing safe and continuous detention and rehabilitation function for convicted people (Foucault, 2022, p. 62). However, nowadays societies are considering the rehabilitation of offenders by using alternatives to the prison system, such as probation services. In Romania there are 4 centres for minors and young people sentenced to custodial measures, 2 education centres and 2 detention centres for minors and young people where they are isolated from the outside world. One of the insights from this study is that young people deprived of their liberty feel the need to have as much contact with the outside world as possible. They are at the age where they have energy, they want to know, to learn, to develop, and deprivation of freedom makes them regress, as one of the young respondents of this study said: *here we dry. We dry up emotionally, physically and mentally, we have to be strong!* Permission to go out should be granted more frequently and not just as rewards for good behaviour but as means of social reintegration. These educational centres and detention centres for minors and young people could be transitional and vocational training units, social and therapeutic centres, farms and rural placement centres for young offenders. (Foucault, 2022, p. 17). Another insight from the study is that young people want to work more. Work itself has a key function in the transformation of the inmate. Work should be the real social compensation for crime, work being the essential, fundamental replica to crime (Foucault, 2022, p. 18). In order to make the detention a meaningful one for young people and to make them want to be more involved, it would be appropriate for young people to be consulted in the development of their monthly programme, so that there is a participatory element in the decision-making that concerns them and they feel that they are directly involved in their own rehabilitation and social reintegration process. Involving the inmate in a participatory way in the elaboration of the penal programme will make the detention easier to bear, they will accept it while feeling that they are the managers of their own punishment (Foucault, 2022, p. 21).

Conclusions

In this study we wanted to find out how young people perceive their detention. While some describe their detention days in negative terms, as difficult, flawed, boring and even unpleasant, other young people included in the study look at things resignedly and describe them in a less negative tone, as being good, not so good, or even entertaining. While some find difficult not having freedom and missing their loved ones from home, others have created a daily routine, engaging in work activities which make time pass quickly and help them forget where they are. The disciplinary regime and following the strict rules are challenges for some of the young prisoners, but they realise that they need rigorous discipline in order to change. They also complain about the physical and moral chaos. On the one hand, they complain about the degrading and unsanitary housing conditions (broken windows, damp, bedbugs), and on the other hand, they speak of preferential treatment for some prisoners, feeling the need to be treated fairly. The resource people for the incarcerated young adults are the specialists from the social reintegration service, psychologists, social workers and educators, who provide them counselling, educational activities and support groups. They feel betrayed by the friends they used to have when they were free and they are more cautious about the friends they make in the detention centre, especially

because some of the other inmates challenge them, bully them and they do not want to get back into groups that might prolong their detention. They would like more diverse and more frequent socio-educational activities and programmes. The interviews also revealed that young people would like to be involved in as many working activities as possible, and if possible, outside the detention centre. They say they would be willing to work anything. Their reasons for wanting to change and to be free as soon as possible are related to their sense of belonging to their family, with whom they want to be reunited as soon as possible. They have seen what it means to miss family and not be able to communicate with their loved ones at any time. Some are thinking about their future, planning to find a job and to start a family.

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