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## Experiencing Stress as an Influence Factor on the Level of Psychosocial Adaptation in One-Time and Repeated Offenders Punished with Imprisonment

**Abstract:** The article presents the results of research showing the relationship between experiencing stress in the first phase (perception of stressful stimuli) and the second phase (stress management), and the level of psychosocial adaptation of persons who have been sentenced to imprisonment once and repeatedly. The results were obtained on the basis of surveying 296 men convicted with imprisonment. For the analysis of the level of psychosocial adaptation Julian Rotter's *Rotter Incomplete Sentences Blank (RISB)* was used. The perception of stressful situations was measured by Iwona Niewiadomska's *Own Life Evaluation Questionnaire*. The measurement of how one deals with stressful situations was performed using Norman Endler and James Parker's *Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS)* and also John Marsden's *MAP Questionnaire*. The results obtained indicate that there are specific elements of experiencing stress, which affect the level of psychosocial adaptation of convicted offenders: 1) regardless of the number of prison sentences served, 2) only in group of people serving the prison sentence once, 3) only in group of people repeatedly residing in prison.

**Key words:** experiencing stress, perception of difficult situations, stress management, psychosocial adaptation, prisoners, one-time imprisonment, repeated imprisonment.

## The theoretical basis for research

**Characteristics of the first phase of experiencing stress: perception of difficult situations (stress-inducing stimuli).** A complex system, covering the whole of relationships between a specific person and the surrounding environment, creates a psychological situation (Tomaszewski 1963, p. 139). Thanks to the existence of cognitive personality variables, the conduct of a human being is characterized by great flexibility in the context of occurring events, because the entity creates subjective scenarios for adapting behavior to achieve an objective in the existing circumstances, and among several potential activities selects the one that has the highest probability of success (Ericsson, Lehmann 1996, p. 275).

Particularly noteworthy are problem situations that are characterized by a divergence between human needs or tasks and the capabilities to satisfying these expectations or performance of tasks (Tomaszewski 1984, p. 134). The catalogue of difficult situations primarily include (Gierowski 1996, p. 137–138; Terelak 2001, p. 186–190):

- deprivation of important biological or psychological needs;
- overload – the need to perform tasks beyond the physical or psychological capabilities;
- painful situation – the need to endure physical or mental suffering (e.g. an insult, humiliation, injury);
- conflict of motivation – long and tiring decision-making processes of a negative emotional tone;
- physical (related to life and health) or social (e.g. the possibility of losing social status) threat – a system of incentives, which in themselves are harmless, but signal the emergence of unpleasant emotional states;
- hindrance – limitation of an intentional activity due to lack of elements necessary for its performance or the occurrence of an obstacle in the performance of activities aimed at the chosen goal (frustration);
- new situation – a set of circumstances in which proven practices fail.

The listed difficulties are not mutually exclusive. They can co-exist with each other or overlap at a certain point in time or in a long-lasting way. For example, a new situation can be both painful, threatening or cause a conflict of motivation (Gierowski 1996, p. 138).

Experiencing difficulties it is closely associated with psychological stress (Tomaszewski 1984, p. 134). Its intensification constitutes the function of differences between the requirements towards the entity and the possibilities of performing tasks (Strelau et al. 2004, p. 49–51). We can speak about the level of stress only when the magnitude of the overload has reached a certain threshold of intensity, so-called stress threshold. Its excess is associated with stress response

syndrome, which occurs at three levels – non-specific changes, specific changes and modifications of expression activities.

Non-specific changes take place from increased activity and improvement of ability, through increased emotional tension and deterioration of functioning to exhaustion of the body, disorganization of activity and a decline in interest in the result. Specific changes involve adjusting the content of behavior to the type of difficult situation. Depending on the “threshold of stress tolerance” two forms of specific reactions can be distinguished: a) fighting stress adequately to the type of destabilizing factor (e.g. removing the source of stress); b) defense against stress, which appears when fighting it is ineffective. Defensive behavior may take a real form (e.g. withdrawing from a stressful situation, avoiding it, attacking obstacles) or a symbolic form (e.g. fantasy, denial or other kinds of defense mechanisms). Reactions related to changes in expressive activities do not serve attaining specific external objectives, but indicate the state of emotional tension towards the difficulty (e.g. expressing disapproval, verbalizing unpleasant experience, rage, panic).

In the context of the analyzed issue, one should also note the various effects of stress load depending on its intensification. As a rule, stress reactions interfere with the functioning of the human, but not lead to disturbances in the adaptation process. Yet after going beyond the individual “threshold of tolerance” the overload is so strong that it causes maladaptive responses that are not focused on the task, but only to defend against excessive mental stress (Terelak 2001, p. 228–229).

The web of adverse situational factors plays an important role in recidivism (Short 1998, p. 3–36). Repeat offenders are usually characterized by disturbances in emotional and cognitive functioning. These problems and lower resistance to stress, which is the result of long-lasting adaptation difficulties, cause that people from this group often perceive different types of life circumstances in terms of difficult situations. Such an interpretation of occurred events increases the risk of deviant behavior constituting a response to stress (Brezina 1996, p. 39–60). The increase of criminogenic psychological tension is most often the result of three types of difficulties – obstacles in achieving important objectives (frustration), lack of particularly cherished values (deprivation), the perception of aversive situations (Mazerolle et al. 2000, p. 90).

Empirical analyses confirm the existence of a link between high mental stress in problem situations and a greater number criminal offenses, escalated by aggression, decrease in the number of social liabilities of their perpetrators and intensive involvement in the activities of criminal groups (Mazerolle et al. 2000, p. 89). The study results also helped to establish the characteristics of perpetrators, which increase the likelihood of committing a crime (especially violent acts) in stressful circumstances. The subject risk factors in this respect include in particular (Agnew 2001, p. 319):

— sense of injustice;

- conviction of one's own greatness and strength;
- perception of low social control;
- increased motivation to cope with difficult situations in a way that violates the norms of penal law.

A person serving imprisonment sentences for committing a crime can also experience stress involving the a "critical event of life change" (Sęk 2001, p. 252). It is very similar to experiencing a difficult situation. The difference lies in the fact that the stress of a problematic situation can be easily coped with, but a critical event requires changes in the functional system: human-environment. These changes can be constructive or destructive in nature (Sęk 2001, p. 253). Their constructiveness consists, among others, in the fact that this type of experience can be conducive to a person's development due to the discovery of higher values, focusing behavior on more mature goals and/or initiating pro-social attitudes (Cekiera 1993, p. 280–281). But often the circumstances constituting critical life events lead to negative consequences. Their risk increases when an individual in such a situation (Sęk 2001, p. 252–253):

- experiences large physical, psychological and/or social losses;
- perceives a critical event in various spheres of life (i.e. personal, family, professional);
- experiences major intensification of feelings of helplessness and hopelessness;
- has limited preventive resources.

The presented regularities are reflected in the conclusions of studies on convicts sentenced to imprisonment. The first consists in the fact that the risk of recidivism is very high in people who experience high intensity of problems in various dimensions of life (Stattin, Magnusson 1995, p. 417–449). The second regularity applies to pro-social motivations in former prisoners – it increases when the state of oppression, in which the person is after being released from prison, is alleviated and when the life situation improves (Bałandynowicz 1996, p. 147).

An effective way of acting in a situation of critical life events is the skillful provision of social support (Lazarus, 1986, p. 5; Sęk 2001, p. 252–253). Two factors gain essential meaning in offered assistance – adequate awakening of hope for solving problems of the entity and the positive use of its impatience due to the lack of significant progress in overcoming difficulties. These factors are referred to as stimulators of tendencies to behaviors aimed at changing one's personal life situation. Lowering motivation to change occurs when an entity has faint hope for a positive solution to a problem, and a high level of impatience due to the lack of changes (Bałandynowicz 1996, p. 148).

**Characteristics of the second phase of experiencing stress: coping competences in difficult situations.** The cognitive system responsible for perceiving the degree to which a person has demonstrated effectiveness in actions or thinks that they may get through them is referred to as competences (Bandura 1982, p. 122–147). Three processes take part in their development – social

modeling, practicing specific behaviors in order to consolidate the desired skills, and their application in everyday life (Bandura 1997, p. 56–59).

A very important type of competence of a cognitive-behavioral character is coping skills in problem situations (Bandura 1997, p. 61). Coping with stress is a function of initial cognitive evaluation of the occurring event – if the person classifies the situation as stressful, then the adaptation process is started in the form of coping. Its course depends on the secondary evaluation of the problem, in which the person estimates what can be done to meet the demands of the occurring circumstances. Coping possibilities are assessed in terms of two basic functions (Lazarus 1986, p. 24):

- 1) changing the situation for the better (strategies focused on the problem);
- 2) emotional self-regulation to avoid the collapse of mental strength or functioning in social relations (strategies focused on emotions).

There are four basic ways to cope with stress which simultaneously meet the listed functions – searching for information (review of the stressful situation in order to gain the knowledge necessary to make a rational coping decision or to reevaluate the threat), direct action (actions aimed at changing the causative subject or in the surroundings designed to cope with stress), refraining from activity (due to the circumstances, inaction is more favorable than action), intrapsychic processes, or cognitive processes aimed at emotional regulation – these mainly include the defense mechanisms (Terelak 2001, p. 358).

Coping methods designed to change the circumstances for more favorable ones can take a variety of forms – e.g. monitoring stress, structuring the situation or seek social support. Their effectiveness, however, requires the proper functioning of the cognitive system, which serves for a realistic perception of stressors and available coping resources. If as a result of this assessment the entity comes to the conclusion that the problem cannot be solved, then emotional coping strategies are initiated in the form of physically removing the situation or using defense mechanisms, e.g. ignoring or rationalizing the problem (Brandstadter, Renner 1990, p. 58–67). The risk of disturbances in adaptation occurs especially when the functions of changing the circumstances and emotional regulation come into conflict – e.g. the effect of self-ease obtained as a result of using psychoactive substances precludes taking any adaptation measures (Heszen-Niejodek 2000, p. 77).

The relatively steady coping process and dispositions of reducing psychological stress specific for an entity correspond to the personality variable, defined as a coping style (Heszen-Niejodek 2000, p. 484). The existence of this dimension of personality is determined by the fact that people habitually use fixed patterns of conduct in situations that are characterized by similar properties. So, the coping style determines the relative constancy of human behavior in certain types of difficulties. What strategies will be used to solve a particular problem is determined by two factors – the possibility of an individual coping style and needs of the current situation (Heszen-Niejodek 2000, p. 488–489).

The process of coping can be considered effective if it leads to a lasting and constructive solution to the problem, and at the same time – to positive emotions. Empirical studies do not indicate clearly what coping style is most effective in coping with stress. The results of some studies lead to the conclusion that the effectiveness of a coping style depends on the situational context (Heszen-Niejodek 2000, p. 489), while others suggest that even when considering the circumstances, the style focused on solving the problem has a greater adaptable value than those of escape and avoidance or emotional (Pervin, John 2002, p. 549). Some authors also express the view that overcoming difficulties through emotions are often associated with an inefficient way of managing internal coping resources, which increases the risk of increased mental strain (Strelau et al. 2004, p. 49–51).

The presented conclusions lead to important practical applications in the field of psychosocial adaptation of persons convicted with imprisonment. Namely, it can be concluded that the reduction of recidivism is related to the need to adapt the social rehabilitation influences to the individual style of coping with stress of people convicted with imprisonment (Heszen-Niejodek 2000, p. 482). The interactions aimed at positive social rehabilitation must also take into account factors that increase the effectiveness of the used coping strategies. The results of empirical analyses argue that behaviors designed for solving problems are more effective when they include the following elements (Sęk 2001, p. 258):

- basic trust to oneself and to other people;
- active exploration of reality and search for information;
- division of the problem situation into fragments and gradual solution of problems;
- constructive coping with feelings;
- initiating help from other people;
- recognizing tendencies to tiredness and disorganization and overcoming them;
- willingness to make changes in oneself.

In the context of analyzing the risk of returning to crime, one should also pay attention to chronic stress, which consists in long-term experience of emotional tension of a negative nature. In the population of people convicted with imprisonment it can also stem from long-term prison isolation, as well as persistent difficulties in adaptation after leaving prison. Empirical analyses suggest that long-term mental stress leads to responses that increase the likelihood of criminal behavior – e.g. by giving preference to behaviors like: uncontrollable outbursts of rage and/or anger, hostility towards people, aggression as a response to the smallest provocation, isolation from the environment or the desire to dominate others (Terelak 2001, p. 307). These manifestations of social maladjustment of people convicted with imprisonment are additionally constituted by indicators of difficulties related to the demands that society puts before individuals leaving prison. The high intensity of the symptoms mentioned above may lead to harming society or its individual entities (Ostrowska 1986, p. 8). The presented regularities

justify the claim appearing in literature on the subject, that from the perspective of the perpetrator, the criminal offense (especially of an aggressive nature) is often an attempt to solve a difficult situation (Strelau et al. 2004, p. 49–51).

Prolonged stress can also cause negative consequences in people experiencing mental tension. At the level of mental functions they can consist in anxiety, apathy or depression; in the physiological aspect – they can lead to psychosomatic diseases or other health problems in the behavioral dimension – they increase the risk of self-destructive behavior, including suicide (Strelau et al. 2004, p. 50).

In longitudinal studies on the psychological consequences of chronic stress, it was found that most often in response to tension, aside from neuroses (especially with the depressive component) and psychosomatic diseases, there is increased use of psychoactive substance – primarily alcohol (Poprawa 1998, p. 62). Factors that increase the risk of using chemical substances as a coping strategy include primarily (Poprawa 1998, p. 65–67):

- lack of adequate cognitive-behavioral skills for coping with stress (their poverty or stiffness), while believing that a psychoactive substance is an effective method of solving problems;
- low self-efficacy in dealing with problems, and simultaneously positive expectations regarding the effects of using a chemical substance in a particular situation – mainly as a good way of reducing tension and breaking away from current problems;
- lack of motivation to grapple life's problems – a low tolerance for difficulties, piling up failures, the tendency to resign from effort and seek “easy solutions”;
- having established patterns of psychoactive substance use;
- intensive social training in behaviors of an escaping-compulsive nature.

The use of chemicals (especially alcohol) as a coping strategy in stressful situations is characteristic of people leaving prisons. It should be noted, however, that their use is an important risk factor for recidivism and serious readaptation difficulties – conflicts with the family, problems at work, public nuisance (Yu 2000, p. 261). In addition, escaping from stress in states of intoxication is associated with a paradox consisting in the fact that in the short term, psychoactive substance use causes relief, but in the long term – it causes more and more psychological distress, worsens coping deficits and often leads to the creation of addiction mechanisms, which destroy the proper structure of life aspirations (Poprawa 1998, p. 68; Terelak 2001, p. 305). The presented regularity is confirmed by the results of analyses, which have found that alcohol abuse often co-occurs with repeatedly committing aggressive crimes against vulnerable members of the family (Łuszczńska-Cieślak, Gąsiorowska 2000, p. 132–133).

Studies of criminals involved in addiction therapy have indicated that participation in the programme promotes the use of more constructive coping strategies in life situations (Hepburn 2005, p. 237–259). Analysis of coping styles

in alcoholics in treatment allows us to claim that the process of recovery coincides with changing the methods of overcoming problems in the form of a greater focus on solving problems (among others, through planned solving difficulties and positive re-evaluation of the situation), and a decrease in the intensity of the style focused on emotions, e.g. as a result of less frequent use of the confrontational strategy involving the strong expression of negative emotions (Makowska 1998, p. 108). The results confirm the regularity whereby the increase of competences in stressful situations reduces the likelihood of using coping strategies in the form of psychoactive substance use (Poprawa 1998, p. 62).

A summary of the issues presented in the theoretical section is two questions that constitute a justification to conduct own research:

1. What is the impact of perceived stress situations (elements of the first phase of experiencing stress) on psychosocial adaptation of people convicted with imprisonment once and repeatedly?
2. What is the impact of the way of coping with stressful situations (elements of the second phase of experiencing stress) on psychosocial adaptation of people convicted with imprisonment once and repeatedly?

## Methodology of own studies

Answers to the research questions were based on the results of studies which involved 296 men convicted with imprisonment once or repeatedly. The division of the group of respondents into people convicted with imprisonment once and penitentiary recidivists is justified by the fact that the probability of recidivism is strongly related to previous criminal records – in people serving imprisonment once the risk of committing another crime is at an average level, but it grows very quickly in subsequent stays in prison. Therefore, it is recommended that penitentiary recidivists are treated as a separate group in the criminological studies (Tonry 2001, p. 178).

Half of the surveyed group (49.4%) are people imprisoned one time. Some of them were currently serving imprisonment (N = 80), and some had been imprisoned in the past (N = 66). The other half of the participants (50.6%) are people repeatedly deprived of their liberty, who were either currently in prison (N = 80), or they were functioning in conditions of freedom after completing the last sentence of imprisonment (N = 70). The number of sentences of imprisonment served among penitentiary recidivists was proportionate: 18.2% of respondents – two, 14.2% – three and 18.2% – more than three imprisonment sentences.

Due to the whereabouts of the respondents, the conducted studies were twofold. The first was to reach the convicted men who were serving imprisonment. Studies were conducted in three prisons in the Lublin Inspectorate of the Prison Service: in a closed-type prison for first-time offenders in Zamość, in a closed-type



prison in Chełm for men who were convicted for the first time and for penitentiary recidivists, as well as in a closed-type and semi-open prison for penitentiary recidivists in Włodawa. The second method of conducting studies concerned men who had completed serving their sentence of imprisonment. Studies were conducted throughout Poland, and reaching the group of respondents was possible thanks to probation officers, priests, members of the AA movement and social workers.

The level of psychosocial adaptation of the respondents was determined based on the overall score in *The Rotter Incomplete Sentences Blank RISB*, which reflects adaptability skills of the respondent in areas such as: functioning in relationships outside the family and in the family, attitude towards oneself, objectives and goals, intensification of experienced problems (Jaworowska, Matczak 1998). The psychometric value of the method measured by the Cronbach's Alpha internal compatibility ratio for the overall result amounts to 0.79 (Matczak, Jaworowska 2003, p. 11–12). Accuracy measured by differences in contrasting groups indicates that persons experiencing adaptation difficulties (among others, prisoners, battered women, patients with depression, the unemployed) achieve a significantly lower level of adaptability than people constituting the standardization sample (Matczak, Jaworowska 2003, p. 13–29).

Distinguishing in the population of once and repeatedly convicted men such persons which are characterized by a high and low level of psychosocial adaptation was carried out by applying quartile deviation in relation to the overall score in *The Rotter Incomplete Sentences Blank RISB*. By using this procedure for analyses, results were selected of people who obtained the lowest 25% and the highest 25% of scores, indicative of the level of psychosocial adaptation of persons convicted with imprisonment once and penitentiary recidivists.

The next step in the analysis of the results was applying cross tables. With this procedure, four groups of respondents were selected, which simultaneously took into account the correlations between the number of served imprisonment sentences and the level of psychosocial adaptation. Due to the two criteria mentioned above (the number of imprisonment sentences served: one-time stay in prison or repeated stay in prison) and the level of adaptation measured by the overall score in *The Rotter Incomplete Sentences Blank RISB* (high or low), respondents were divided into four groups:

- group E (N = 43) – offenders serving imprisonment sentences once with high psychosocial adaptation;
- Group F (N = 30) – offender repeatedly serving imprisonment sentences with high psychosocial adaptation;
- Group G (N = 45) – offenders repeatedly serving imprisonment sentences with low psychosocial adaptation;
- Group H (N = 33) – offenders serving imprisonment sentences once with low psychosocial adaptation.

For the study of the first phase of stress (perception of stress-inducing stimuli) in the group of respondents, the first part of Niewiadomska's *Own Life Assessment Questionnaire* was used, which serves to determine the sense of the intensification of difficult situations. The tool used is based on two assumptions. The first one suggests that the perception of difficult situations is of particular importance for the functioning of a human as a result of the fact that it disturbs the entity-environment system, causing such a state of instability that leads to psychological stress (Steuden 1997, p. 77). The second assumption is a result of adopting the transaction concept of stress, which assumes that mental burden does not depend directly from the stressful stimulus or from the person experiencing tension – it is the result of how an entity assesses the situation in the context of adaptation to the environment (Szczepaniak et al. 1996, p. 188–189).

The questionnaire listed 7 kinds of difficult situations related to:

- deprivation of biological and psychological needs;
- excessive physical and/or mental burden;
- physical and/or mental suffering;
- internal conflicts;
- sense of threat;
- frustration in achieving goals;
- the newness of incoming stimuli.

Analysis of the intensification of the perceived difficulties includes three time perspectives – past, present and future. Summing up the frequency of difficulties in each time perspective serves to determine three indicators – sense of intensification of difficult situations in the past, perception of the intensity of current difficulties, and anticipating problem situations in the future. The Cronbach's Alpha internal compatibility ratio, counted on a group of 296 people, for indicators of intensification of difficult situations reached the following values: 0.85 – experiencing past problems; 0.83 – experiencing current difficulties; 0.71 – anticipating future problem situations.

Endler and Parker's *Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations* (CISS) was applied to study experiencing stress in the second phase, i.e. to assess ways of coping with stress. The CISS method is based on the transactional theory of stress, which assumes that human remedial actions in a situation of psychological tension are the result of the interaction that takes place between the characteristics of the situation and the coping style, characteristic for a given entity (Strelau et al. 2004, p. 54). The process of coping with stress involves strategies changing over time which are designed to meet two basic functions – solving problems (achieved by performing tasks) and reducing emotional tension (coping focused on emotions). The authors of the questionnaire added a third form of behavior in a stressful situation – avoiding the circumstances leading to tension (Szczepaniak et al. 1996, p. 188–191). The repeatability of these coping forms in different stressful situations is the basis for extracting three styles in terms of coping with mental stress

– concentrated on the task, emotions and avoidance. Empirical studies obtained low, mostly negligible, correlation coefficients between the indicators of the listed categories, which suggests the existence of independent dimensions in terms of styles of coping with stress (Parker, Endler 1992, p. 324–326). The Cronbach's Alpha internal compatibility ratio Factors in five independent studies involving 2,898 people ranged from 0.72 to 0.92; absolute stability (determined by calculating the correlation coefficient of the results obtained on a group of 238 students in two studies six weeks apart) ranged from 0.51 to 0.73 (Szczepaniak et al. 1996, p. 193–194).

The study also used the first part of Marsden's *MAP Questionnaire (Maudsley Addiction Profile)*, which is a structured interview serving to examine issues related to the problems of chemical additions (Marsden et al. 1998, p. 1857–1867). The method was used to evaluate the use of avoidant strategies of coping with stress, which depends on the use of psychoactive substances (Hornowska 2006, p. 10–11). MAP reliability measured by test-retest method in a period of 14 days indicated that the correlation coefficients for the different parts of the method ranged from 0.68 to 0.98 (Hornowska 2006, p. 12).

To seek answers to the research questions ANOVA variant analysis was used (Ferguson, Woven 1997, p. 272–273).

## Results of own studies

### **The impact of perceived difficult situations on the psychosocial adaptation of people convicted with imprisonment**

The attempt to obtain answers to the first research question involved testing dependencies occurring between the intensity of experienced difficult situations (and between their types) in three time perspectives and the level of psychosocial adaptation in four groups of criminals convicted with imprisonment E, F, G and H. The study on the impact of the intensification of difficult situations in the three time perspectives (past, present and future) on the level of psychosocial adaptation in people once convicted with imprisonment and penitentiary recidivists is illustrated in Table 1.

**The intensification of past difficult situations in the compared groups.** A significantly lower intensification of the tested variable is indicated in groups E and F in relation to collective G and H, which leads to the conclusion that the analyzed personality dimension determines the psychosocial adaptation of convicted criminals, regardless of the number of served sentences of imprisonment. Both one-time offenders and penitentiary recidivists with great adaptation potential, are characterized by low intensification of perceiving various problems in the past time perspective.

Table 1. Results of the analysis of variance (general linear model GLM) for scales of Niewiadomska's Own Life Assessment Questionnaire in groups E, F, G, H (distinguished based on indicators of psychosocial adaptation and return to crime)

Dependent variable	Constant		Groups E, F, G, H source of variation of dependent variable		Group E (N = 43)		Group F (N = 30)		Group G (N = 45)		Group H (N = 33)		E-F	E-G	E-H
	F	p ≤	F	p ≤	M	s	M	s	M	s	M	s			
Past	2087.70	.000	5.32	.002	18.88	5.35	21.17	6.80	23.22	4.53	23.18	6.56	-	.001	.001
Present	1509.83	.000	10.64	.000	15.84	5.39	16.07	4.88	21.56	6.58	20.76	5.86	-	.000	.000
Future	1761.40	.000	7.99	.000	14.88	4.40	15.33	5.19	18.33	5.33	19.61	4.70	-	.001	.000

**The intensification of current difficult situations in the compared groups.**

Groups E and F, in contrast to G and H, are characterized by significantly lower levels of the measured size of experienced stress. The obtained dependence therefore justifies the conclusion that the intensification of experienced problems in the present time perspective has an impact on adaptation potential both in one-time offenders and penitentiary recidivists. High indicators of psychosocial adaptation – regardless of the number of served sentences – are conditioned by low intensification of perceived difficult situations in the present time perspective.

**The intensification of anticipated difficult situations in the compared groups.** The studied dimension of personality is marked by significantly lower intensification in groups E and F in relation to G and H. For this reason, it was treated as a variable that determines the adaptation potential regardless of the criteria of recidivism. In people characterized by a high adaptation potential there is a low intensification of anticipated problems in the future time perspective.

**Types of past stressful situations in the compared groups.** Analysis of the relationships between the types of past difficult situations and psychosocial adaptation in one-time offenders and those repeatedly convicted is presented in Table 2.

After conducting the analyses, attention was paid to three types of dependencies between the indicators of effectiveness of imprisonment sanctions and the frequency of experiencing specific problems in the past time perspective.

The first of these involves determining the adaptation potential regardless of recidivism. Two categories of past difficulties have this type of impact – burden and suffering. The significantly lower intensification of these factors is indicated in groups E and F compared to the population of G and H.

The second type of dependency concerns determining high adaptation potential, but only in one-time convicted offenders. The said type of impact is associated with experiencing deprivation of needs in the past time perspective – a significantly lower intensification of this variable is present in community E in comparison with the groups F, G and H.

The third type of relationships concerns conditioning of low adaptation potential in penitentiary recidivists. The predictor of this type are past threats – their significantly higher frequency occurs in group G compared to groups E, F and H.

Three categories of past difficult situations – conflicts, frustrations and new incoming stimuli – do not determine the level of psychosocial adaptation of people sentenced to imprisonment once and those repeatedly punished by imprisonment. This is indicated by the similarity of results of these variables in populations E, F, G and H.

**Types of current stressful situations in the compared groups.** An analysis of the categories of currently perceived stressful situations in the compared groups is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 2. Results of the analysis of variance (general linear model GLM) for elements concerning types of difficult situations in the past in I. Niewiadomska's *Own Life Assessment Questionnaire* in groups E, F, G, H (distinguished based on indicators of psychosocial adaptation and return to crime)

Dependent variable Type of past difficult situations	Constant		Groups E, F, G, H source of varia- tion of depen- dent variable		Group E (N = 43)		Group F (N = 30)		Group G (N = 45)		Group H (N = 33)		E-F p ≤	E-G p ≤	E-H p ≤
	F	p ≤	F	p ≤	M	s	M	s	M	s	M	S			
Deprivation of needs	648.56	.000	5.14	.002	2.09	1.25	2.77	1.48	3.02	1.27	3.12	1.27	.032	.001	.001
Burdens	957.74	.000	4.96	.003	2.67	1.15	2.63	1.38	3.47	1.01	3.27	1.23	-	.002	.030
Suffering	1015.43	.000	4.29	.006	2.56	1.12	2.87	1.31	3.16	1.04	3.45	1.15	-	.015	.001
Conflicts	1203.62	.000	2.03	.112	2.84	1.07	3.20	1.24	3.29	1.01	3.42	1.17	_*	_*	.024*
Threats	1270.18	.000	3.49	.017	2.81	1.03	3.03	1.19	3.53	.97	3.21	1.14	-	.002	-
Frustrations	1625.74	.000	1.77	.154	3.05	.90	3.33	1.06	3.53	.94	3.30	1.10	_*	.023*	_*
New situations	1478.87	.000	2.19	.091	2.86	.80	3.33	1.09	3.22	1.00	3.39	1.17	.050*	_*	.024*

\* no differences resulting from values of F for the dependent variable in groups E, F, G and H.

Table 3. Results of the analysis of variance (general linear model GLM) for elements concerning types of current difficult situations in I. Niewiadomska's *Own Life Assessment Questionnaire* in groups E, F, G, H (distinguished based on indicators of psychosocial adaptation and return to crime)

Dependent variable Type of current difficult situations	Constant		Groups E, F, G, H source of variation of dependent variable		Groups E (N = 43)		Groups F (N = 30)		Groups G (N = 45)		Groups H (N = 33)		E-F	E-G	E-H
	F	p ≤	F	p ≤	M	s	M	s	M	S	M	S			
Deprivation of needs	615,71	,000	5,65	,001	2,16	1,23	2,23	1,16	2,96	1,35	3,15	1,35	-	,004	,001
Burdens	653,07	,000	2,28	,082	2,09	1,17	2,30	1,09	2,60	1,21	2,70	1,07	-*	,040*	,024*
Suffering	687,20	,000	5,55	,001	2,00	,93	2,03	,96	2,80	1,16	2,64	1,29	-	,001	,013
Conflicts	918,20	,000	2,52	,060	2,33	1,04	2,53	1,04	2,91	1,08	2,76	1,03	-*	,010*	-*
Threats	739,01	,000	5,12	,002	2,19	1,03	2,10	,80	2,84	1,20	2,88	1,32	-	,006	,008
Frustrations	1031,90	,000	4,39	,005	2,72	1,03	2,60	1,13	3,20	1,18	3,45	1,17	-	,048	,006
New situations	924,48	,000	9,47	,000	2,35	,95	2,27	,87	3,33	1,19	3,18	1,36	-	,000	,001

\* no differences resulting from values of F for the dependent variable in groups E, F, G and H.

Table 4. Results of the analysis of variance (general linear model GLM) for elements concerning types of anticipated difficult situations in I. Niewiadomska's *Own Life Assessment Questionnaire* in groups E, F, G, H (distinguished based on indicators of psychosocial adaptation and return to crime)

Dependent variable Type of predicted difficult situations	Constant		Groups E, F, G, H source of variation of dependent variable			Group E (N = 43)		Group F (N = 30)		Group G (N = 45)		Group H (N = 33)		E-F	E-G	E-H
	F	p≤	F	p≤	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	p≤	p≤	p≤
Deprivation of needs	618.44	.000	5.05	.002	1.84	2.13	.84	2.13	1.04	2.60	1.30	2.70	1.26	-	.002	.001
Burdens	876.96	.000	1.83	.144	2.26	2.37	1.05	2.37	1.13	2.47	1.01	2.79	.82	-*	-*	.024*
Suffering	667.08	.000	3.11	.028	1.91	2.13	.87	2.13	1.11	2.27	1.07	2.64	1.17	-	-	.003
Conflicts	960.45	.000	1.58	.197	2.33	2.13	.86	2.13	.90	2.49	1.06	2.61	.86	-*	-*	-*
Threats	825.95	.000	3.82	.011	2.09	2.17	*/.84	2.17	.91	2.56	1.18	2.79	1.05	-	.034	.003
Frustrations	1257.22	.000	8.56	.000	2.33	2.33	.97	2.33	.84	3.04	.95	3.15	.91	-	.000	.000
New situations	917.20	.000	8.27	.000	2.14	2.07	.99	2.07	.87	2.91	1.08	2.94	1.03	-	.000	.001

\* no differences resulting from values of F for the dependent variable in groups E, F, G and H.



The high adaptation potential both in people serving the sentence of imprisonment once and in penitentiary recidivists is affected by the low frequency of current problems, which are the result of deprivation of needs, suffering, threats, frustration and new situations. The above conclusion is the result of regularities involving significantly lower results of these variables in groups E and F in relation to community G and H.

The frequency of two categories of difficult situations – current burdens and conflicts – does not determine indicators of the effectiveness of the penalty of imprisonment. This is evidenced by the similarity of the compared groups within these factors.

**Types of stressful situations anticipated in the future in the compared groups.** Table 4. shows the results of the distinguished groups in terms of the types of problems anticipated in the future.

The analysis revealed two types of dependencies between the frequency of anticipated types of difficult situations and the psychosocial level of adaptation of persons serving imprisonment. The first is determinants of a high level of adaptation regardless of the number of imprisonment penalties served. These types of variables should include predictions about the deprivation of needs, threats, frustration and new situations in the future time perspective. Significantly lower frequency of these factors is noted in people with high adaptation potential (groups E and F) in relation to individuals with low adaptation possibilities (G and H).

The second type of dependency concerns determining low adaptation possibilities in people convicted once. Their predictor is anticipated suffering, because the significantly greater frequency of this factor has been found in community H in comparison with groups E, F and G.

Two categories of anticipated difficult situations – burdens and conflicts – do not affect the indicators of effectiveness of imprisonment penalties, seen in the context of recidivism, due to their comparable intensification in groups E, F, G and H.

### **The impact of coping with stressful situations on the psychosocial adaptation of people convicted with imprisonment**

The attempt to obtain answers to the second research question involved testing dependencies occurring between the level of adaptation in groups E, F, G, H and factors of the second phase of experiencing stress, such as:

- style of coping with stress (Tab. 5);
- preference of avoidance strategies for coping with stress – alternative activities and seeking company (Tab. 6) and psychoactive substance use (Tab. 7–8).

**Preference of styles for coping with stress in the compared groups.** The results indicating the intensification of three coping styles – task, emotional and avoidance in groups E, F, G and H are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of the analysis of variance (general linear model GLM) for the scales of Endler and Parker's Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations in groups E, F, G, H (distinguished based on indicators of psychosocial adaptation and return to crime)

Dependent variable	Constant		Groups E, F, G, H source of variation of dependent variable				Group E (N = 43)		Group F (N = 30)		Group G (N = 45)		Group H (N = 33)		E-F	E-G	E-H			
	F	p ≤	F	p ≤	M	s	M	s	M	s	M	s	M	s				p ≤	p ≤	p ≤
Task style	1598.09	.000	7.25	.000	46.77	16.68	53.07	13.55	47.49	13.16	37.09	11.23	-	-	.003					
Emotional style	4359.74	.000	5.74	.001	46.67	9.089	42.03	8.88	50.31	8.41	46.36	7.39	.023	.047	-					
Avoidance style	3437.11	.000	2.13	.099	45.14	10.01	44.03	7.73	47.29	9.50	42.09	8.98	-.*	-.*	-.*					

\* no differences resulting from values of F for the dependent variable in groups E, F, G and H.

**The intensification of the task coping style in the compared groups.**

A significantly lower level of the tested variable is determined in group H in relation to groups E, F and G. As a result, it can be concluded that its low intensification determines only a small adaptation potential in people convicted with imprisonment once. The low adaptation indicator of one-time convicts is determined by a low tendency to undertake efforts in stressful situations that aim to solve the problem through its cognitive transformation or attempt to change the situation. These people do not really plan to solve existing difficulties and rarely treat them in terms of a task.

**The intensification of the emotional coping style in the compared groups.**

The tested personality dimension in significantly lower intensification is determined in group F, at the same time in significantly higher intensification in community G in relation to groups E and H. Therefore, it can be concluded that its level determines both a low and a high level of psychosocial adaptation, but only with penitentiary recidivists. High adaptation potential of repeatedly convicted criminals is determined by low intensification of the tendency consisting in concentrating on experienced negative emotions, use of wishful thinking and/or fantasizing in difficult situations. In contrast, low adaptation potential of penitentiary recidivists is a result of the reverse tendency – their activities focus primarily on reducing emotional tension, focus on themselves, wishful thinking and/or fantasizing.

**The intensification of the avoidance coping style in the compared groups.**

In groups E, F, G and H, the tested variable is at a similar level, which allows to conclude that it does not determine adaptation potential indicators considered in the context of the number of served imprisonment sentences. The general tendency to avoid thinking, feeling and experiencing difficult situations is marked by a similar intensification both in individuals with high levels of adaptability, as well as with low adaptation potential.

**Preferring avoidance strategies for coping with stress in the compared groups.** The analysis of the intensification of two strategies consisting of the avoidance coping style – alternative actions and seeking company – in the compared populations is illustrated in Table 6.

**The intensification of alternative actions in the compared groups.**

The tested factor occurs in a similar intensification in groups E, F, G and H. Therefore, it can be said that it neither affects the adaptation potential of people who have been convicted once nor people repeatedly serving imprisonment sentences. Criminals with a high adaptation indicator and low adaptation potential alike – regardless of the number of penalties served – are involved in alternative actions at a similar level (e.g. Sleep, watching TV, overeating) in situations when they experience various problems.

Table 6. Results of the analysis of variance (general linear model GLM) for the subscales of the avoidance style in Endler and Parker's *Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations* in groups E, F, G, H (distinguished based on indicators of psychosocial adaptation and return to crime)

Dependent variable	Constant		Groups E, F, G, H source of variation of dependent variable		Groups E (N = 43)		Groupa F (N = 30)		Groupa G (N = 45)		Groupa H (N = 33)		E-F	E-G	E-H
	F	p ≤	F	p ≤	M	s	M	s	M	s	M	S			
Alternative actions	2137.76	.000	2.23	.087	20.14	4.74	19.33	3.82	22.11	6.14	19.61	5.94	-*	-*	-*
Seeking company	2296.30	.000	3.24	.024	16.56	4.91	16.37	4.06	15.58	3.39	13.91	3.00	-	-	.004

\* no differences resulting from values of F for the dependent variable in groups E, F, G and H.

Table 7. Results of the analysis of variance (general linear model GLM) for the scales of Marsden's *MAP Questionnaire* in groups E, F, G, H (distinguished based on indicators of psychosocial adaptation and return to crime)

Dependent variable	Constant		Groups E, F, G, H source of variation of dependent variable		Group E (N = 43)		Group F (N = 30)		Group G (N = 45)		Group H (N = 33)		E-F	E-G	E-H
	F	p ≤	F	p ≤	M	S	M	s	M	s	M	s			
Nasilienie uzywania substancji psychoaktywnych	938.93	.000	3.51	.017	13.12	4.76	12.50	3.58	15.87	7.71	15.76	4.89	-	.024	.045

Table 8. Results of the analysis of variance (general linear model GLM) for elements concerning the types of psychoactive substances used in Marsden's MAP *Questionnaire* in groups E, F, G, H (distinguished based on indicators of psychosocial adaptation and return to crime)

Dependent variable	Constant		Groups source of variation of dependent variable			Group E (N = 43)		Group F (N = 30)		Group G (N = 45)		Group H (N = 33)		E-F	E-G	E-H
	F	p≤	F	p≤	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	p≤			
Alcohol	610.15	.000	6.38	.000	2.21	1.15	2.23	1.38	2.89	1.38	3.36	1.34	1.34	-	.016	.000
Heroin	393.84	.000	1.97	.121	1.07	.34	1.00	.00	1.33	1.04	1.30	.85	.85	-*	-*	-*
Methadone	609.84	.000	2.15	.096	1.05	.30	1.00	.00	1.27	.91	1.03	.17	.17	-*	-*	-*
Cocaine	508.47	.000	1.90	.133	1.05	.30	1.07	.36	1.33	.93	1.15	.57	.57	-*	.031*	-*
Amphetamine	322.79	.000	1.55	.204	1.42	.93	1.20	.66	1.47	1.06	1.73	1.15	1.15	-*	-*	-*
Ecstasy	306.30	.000	.77	.515	1.26	.85	1.17	.65	1.42	1.03	1.45	1.03	1.03	-*	-*	-*
Hemp	272.42	.000	1.79	.152	1.49	1.00	1.27	.83	1.51	1.12	1.91	1.49	1.49	-*	-*	-*
Sedatives	355.36	.000	5.34	.002	1.23	.48	1.23	.77	1.96	1.30	1.70	1.13	1.13	-	.001	.043
Hallucinogens	466.16	.000	.80	.494	1.21	.74	1.10	.40	1.31	.85	1.12	.41	.41	-*	-*	-*
Other substances	497.56	.000	2.35	.075	1.14	.47	1.23	.68	1.38	.94	1.00	.00	.00	-*	-*	-*

\* no differences resulting from values of F for the dependent variable in groups E, F, G and H.

### **The intensification of seeking company in the compared groups.**

In population H the studied variable is at a significantly lower level in relation to groups E, F and G. Therefore, it can be inferred that the tested coping strategy affects only the low adaptation indicator in one-time convicted criminals. Low adaptation possibilities of people convicted once are affected by a low level of coping strategy consisting in seeking contacts with other people in situations of experiencing various types of difficulties.

Tables 7–8 present the results of the compared groups concerning the consumption of psychoactive substances, which has been treated as a kind of avoidance coping strategy.

**The intensification of using psychoactive substances in the compared groups.** The tested strategy is at a significantly lower level in groups E and F in relation to communities G and H. The discovered regularity shows that the intensification of this variable determines the level of psychosocial adaptation, regardless of the number of sentences of imprisonment served. People with a high adaptation potential – both one-time and repeat convicts – are characterized by low intensification of consumption of psychoactive substances.

The type of psychotropic drugs used in groups E, F, G and H is presented in Table 8.

**Type of psychoactive substances used in the compared groups.** The high level of adaptation – regardless of the number of penalties served – is affected by the low frequency of using alcohol and sedatives. The presented proposal justifies the regularity consisting in the fact that these factors are at a significantly lower level in groups E and F in relation to communities G and H. The frequency of consumption of other psychoactive substances in the compared groups is at a similar level.

## **Final conclusions**

To summarize the dependencies occurring between experiencing stress in the first phase (perception of difficult situations) and the second phase (coping with difficult situations) and the level of psychosocial adaptation in one-time and repeated convicts, several conclusions can be formed.

**Conclusion 1.** The high level of psychosocial adaptation – regardless of the number of imprisonment sentences served – is significantly associated with elements of experiencing stress such as:

- slight intensification of perceiving stressors in the form:
  - a) past difficult situations – mainly burdens and suffering;
  - b) current problems – above all, deprivation of needs, suffering, threats, frustration and new situations;
  - c) future problem situations – mainly deprivation of needs, threats, frustration and new situations.

— low frequency of using psychoactive substances – primarily alcohol and sedatives.

**Conclusion 2.** The predictor of high adaptation possibilities, but only in one-time convicted criminals, is the low frequency of deprivation of needs in the past time perspective.

**Conclusion 3.** The determinant of high psychosocial adaptation, but only in penitentiary recidivists, is low intensification of the emotional coping style.

**Conclusion 4.** The low level of adaptation possibilities in one-time offenders serving imprisonment is affected by elements of experiencing stress like:

- high frequency of anticipated difficult situations in the future associated with suffering;
- low intensification of the task coping style;
- low intensification of seeking company (avoidance coping strategy).

**Conclusion 5.** The small adaptation potential in penitentiary recidivists is determined by two elements of experiencing stress: by high frequency of perceiving past difficult situations associated with threats and by a high level of the emotional coping style.

The regularities presented above justify the assertion that adaptation possibilities of people who are one-time and repeated offenders convicted with imprisonment to a great extent depend on experiencing stress, i.e. both on the initial assessment of the stressful transaction (cognitive assessment of occurring events), and on elements of secondary stress assessment, which involves starting coping possibilities in the context of the occurring situation and on monitoring the course of behaviors serving to reduce mental tension (Heszen-Niejodek 2000, p. 470–471; Lazarus 1986, p. 18–19).

The impact of experienced stress on the autoregulation of behaviors, serving positive psychosocial adaptation of one-time and repeat offenders convicted with imprisonment may be diverse in nature. Referring to the position that criminal behavior is often a destructive way of coping with stress, it can be concluded that those factors indicated in the studies prevent the use of such strategies reducing mental tension, which also bear the characteristic of criminal acts (Gierowski 1996, p. 138).

The second regularity refers to the diverse effects of stress, depending on its intensification. Generally, stress tension disrupts the functioning of a person, but does not lead to disturbances in the process of adaptation to the surrounding world. However, after going beyond the individual “threshold of tolerance to stress”, the overload is so strong that it triggers maladaptive reactions (Terelak 2001, p. 228–229). The presented dependency confirms the fact that in criminogenic situations various types of problems often overlap of the person coming into conflict with the law (Stattin, Magnusson 1995, p. 417–449; Gierowski 1996, p. 138). Elements of experiencing stress (especially with its first phase related to the perception of difficult situations), which were identified in the studies, may lead to a lower

level of tension, and consequently to a smaller number of maladaptive reactions (Sęk 2005, p. 88).

Thirdly, due to the low intensification of perceived difficult situations in people with high levels of social adaptation – regardless of the number of penalties served – the transformation of experienced stress into a crisis reaction is less likely to occur (Paternoster, Mazerolle 1994, p. 235–263). According to the transactional concept of stress, crisis develops especially when it comes to summing up difficult situations, and a person cannot cope with the growing tension, which in turn leads to loss of control over events and experiencing a general feeling of “lack of power” (Kubacka-Jasiecka 2005, p. 64).

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