

THE SOCIAL SITUATION OF THE FAMILIES OF THE INCARCERATED

Summary

Sonia Dzierżyńska-Breś's book 'The social situation of the families of the incarcerated' deals with the problem of the families of people serving time in jail, an 'unseen' area of resocialization pedagogy, both in terms of theory and practice. This state of affairs is the result of insufficient diagnostic research conducted in such families and on their attitude to imprisonment.

It seems obvious that a stable family with strong bonds might play an important role in resocialization. However, the descriptions of families with a member in prison that are found in the literature present a far less optimistic picture. These are very often families with multiple problems, in which crime is just one of the daily social dilemmas. Prison and imprisonment are occupational hazards. Frequently, spending time in this institution is 'inherited', passed from one generation to the next. However, it is extraordinary that despite clear ignorance and a lack of diagnosis, such families are deemed to be a factor that might exert a positive influence on the resocialization and readaptation of those serving prison sentences.

One key issue discussed in this publication is the environment in which the families of an imprisoned person function. These exert a huge influence on the way families themselves perceive prison and the actions they undertake. However, the social situation of families and the processes shaping the personalities of family members are subject to differentiation in terms of particular local milieu. The process by which an individual becomes a social being takes place against a social background, generating human experience bestowed with meaning, values or the principles of interpersonal interaction. It is this background that shapes families' social situations. The models for family roles and how they function are created in social circles.

The author discusses the types of social situations occurring in the families of those imprisoned, the internal sets of roles, relations and interactions, all rooted in their biographical and social contexts. But just who are the families of prisoners? How does their social situation look? Answers to these two fundamental questions portray the lives of the prisoners' families. These responses might also provide a basis for constructing essential assistance programmes and actions to support such families. The aim of this paper is to diagnose the social situations of incarcerated individuals, and the analysis of the findings is primarily to provide practical and innovative actions. An attempt is made to produce a typology of families with members in prison and to formulate practical recommendations enabling assistance programmes to be developed and support given to these families.

Chapter One provides a theoretical introduction to issues related to the social situation of these families. The family, how it functions, and the actions undertaken are all presented in terms of the

social situation. This is why particular emphasis is placed on conveying the concept of symbolic interactionism as a paradigm which for the first time dealt with the term 'situation' on such a large scale. This paradigm combined the social and individual, thus acting as a cohesive force between theory and practice. Such a combination makes it possible to research the social situation of families, and also to construct measures designed to help them. An attempt is also made at this juncture to provide a terminological explanation of the complicated definition of situation. Chapter Two focuses on presenting research conducted so far describing the families of individuals in prison and theoretical concepts, which provides, as it were, a basis for distinguishing particular types of social situations experienced by such families. Chapter Three provides analysis and interpretation of research conducted. The aim here is to show the social situation of those in prison. The final chapter presents a discussion of work with these families, as well as the methods and techniques which should be taken into consideration when planning the support and assistance to be given to such families.

Translated by Rob Pagett