

FORMS OF ADAPTATION IN ROMANIAN PENITENTIARY

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Abstract

Objectives. The objective of this study was to explore defense mechanisms and the self-efficacy that inmates in Romania developed in their deprivation of freedom

Material and methods. Data were obtained from 111 adult respondents divided into 3 groups depending on the severity of the punishment. First group ($N = 28$) with prison sentences from one month to 3 years, second group ($N = 45$) with prison sentences from 3 to 5 years and the third group ($N = 38$) with sentences with more than 5 years of prison detention. Three concepts were studied by using the following questionnaires or scales: SES – for self-efficacy; DSQ-60 – for defense mechanisms.

Results. 107 individual had an average level of personal beliefs about their capacities to mobilize their cognitive resources onto the stress that they face in the closed environment, self-efficacy also influences the resources allocated into solving a task. Even though it seems that there were no significant differences between the 30 defense mechanisms and the severity of the punishment of the three groups ($p = 0.008$).

Conclusions. The enclosed environment has a hidden role. And this affiliation to the "community" of the penitentiary can be explained by the immediate assumption of the captive role. Altruism is the main defense mechanism used by detainees from this research and this could come from their integration to the penitentiary environment. Most of the participants were recidivists and this may establish their attachment to the prison culture.

Keywords: defense mechanism, self-efficacy, penitentiary, inmates groups, DSQ-60, self-efficacy scale, adaptation.

Introduction

The issues faced by the individual in the situation of the deprivation of liberty are often ignored; the interest is only on the removal of the perpetrator from the society. The way an individual accepts or doesn't accept, adapts or does not adapt (Rada and Ispas, 2016) to the new stressful situation plays a decisive role in his future development. Society's fear of delinquency can lead to ignorance and social exclusion. Social labelling is a strict reaction of society to crime (Zamfir, 1994) and applies them exclusively to those who violate social norms being qualified as offenders (Butoi and Butoi, 2006). Detainees who develop effective adaptation mechanisms are able to achieve and maintain a psychological optimum over a long period of time. They have a strong sense of identity, build healthy relationships with family and friends, have the ability to use the challenges of life as opportunities for personal development. Detainees with effective adaptation

mechanisms are more socially active, more readily accepting the restrictive rules of the penitentiary environment, and cooperate more effectively with the penitentiary administration.

Firstly, in the existing literature there are no articles that address this type of organized population in relation to the three levels of gravity of punishment. Romanian literature takes over the terms of foreign literature, and the differences may be consistent. Many psycho-social mechanisms have been proven to have universalist inclinations, but the mode of operation and operation is heavily culturally imprinted. Therefore, this research attempts to capture the cultural specificity through different ways of articulation of the self from the Romanian social environment in general and from the penitentiary environment, in particular, operating with the original concepts.

Secondly, at the theoretical level, research seeks to make potential contributions by focusing on this environment, and especially on how defense mechanisms, self-construal and self-efficacy interact with each other (a descriptive-analytical analysis). At the same time, in the same analysis, it will also indicate the specific ways in which these constructs operate, depending on the different categories of crime (treated in terms of penalties applied by the Criminal Code, the three categories of penalty severity).

The benefit is significant, as when and what mechanisms are best suited to dealing with a stressful environment. This can also help develop offenders' ability to adapt more easily to the outside environment. This can also restructure the hypothesis that if a person has a high level of adaptation to the penitentiary environment, he has a low level of adaptation to the outside environment, because adaptation is a continuous process that is restructured according to the stressful event at which the individual takes part.

This study aims to examine the dynamics of relations between defense mechanisms, self-efficacy and self-construal in the Romanian prisons. The present research involves an exploratory study in order to identify the mechanisms of adaptation and self-construal that prisoners in Romania develop in the prison, which are corroborated with self-efficacy from the detainees' perspective. This design involves quantitative methodology based on self-administrated psychological testing in groups and individual. The objective of the study regards the identification of adaptation mechanisms for all three groups involved in the research.

Material and methods

A battery of psychological tests was used in the study. The questionnaires were structured over seven pages starting with the Defense Style Questionnaire (60 items), followed by a "resting" session involving the Self-Efficacy Scale (10 items) and finally the 72 items of self-construal scale. In order to achieve this time structure, the level of frustration that the individual can feel when viewing and consciousness the large number of items (142 in this research) was being taken into account, so the aspect of the scales (font, text, response method) has been changed. Respondents were assured that the scrutiny time would be reasonable and were encouraged to ask questions when they would encounter problems of contextual understanding.

DSQ-60 Defensive Style Questionnaire (Thygesen, Drapeau and Trijsburg, 2008) – is a self-assessment tool that evaluates defense mechanisms. The questionnaire is an abridged version of the original version of the questionnaire built by Bond (2004). The questionnaire has a number of 60 items and identifies 30 defense mechanisms, each mechanism having a number of 2 items. Over time, DSQ has experienced many forms (with 40, 42, 81 or even 88 items), but the DSQ-60 is the latest version of the tool. Some authors (Bond, 2004) consider the DSQ to be one of the most used tools for analyzing defensive psychological mechanisms being included in the Psychiatric Measurement Manual. The DSQ-60 questionnaire in Romanian version contains a nine-step Likert scale, and the subject should encircle the response that indicates the extent to which the affirmation applies to its state. There are no reversed items.

The SES Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995) – measures self-esteem, respectively, the belief that one's own actions are responsive for the success of a particular activity. The scale contains 10 items, with a Likert rating scale of 1 to 4, where 1 means "totally untrue as far as I am concerned" and 4 means "perfectly true as far as I am concerned". Self-efficacy is defined as the individual's belief in his ability to achieve certain achievements (Bandura, 1999), so the individual is more likely to use them in a challenging situation, such as school, in a new stressful and punitive environment (penitentiary). For example, self-efficacy has proven to be important in choosing a professional trainee. Betz and Hackett (1981; Pintrich and Schunk, 1996) have demonstrated that self-efficacy mediates the impact of social and structural factors in choosing careers.

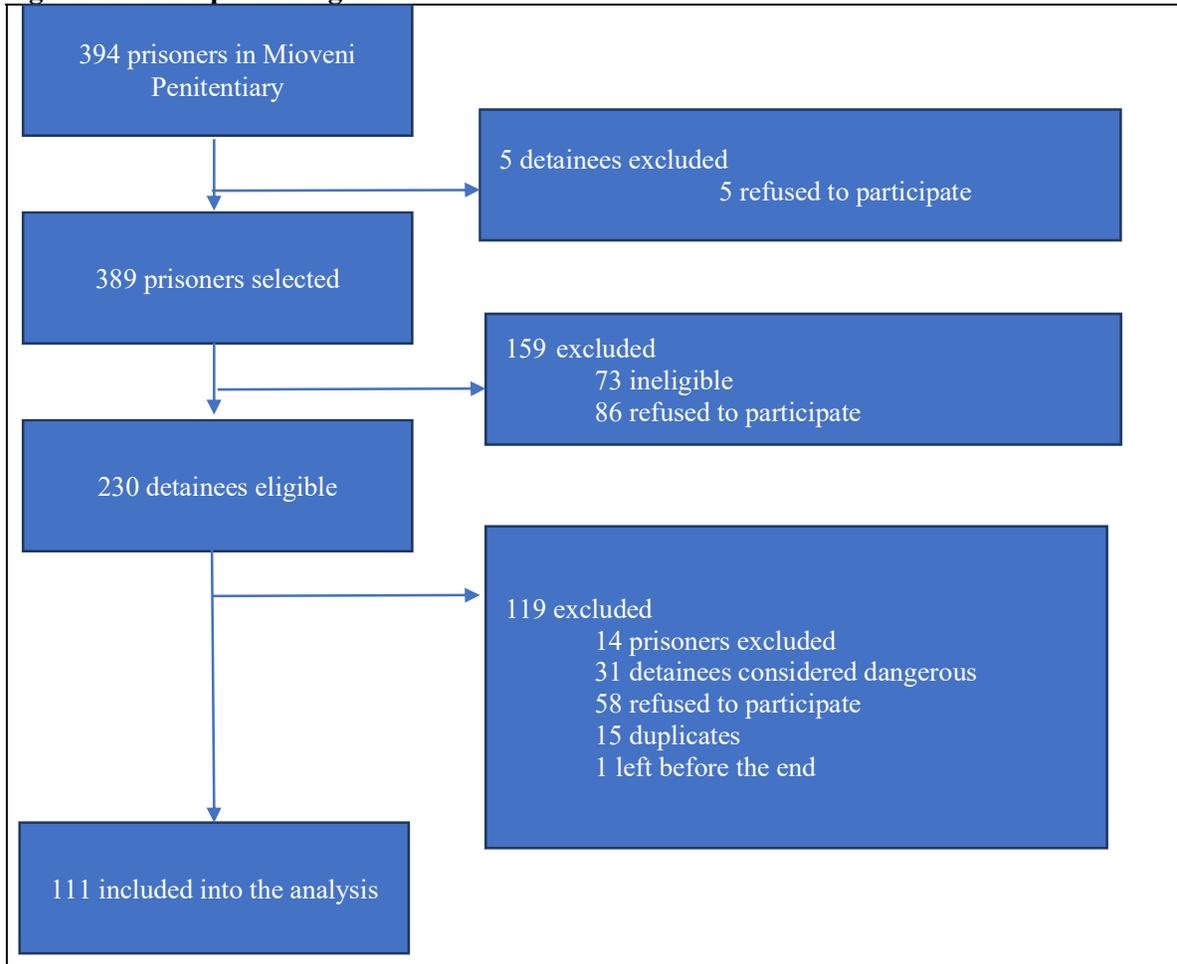
In addition to choosing the behaviors in which an individual will engage, self-efficacy also influences the resources assigned to the service of solving a task (Bandura, 1977). Individuals with a high level of self-efficacy will optimally allocate resources if they face difficult situations and will persist longer than those who have a low level of self-efficacy, as their skills are similar. The deeper processing of information by individuals with a higher level of self-efficacy has also been demonstrated (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996). It is essential to distinguish between self-esteem and self-efficacy. If self-efficacy aims to perceiving one's own abilities to achieve a certain purpose, self-esteem is rather about the overall perception of one's own value.

The participants (N=111) in this research were adults, over the age of 18, divided into three groups according to the severity of the penalty. The first group of subjects were with sentences from one to three years, the second group of participants were with sentences of three to five years and the last group were with sentences that had more than 5 years of imprisonment.

The first category of participants (0-3 years penalty) includes detainees for a short period of time, those on whom the penitentiary's impact is a pregnant one, within the Mioveni Penitentiary there are 33 subjects with this criteria (28 included in the study), if in this category can be included those whom have just distanced themselves from a social norm, not the same can be said about the other two categories.

Into the second group are included those with medium punishments (from three to five years of imprisonment) whose facts are considered (by the Penal Code) more dangerous than those in the first category, from the selected penitentiary their number is 81 (and are included 45 into this analysis).

The latter category, detainees with bigger punishments, authors of some facts that have horrified the public opinion, so they were ostracized from the social environment, in the selected penitentiary 236 (100 of them accepted to be included into this research), also none of them is at first offense. It is worth mentioning here that in this category are included those whom are with life punishment. Lifetime detainees are a special category among the criminals in Romania because, for at least 10 years, Romania has adhered to the European conviction that a punishment should not be for life, but that it must express the guilt of the person as accurately as possible, according to the first article of Criminal Procedure Code.

Figure 1. Participants diagram

Participants received 3 credits for participation (in Romanian penitentiary system, the detainees receive credits for participating in studies or development programs, and when they reach a certain number of credits, they receive allowances, the right to receive an extra package or visits in addition and even a reduced sentence), enrolling on a voluntary basis. Prior to participation, each person signed a double participation consent (one from the penitentiary on which the credit was assigned and one from the researchers) and was informed that they could withdraw whenever he wanted without repercussions of no kind. At the same time, the confidentiality of the personal data and that the results or on the group level and that individual responses could not be traced. Participants' risks involving physical or mental integrity were inexistent in the present study.

The first stage consisted in identifying the Romanian penitentiary that could satisfy the population criterion after the duration of the conviction (participants for each of the three groups). After this stage was completed and the Mioveni Penitentiary was identified, Argeş County, the collaboration protocol was completed and accepted by the penitentiary administration. Detainees were invited, from every room in the detention facilities, by the researcher conjunctively with one of the penitentiary psychologists to accept being part in the assessment sessions.

Each administration was conducted between 9:00 am to 11:30 am and from 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm, without interfering in any way with the strict schedule that detainees have in the penitentiary (appeal, lunch break, educational projects, intermissions or other recreational or educational activities). Administration sessions were conducted in groups of two to thirty people in the society club assigned to each section of detainees. The groups were randomly formed (in the

case of detainees with a penalty of 0-3 and 3-5 years) and only with the third category of detainees (on the maximum safety section, the inclusion criterion is according to the danger the individual represents to the society).

At the beginning of the sessions is explained the goal of this research, the duration of the meetings, the importance of being involved in the task at hand, the significance of honesty, and the possibility of withdrawing at any time from the research. The session coordinator provided information on his status, his affiliation to the Doctoral School, data confidentiality, and that the results would be presented at group level rather than individually. Further information was provided, the situational adaptation of the items to the environment and the population in the penitentiary where it was imposed.

All the needed criteria of administration were satisfied (a safe and rattling-free environment, all participants were rested, adequate illumination, the existence of the furniture required for the writing, the space for deployment to provide the comfort of the examined persons). Each test session was conducted over a period of 30 to 60 minutes, with small variations depending on the participants' involvement.

Results

One might expect that denial or rationalization will be the primordial mechanisms that are present in individuals in the penitentiary environment, given the discomfort that the situation may provide and these two defensive responses are like a mask that hides feelings and emotions. Our research reveals surprising data. The psychological profile of the 111 respondents deprived of liberty is specifically articulates being characterized by *altruism* ($M = 14.46$, $SD = 3.5337$) as a defense mechanism. This means that individuals perceive the existing situation as being an anxious one and understand that they are not alone, other individuals share the same status. They turn their attention to the other individuals in the penitentiary environment who are unitarian in the purpose and event. The 111 participants use altruism as a possibility to diffuse their daily life in prison and may also be consider a positive way of adaptation to prison.

The second in line defense mechanism is *self-assertion* ($M = 14.42$, $SD = 3.4126$). This result may come from the relevance that they give to their own opinions, but being in the negative sphere of defense mechanisms, the fact that our participants have a high score can indicate and predict the occurrence of certain problems in the penitentiary environment when their own wishes and requests are not fulfilled. By putting above others their own opinions, rights and desires one might consider that what he has done is not wrong, although, by being in prison, the fact that they have done exactly that may have brought them into the current situation.

Being listed as the third mechanism used in the custodial environment, *anticipation* ($M = 13.49$, $SD = 3.63$), shows that the individuals who are there had their judgement unbroken. They knew what awaited them and they've been mentally preparing for it. This means that they have rehearsed this possible outcome and this could indicate a high level of adaptation (in the case of ones that have been multiple times in the penitentiary) or special preparation for this environment.

Least used defense mechanisms by the participants in this research are *devaluation* ($M = 6.98$, $SD = 4.3921$). Being a subconscious protection system most often associated with borderline personality disorder, and for our research, considering that self-assertion is among most used defense mechanisms, is almost rational that his mechanism by which individuals disregard themselves to be at the bottom of our results. This could also mean that our respondents do not consider themselves as having multiple negative qualities and it's a place to work from.

The second least used is *passive aggression* ($M = 7.26$, $SD = 4.2377$), which could also mean that the subjects of this research have understood their punishment and they've received it as a justified end (Butoi and Butoi, 2006). This result could be determined by the fact that there is no remaining hidden energy that might be driving them into other aggressions and that they are

cooperation persons in solving their duties and other tasks that they receive.

And another least used defense mechanism is *fantasy* ($M = 7.88$, $SD = 5.3287$). This could indicate that individuals in the penitentiary environment are strongly anchored in reality, that they do not use strategies to escape their daily lives, that they are not expecting something from someone. This could also mean that they are not unhappy with their current status, because fantasies can help an individual to explore alternatives to the situation that he not happy with. But this can also help them to somehow not achieve certain unrealistic expectations that they could set.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of participants defense mechanisms

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Altruism	111	14.4685	3.53378
Self-Assertion	111	14.4234	3.41268
Anticipation	111	13.4955	3.63036
Self-Observation	111	13.2613	4.11364
Rationalization	111	13.1892	3.86714
Reaction Formation	111	13.0000	4.29164
Suppression	111	12.7928	3.57801
Sublimation	111	12.5586	4.23982
Withdrawal	111	12.5495	4.87804
Affiliation	111	12.3333	4.46060
Splitting	111	11.3874	4.00266
Projection	111	11.0811	4.72736
Denial	111	10.9640	4.24249
Dissociation	111	10.9279	4.65679
Intellectualization	111	10.8649	4.58552
Idealization	111	10.7928	5.04546
Humor	111	10.7838	4.23493
Devaluation of Other	111	10.7748	3.88864
Repression	111	10.6486	4.42030
Projective Identification	111	10.6486	4.68973
Isolation	111	10.3964	4.58908
Undoing	111	10.3063	4.83884
Omnipotence	111	10.0631	4.44620
Refusal of Aid accompanied by Lamentation	111	9.8739	4.58876
Displacement	111	9.2252	4.27399
Splitting Self	111	8.8649	3.93928
Acting-Out	111	8.3243	4.71586
Fantasy	111	7.8829	5.32872
Passive-Aggressive	111	7.2613	4.23773
Devaluation	111	6.9820	4.39210

Regarding their self-efficacy in the penitentiary all respondents have a "low" level ($M = 31.08$, $SD = 5.856$). This result show that our subjects are not well-accustomed to the carceral detention and from this may come a lot of tension. This could mean that given time they might become uncooperative in carrying out their tasks because they can't handle them. They might also deliberately ignore someone when spoken to and might collectively adopt a negative view of their situation.

Table 2. Means and standard deviation of self-efficacy

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total score of Self-Efficacy	111	31.08	5.856
Total	111		

We also performed an in-depth analysis regarding the similarity or differences of incarcerated individuals by groups and the results show that there are no significant differences between our three groups. This indicative can mean that regardless of the nature for which they are in the penitentiary environment and especially regardless of the period that they spent imprisoned the self-efficacy of individuals is low. Although an individual who spends more time in prison is better adapted to that environment, there were not obtain significant differences between these groups.

In concern with the first group ($N=28$) we can see that their self-efficacy in the penitentiary is also at level II "low" level ($M = 31.14$). The second group ($N=45$) has a self-efficacy of level II also ($M = 31.00$, $SD = 5.673$), and the third group ($N=38$) has a self-efficacy of the same low level ($M = 31.32$, $SD = 5.969$).

Discussions

Researches in the field of defense mechanisms has a history of three decades in the penitentiary environment and this study comes as an innovation from the perspective of accurate identification of defense mechanisms, their self-efficacy and the dominant dimensions of the self in the deprivation of freedom. Their identification and the problems posed by the conditions of the carceral environment are useful not only for the individual, but also for the society in particular. The institution of the penitentiary, however well-regulated and systematized, cannot reach all the individual problems of men, since it is organized to support those who cannot conform to social norms.

One of the major outcomes is that it was identified the propensity for certain defense mechanisms for each of the three groups. Altruism seems to be the main defense mechanism that individuals use in the penitentiary environment. The penitentiary space has a hidden role, to place individuals in the same environment with the same social notion. And this affiliation to the penitentiary "community" can be explained by the immediate assumption of the captive role. This affiliation has its beginnings from the first moments of entry into the prison and it seems to persist regardless of the period of time spent in the penitentiary and regardless the severity of the punishment they received. It also seems that in the penitentiary environment there is a system of values, it seems that individuals who have carried out acts of rape are stigmatized by the other inmates. The waiting was described by Minkowski (1933), as a suspension of activity or even of life. It does not start from the present to predict the future, but the future makes the present to tense: "the moment that comes to dominate the whole situation" (Minkowski, 1933), and given that the strongest desire of any individual is liberty, this waiting is felt as the worst burden, paralyzing any activity. The right vision of the future belongs to Bernanos: "do not bear your own future, but you

do it" (Sutter and Berta, 1991) is paradoxical in the case of detainees because their current status (as of detained) will exist after their release (as being once a detainee).

This study relates to how each detainee has dealt with the problem of atonement. Mitrofan, Zdrengea and Butoi (2000) argued that "when a punishment is assessed to be the measure of the act, the daily condition expresses an acceptance subject to all rigors, when the punishment is seen to be more severe than the offense committed, the prisoner considers it to have been made an injustice and suffer an unjustified sanction". From this perspective it would be interesting to study the predisposition towards shame or guilt. Studies show that the predisposition to guilt decreases with the severity of punishment, because individuals know very well what they have done (usually a very serious deed) and are not guilty of doing so (Milcu, 2006). This is explained by the low result of the defense mechanism of self-devaluation, they do not perceive it as being lower than other social groups, on the contrary it seems that the self-esteem increases the worse the deed. Within the framework of this study, detainees with life punishment were also identified as an interesting aspect given that these punishments have not been applied in Romania since 2006, and those who have previously received a life sentence could have appealed and the sentence would have been changed. This case is an atypical one (Richards, 1978) from the point of view of the fact that the individual seems either to have renounced the possibility of being introduced into society, or that he prefers lifetime status, increasing (in his perception) the value of the environment deprivation of liberty.

Taken all together, the present findings can provide some tentative suggestions for interventions when working with prisoners.

The results of the study should be analyzed in the limitative context of this research. First of all, the instruments did not have demographic questions, nor could comparisons be made before and after the self-efficacy. It is important to have information about the participants in the study because it could have had at least the effects on the level of self-efficacy. Secondly, the research focused on general self-efficacy. For this reason, it can't be know exactly which respondents have a higher level of trust. Others believe that feelings of self-efficacy in a field (for example, the ability to communicate effectively with others about academic subjects) are not inherently correlated with self-efficacy in other areas (Bond, 2004). Indeed, Bond (2004) states that "most motivational constructs contain specific domain components". Thus, it is recommended for the future studies to introduce a more in-depth measure of self-efficacy (on levels of comprehensiveness, background issues) to explore self-efficacy on a large scale.

Conclusions

First of all, this research was performed in a single penitentiary out of an existing number of 44 in the whole country, and if we refer to the number of people in the deprived environment, our number of participants in this study represents about 0.5%. Of the total number of detainees of the Mioveni Penitentiary, our participants represent about 25% and this is not only the main limit of our research, but it can also signify the level of reluctance of those in the penitentiary environment to external factors.

Secondly, altruism is the main defense mechanism used by detainees from this research and this result could come from their integration to the penitentiary environment. Most of the participants were recidivists and this may establish their attachment to the prison culture. In such conditions, their altruism may also be related to the people that live in the same environment, being also a second explanation their reluctance towards the outside. Of course, this finding should not be overlooked, because this aspect demonstrates that there are existing virtues in the penitentiary environment and that the culture of this environment is similar to many others of the world. Moreover, the theory of psychological selfishness that those in prison seem to be the main subject of, that the detainees are permanently motivated by personal interest, seems to be confirmed if the answers given by them were only based on the motivation of a personal benefit.

Thirdly, the defense with the lowest result is devaluation. This may mean that the respondents of this study have either a high self-esteem or an exaggerated narcissism. The second possibility opens the discussion of an existing of a narcissistic personality disorder or even an antisocial personality disorder. And future studies will propose to evoke and elucidate this aspect.

Regarding the low score of self-efficacy, the present study has no data on how they deal with their daily activities, with the results obtained in the existing programs in the penitentiary environment or with the proposals of the commissions of conditional release. The main reason of this lack of details would be the secrecy of this information (it's not a public information), but that does not mean that our results cannot be strengthened with these aspects known in the enclosed environment in order to increase the level of self-efficacy.

Last but not least, the possibility of unknown variables should be discussed. This aspect is difficult to control, such as the desire of individuals to be seen as others want them to look like. Often prisons are "noisy, chaotic and violent" (Kuhlman and Ruddell, 2005), conditions of stress and threats to a personal well-being are unparalleled in the outer world (Vega and Silverman, 1988).

This research focuses especially on the unconscious sphere, on defense mechanisms and although being expected to identify other mechanisms with the highest results (such as devaluation of others or denial), it seems that the situation is not exactly like one would imagine. Our results must be related to this environment, to this situation, to the individuals who are behind bars, to the specific culture of the penitentiary environment and our research shows that there is an existing process much more complex, more hidden in the endeavor of adaptation to the enclosed environment. In the context of a culture specific to the penitentiary, the challenges that can prevent their self-efficacy are of a different form and may have a different significance from those encountered in other social environments. Moreover, our research needs to be extended to an even larger number of inmates, to know precisely if this study is confirmed or not. Our results are necessary for the personnel working in the penitentiary environment, mainly for the psychologists there. The fact that altruism is a primordial mechanism tells how essential are group work programs or team-based psychotherapy. Also, the results obtained on the self-efficacy scale demonstrate the need for strategies based on mindfulness, on increasing resilience in the deprived environment, on the necessity of psychotherapy focused on reducing stress levels and on improving emotion regulation which reduces impulsiveness, or on strategies regarding empathy and respect (of course based on the reason for their imprisonment).

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