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Contacts of persons serving prison sentences with family and other relatives

Sources and conditions

Kontakty osób odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności z rodziną i innymi bliskimi
Źródła i uwarunkowania

Abstract

Background: Contacts between convicted persons and their family as well as other relatives is an important issue in the area of penitentiary science. It is believed that such contacts reduce the discomfort of imprisonment and that they are a prerequisite for successful social rehabilitation and re-adaptation.

Aim: The aim of the article is to present the results of the research on who prisoners contact from among their own family and relatives and whether there are correlations between the sociodemographic features of prisoners and the possession of these contacts.

Methodology – The material for the research comes from own-made questionnaires completed by 345 people serving a sentence of imprisonment in one of four prisons in Poland.

Results – It was established that convicted persons have contact especially with the following types of sources: stepchild, partner (be it female or male), friend outside the prison. After taking into account all contacts with children, stepchildren, sisters, brothers and friends (each respondent could have several), the order of contact sources changed and was as follows: partner (male or female), mother, stepchildren. Attention was drawn to the low percentage of inmates contacting their own children. It was found that having contact with family members and loved ones depends on the gender and age of the respondents, as well as their education and the length of the prison sentence. On the other hand, the number of stays in penitentiary isolation was of little importance.

Conclusions – Maintaining and developing contacts of convicted persons with their family members and relatives should be a central element of penitentiary policy. Relatives who are known to be the main source of contact should be recruited as allies, who can help with penitentiary work. Bearing in mind that the source of support after being released is most often one's own family, when there is no contact with its members, the inmates should be encouraged to initiate it, especially with regard to the relationship between the father and their own offspring.

Keywords: contacts of prisoners with the outside world, penitentiary rehabilitation, social readaptation of ex-prisoners, families of prisoners.

Abstrakt

Tło: Kontakty osób skazanych z rodziną i innymi bliskimi to ważne zagadnienie z obszaru penitencjarystyki. Uważa się, że tego rodzaju kontakty zmniejszają dolegliwości uwięzienia oraz, że są warunkiem powodzenia readaptacji społecznej.

Cel: Celem artykułu jest prezentacja wyników badania na temat tego, z kim z własnego grona rodzinnego i bliskich kontaktują się skazane osoby oraz, czy istnieją zależności pomiędzy cechami społeczno-demograficznymi skazanych a utrzymywaniem tych kontaktów.

Metodyka: Materiał do badań pochodzi z kwestionariuszy ankiety własnej konstrukcji wypełnionych przez 345 osób odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności w jednym z czterech zakładów karnych w Polsce.

Wyniki: Ustalono, że skazane osoby mają kontakt zwłaszcza z następującymi rodzajami źródeł: pasierb, partnerka/partner, przyjaciel z wolności. Po uwzględnieniu wszystkich kontaktów z dziećmi, z pasierbami, z siostrami, z braćmi oraz z przyjaciółmi, których każdy respondent mógł mieć po kilkoro, kolejność źródeł kontaktu zmieniła się i była następująca: partnerka/partner, matka, pasierbowie. Zwrócono uwagę na niski wśród skazanych odsetek kontaktujących się z własnymi dziećmi. Ustalono, że posiadanie kontaktu z członkami rodzin i bliskimi zależy od płci i wieku respondentów, ich wykształcenia oraz wymiaru zasądanego wyroku. Niewielkie znaczenie miała natomiast liczba pobyków w izolacji penitencjarnej.

Wnioski: Utrzymanie i rozwój kontaktów osób skazanych z członkami rodzin i bliskimi powinno być centralnym elementem polityki penitencjarnej. Bliskich, o których wiadomo, że są głównym źródłem kontaktu, warto pozyskiwać jako sojuszników w pracy penitencjarnej.

Słowa kluczowe: kontakty osób odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności ze światem zewnętrznym, resocjalizacja penitencjarna, readaptacja społeczna ekswieźniów, rodziny osób odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności.

Introduction

The aim of the article is to characterize selected aspects of contacts that convicted individuals maintain with the outside world. Specifically, the article presents the results of a study on whom inmates communicate with among their family and close ones, as well as the correlations between maintaining these contacts and the socio-demographic characteristics of the incarcerated ones.

For many reasons, the issue of social contacts is cognitively significant. Contacts, especially in the form of direct interactions, act as a bond-forming mechanism within society (Jacher, 1987), and their frequency and variety are considered important indicators of social bonds (Jacher, 1987; Cudak, 2012). Social bonds are understood as an approving awareness of belonging to a group in which there is a shared respect for common values, an awareness of common interests, along with a readiness to prioritize them over personal interests (Szacka, 2008, p. 196). Serving not only the sense of belonging but also the acquisition and maintenance of status, as well as the defense of oneself and one's allies, social bonds are significant for everyone (Sorys, 2021). In the context of resocialization pedagogy, social bonds possess the property of being, according to Travis Hirschi's theory (1969), a source of informal social control, discouraging antisocial behavior. In this context, contacts with family and other close ones are crucial in both general and specific crime prevention. The subject matter is also important due to the fact that it directly concerns nearly 80,000 individuals currently convicted in prisons and detention centers¹ and an even larger number of their close ones who are potential sources of contact.

Despite the importance attributed to contacts with close ones, and although the population of individuals who have or may have experience with such contacts is large, this issue has been addressed only sporadically by domestic researchers, which is an argument for its exploration.

1. Theoretical background

The contact of convicted individuals with family members and other close ones is associated with various benefits: for the incarcerated person (both during isolation and after leaving the penitentiary facility), for their close ones

¹ The problematic aspects are particularly the child-unfriendly conditions during visits: the possibility of being searched, long and idle waiting times before the visit begins, noise and overcrowded rooms where the visits take place, and a lack of sensitivity from officers to the experiences of children, etc. (Murray and Murray, 2010).

and their mutual relationship, as well as for the prison staff. Considering the value of these contacts for inmates, it has been proved that they alleviate the hardships of incarceration. To support this claim, one can reference a study conducted in Israel among 110 prisoners before and the day after a visit. The authors demonstrated that contact with family and close ones, although it did not change the average level of positive emotions among the prisoners, resulted in a decrease in their negative feelings, such as anger, frustration, and hostility (Bachar and Guetzkow, 2023). On the other hand, reduced contact with family and close ones generated situational stress (e.g., when promised visits did not occur). A lack of contact made inmates more prone to experiencing anxiety and low self-esteem, leading to poor overall adjustment in the facility, which was identified as a situational factor triggering suicide attempts and self-harm (Liebling, 1999).

When justifying the importance of maintaining contact with close ones during imprisonment, we cannot overlook its significance for family relationships, especially between incarcerated parents and their children. A comparison between children who had one or more forms of contact with their incarcerated parent before participating in a mentoring programme for children of convicts, and a group of children without such contact, revealed that contact reduces negative emotions toward the incarcerated parent, primarily anger and alienation (Shlafer and Poehlmann, 2010). Despite the critical context² surrounding prison visits, as described in the literature, such visits hold significant potential. During a visit, a child can be reassured that their parent is alive (Wolleswinkel, 2002), putting an end to what Pauline Boss (2004) termed “ambiguous loss.” Visits also provide an opportunity for the parent to express feelings toward the child (Clarke *et al.*, 2005). Strong arguments supporting the contact between incarcerated individuals and their children were presented by Nancy G. La Vigne and her colleagues (2005). After conducting interviews with male prisoners before and after their release, the researchers found that contact with their children predicted greater attachment and involvement in the relationship with the child post-release. Visits to an incarcerated individual can also benefit their spouse/partner. For example, a woman, especially if she brings the child to the visit - something she might choose not to do if she had the authority of a “gatekeeper” (Dzierżyńska-Breś, 2016, p. 46) - gains the opportunity to demand that the man be more involved as a partner and father (Swanson *et al.*, 2013). By visiting their partner, some women also gain a sense of “creating a family” (Comfort, 2008).

² Since December 2021, the Correctional Facility in Stargard became an external unit of the Detention Centre in Szczecin.”

Maintaining contact with family members and other close ones has also been linked to benefits for the penitentiary institution, including greater discipline among inmates. Desmond Ellis, Harold Grasmick, and Bernard Gilman observed that the frequency of visits was inversely proportional to aggressive behavior of prisoners toward other inmates and staff, both at the aggregate and individual levels (Ellis, Grasmick, and Gilman, 1974).

Contact with family members and other close ones is also considered as a factor in successful social reintegration. By maintaining communication with people on the outside, prisoners increase the likelihood of preserving these relationships after serving their sentence (La Vigne *et al.*, 2005). This, in turn, enhances their chances of accessing resources that family and close ones can provide, both directly and indirectly. Directly, families offer ex-prisoners material support. A study involving men who had been incarcerated found that 59% of them received financial support from spouses, extended family members, or friends, and 88% lived with family members after release (La Vigne, Visser, and Castro, 2004). Indirectly, family members facilitate access to resources by vouching for an ex-prisoner's qualifications and reputation to potential employers, an approach whose effectiveness has been empirically confirmed (Berg and Huebner, 2011). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, family ties also serve a controlling function, helping to prevent recidivism.

Some researchers have undertaken the task of determining the relationship between maintaining contact with family and close ones during incarceration and the success of social reintegration, measured by the absence of recidivism³. A study of 16,420 inmates released from Minnesota prisons between 2003 and 2007 found that 61% had been visited at least once, and within this group, re-offending was 13% lower compared to those who had not been visited. The risk of recidivism decreased with an increase in the number of visits and visitors, except for visits from ex-spouses, which significantly increased the risk of recidivism (Duwe and Clark, 2013). Similarly, some researchers consider visits from children to be an exception to the positive relationship between the increase in visits and the reduction of recidivism (Bales and Mears, 2008).

Contact with family⁴ and other close ones is a legally guaranteed right for individuals incarcerated in penitentiary isolation (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 102). This right can be realised in the form of visits within the prison, correspondence, phone calls, packages, and money transfers, and in justified cases and with the

³ Its general results are published in (Jarzębińska, 2023).

⁴ One participant in the study reported being married and in an informal relationship. Consequently, when summing the numbers of those who are married, in a partnership, and single, the total (346) exceeds the number of study participants.

consent of the prison director, through other means of communication (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 105 § 1). The scope and manner of contact depend on the type of prison and the requirements of the individual rehabilitation programme (except for packages) (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 105 § 3). Regarding visits, the following has been established: a) for prisoners serving their sentence in an open prison, an unlimited number of visits, which may be supervised by the administration (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 92); b) for prisoners in a semi-open prison, up to three supervised visits per month (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 91); c) for prisoners in a closed prison, the number of visits is limited to two per month (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 90). The right to visits with the prisoner is primarily granted to members of their family and other close persons, and with the permission of the prison director, also to individuals outside of this circle (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 105a § 4). In terms of phone calls, an incarcerated person can make calls at their own expense or at the expense of the recipient using a collect-call telephone (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 105b § 1), at least once a week (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 8 § 4). In a closed prison, phone calls are monitored (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 90), in a semi-open prison, they may be subjected to administrative monitoring (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 91), and in an open prison, they are not monitored (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 92). Similar regulations apply to correspondence (Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Arts. 90–92). According to *Rozporządzenie Ministra Sprawiedliwości z 23 grudnia 2022 r. w sprawie regulaminu organizacyjno-porządkowego wykonywania kary pozbawienia wolności*, the detailed organization of contact with the outside world is specified in the internal regulations of individual prisons (Sejm.gov.pl, 2022, § 8.1).

Regarding how incarcerated individuals and their close ones exercise their right to mutual contact, is relatively little known, primarily from Western studies. According to Grant Duwe and Valery Clark (Duwe and Clark, 2013), nearly half of the prisoners were visited by a friend, almost one-third by their mothers, followed by fewer visits from siblings. A different structure of contacts was observed in a study conducted in Poland among incarcerated men serving prison sentences. In this case, the primary source of contact was the mother, with nearly three-quarters of the study participants maintaining contact with her. Next were extended family members (including siblings, grandparents, stepchildren, and grandchildren), followed by friends and acquaintances, then partners, children, and fathers (Jarzębińska, Iwański, and Leszko, 2021). However, in the aforementioned study, it was not indicated how many of the prisoners had a particular person in their lives, and consequently, it is unclear, for example, what percentage maintained contact with their mother among those whose mother was still alive. There are, however, studies that focused exclusively on incarcerated individuals who had a specific close person, namely fathers. According to

Joseph Murray (2005), in the structure of incarcerated fathers' contact with their children, correspondence predominated (68% of imprisoned women and just over half of men exchanged letters with their children at least once a month). Fewer parents had seen their child since being incarcerated (45% of mothers and 42% of fathers), and the lowest rates were for phone calls (at least once a month for 54% of women and 42% of men). A different structure of contact in the father-child relationship was described by Joanna Knapik and Hanna Przybyła-Basista (Knapik and Przybyła-Basista, 2015). They found that over 80% of incarcerated fathers spoke to their child by phone, more than three-quarters exchanged letters, and slightly over half were visited by their child.

Some researchers have explored the relationship between maintaining contact with loved ones and variables such as the socio-demographic characteristics of incarcerated individuals. According to Lynda Clarke (Clarke *et al.*, 2005), being in a marital or partnership relationship facilitates maintaining contact. Nigel Walker (1983) highlighted the significance of time, stating that the number of visits and correspondence from wives decreases for long-term prisoners, with the seventh year of incarceration being critical. The importance of time was also confirmed in a national study, which indicated a decline in contact with mothers and fathers as months of imprisonment passed (Jarzębińska, Iwański, and Leszko, 2021). The same study noted that the older the prisoner, the more frequently there was a lack of contact with their mother, father, other family members, and friends, while the opposite was true for wives and children (Jarzębińska, Iwański, and Leszko, 2021). Another study observed that the number of incarcerations mattered - as the number of imprisonments increased, the list of individuals from the outside world with whom prisoners maintained contact narrowed, although an exception was recorded among those serving a third sentence (Jarzębińska, 2020). Additionally, research results are available showing that a higher level of education of the incarcerated parent was positively associated with contact with their children in the form of phone calls and correspondence, though not with visits (Galardi *et al.*, 2017).

2. Results

The reported results were obtained as part of a broader project⁵ conducted using a diagnostic survey method, which allows for the collection of knowledge

⁵ Analysing the data from Table 2, comparisons of results concerning the following types of contact sources were omitted: spouse, former spouse and stepchild, due to the small number of respondents maintaining contact with these sources, which is especially evident when

about the structural attributes of phenomena, including their intensity and dynamics (Pilch, 1998). The survey was deemed adequate for examining the poorly understood phenomenon in question, particularly since quantitative characterization could serve as a starting point for qualitative analysis. The choice of the diagnostic survey method and the corresponding survey technique were also influenced by organizational and procedural considerations related to the penitentiary institution where the study was conducted (including the aim to minimize the workload of prison staff related to ensuring safety and order during the movement of study participants and the researcher).

The study sought the answer to the following questions: With whom among their family and loved ones do incarcerated individuals maintain contact, and what are the relationships between maintaining contact with specific sources and the socio-demographic characteristics of the prisoners?

Assuming that participants in the study would primarily maintain contact with their own mother, it was posited that the proportion of those maintaining such contact would depend on selected socio-demographic characteristics. Specifically, it was expected that higher proportions would be found among: female prisoners, the youngest respondent groups, those with education beyond vocational training, those serving short-term sentences, and first-time offenders.

Answers to the research problem and, consequently, the possibility of verifying the hypothesis were sought through a survey technique conducted among incarcerated men and women serving prison sentences.

Participants in the study were recruited with the assistance of prison educators, who explained the purpose and organization of the study in the residential areas and assured them of its voluntary and anonymous nature. Initially, more than 400 individuals expressed their willingness to participate. They were provided with survey questionnaires of a classical design, consisting of a preamble, a set of questions about socio-demographic characteristics, and the largest section - questions about the structure of contact with the loved ones, along with an attached cafeteria. The next step was the preliminary analysis of the returned questionnaires and the rejection of those filled out incorrectly. A total of 345 questionnaires were qualified for the research analysis. The majority of respondents were men ($n = 294$; 85.22% of participants), which is expected, considering the predominance of men in the population of incarcerated individuals in Poland. The participants represented all types of penal institutions categorized by the level of isolation and purpose, including the following:

responses are placed according to the respondents' age. A similar approach was taken in analysing the data in subsequent tables, where former wives and stepchildren were also excluded.

- closed-type penitentiary in Goleniów designated for repeat offenders, with separate units for female prisoners,
- closed and semi-open units of the penitentiary in Stargard⁶ designated for adult and juvenile male first-time offenders,
- closed penitentiary in Nowogard for recidivist offenders and its external unit in Ploty, where in open units are men serving sentences for the first time.

The majority of individuals were serving their sentences in a closed facility, which aligns with the nationwide structure of the inmate population.

The analysis of socio-demographic characteristics revealed that the most represented age group among the study participants was 29-35 years old ($n = 82$; 23.8%), and in terms of education, the majority were inmates who had completed only primary school ($n = 135$; 39.1%). First-time offenders slightly outnumbered repeat offenders ($n = 179$; 51.9%), and a similar comparison was observed between those serving short-term sentences and those sentenced to long-term imprisonment⁷ ($n = 180$; 52.2%).

Among the study participants, the largest group consisted of those living alone ($n = 152$; 44.1%). The majority had siblings ($n = 283$; 82.0%). There was a predominance of individuals whose parents were alive (with mothers being more prevalent; $n = 262$; 75.9% and $n = 173$; 50.1%). Many reported having a friend outside of prison ($n = 215$; 62.3%), while fewer had a friend they met within the prison ($n = 77$; 22.3%). More than half of the participants were parents ($n = 205$; 59.4%), most often of one child. In total, respondents confirmed having 346 children, and some also reported stepchildren ($n = 31$; 9.0%). Additionally, 45 respondents declared that they have contact with individuals from the extended family category, specifying a total of 177 such individuals (Table 1).

2.1. People with whom the study participants had contact

During the study, it was determined what proportion of respondents who reported having certain family members or close ones are in contact with them. The highest percentage was for those maintaining contact with a partner ($n = 125$; 91.9% of those who have such a person). The second was the percent-

⁶ As of August 31, 2023, there were 76,798 individuals incarcerated in Polish prisons and detention centers, including 3,868 women (Ministry of Justice, Central Prison Service Administration, 2023).

⁷ Long-term imprisonment, according to Jerzy Jasiński (1878), is a sentence of imprisonment of 3 years or more.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants (n = 345)

Variable	categories		n	%
gender	women		51	14,8
	men		294	85,2
age	under 21		25	7,2
	22–28		78	22,6
	29–35		82	23,8
	36–42		70	20,3
	43–49		42	12,2
	50 and more		48	13,9
education	not higher than elementary (including after lower secondary school)		135	39,1
	vocational secondary education		99	28,7
	secondary education		97	28,1
	university education		14	4,1
punishability	convicted for the first time		179	51,9
	repeat offenders	second stay in a penal institution [zk]	66	19,1
		third stay zk	61	17,7
		fourth or more stay	39	11,3
		total repeat offenders	166	48,1
type of penal institution	open		16	4,6
	semi-open		129	37,4
	closed		200	58,0
sentenced punishment	short-term penalty		180	52,2
	long-term penalty, including:		165	47,8
	– from 3 to 15 years		147	42,6
	– more than 15 years		3	0,9
	– 25 years of imprisonment		13	3,8
– life imprisonment		2	0,6	
marital status	married		58	16,8
	in partnership ¹		136	39,4
	single		152	44,1
	after divorce		43	12,5
child/children	lack		140	40,6
	owns		205	59,4
	total children		346	–
stepchild/stepchildren	lack		314	91,0
	owns		31	9,0
	total stepchildren		40	–
mother	lack		83	24,1
	owns		262	75,94

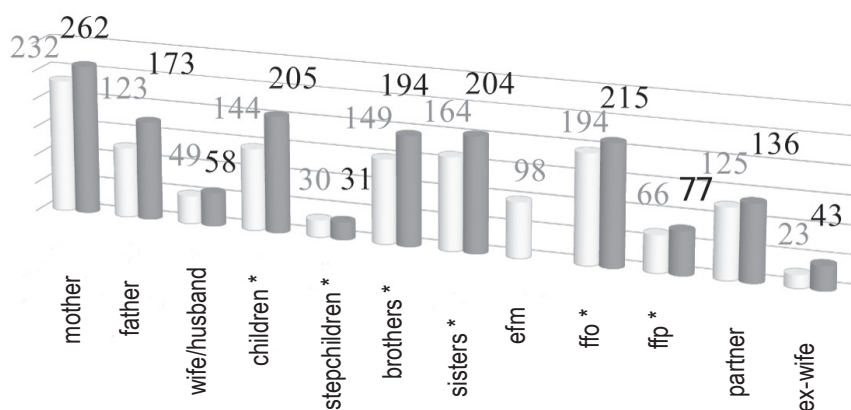
¹ In the Executive Penal Code (K.k.w.), the terms “family” and “other close persons” are present (e.g., Sejm.gov.pl, 1997, Art. 105 § 1), though the legislator does not specify who belongs to these groups. However, in the Penal Code of June 6, 1997, the term “closest persons” is used, and it is clarified that this group includes: a spouse, ascendants, descendants, siblings, in-laws in the same line or degree, a person in an adoptive relationship and their spouse, as well as a person in a cohabiting relationship (§ 11).

father	lack	172	49,85
	owns	173	50,14
siblings	lack	60	17,39
	no answers	2	0,58
	owns	283	82,02
extended family members ^{bd} [efm]	reported contact	45	13,04
	total reported contacts with extended family members	177	–
friend from outside [pw]	lack	130	37,68
	owns	215	62,32
	total friends from outside	414	–

^{bd}. – Participants were not asked to specify the total number of extended family members, so the total number of this group is unknown. Data compiled from the own research.

age representing how many of the respondents who have a mother maintain contact with her (n = 232; 88.5%). Close behind was the percentage illustrating contact with stepchildren (n = 35; 87.5% of all reported stepchildren), followed by contact with friends from outside (n = 362; 87.4% of all reported outside friends). Slightly lower percentages were recorded for contact with friends known in prison (n = 110; 85.3% of all reported in this category), and then with the wife (n = 49; 84.5% of those with a wife). Even lower was the proportion of respondents who, having siblings, maintained contact with them (n = 226; 75.8% for sisters and n = 211; 67.2% for brothers). A similar result was obtained when analysing how many participants whose father is alive maintain contact with him (n = 123; 71.1%). Only lower were the indicators illustrating contact with reported children (n = 240; 69.4%) and with ex-wives (n = 23; 53.5% among divorcees). Extended family members clearly stood out as sources of contact (aunts and uncles, cousins, grandparents, offspring of siblings, and others, mentioned a total of 177 times; chart 1).

Chart 1. The number of people the study participants are in contact with compared to the number of reported family members and the close ones



(*) - In the category children, all reported contacts with children were taken into account, comparing them with the total number of children, and similarly for the categories of sisters, brothers, stepchildren, (ffo) friends from outside, (ffp) friends from prison and facility friends. Data compiled from the own research.

2.2 Gender of study participants and contact with family members and other close ones

After determining with which reported family members and close ones the study participants were in contact, the relationship between these contacts and the socio-demographic characteristics of the prisoners was analysed. It was noted that the overall percentage of those maintaining contact with reported family members and close ones was higher among male prisoners than female prisoners (79.4% versus 73.2%). On average, each female participant in the study had fewer sources of contact – an average of 4.92 compared to 5.12 sources per male prisoner (excluding family members). The most noticeable difference was observed when analysing contact with sisters, which was again higher in the male group (78.8% versus 59.5%). Discrepancies were also found regarding contact with parents. Most men whose mothers were alive had contact with them, whereas for women, the result was significantly lower (90.7% versus 75.7%). Men also had more frequent contact with friends from outside and with those they met in prison. Additionally, only men were in contact with their ex-spouse. However, a higher percentage of women had contact with their father (79.2% versus 69.8%). A distinctive characteristic for women

was also a higher percentage of contact with reported children (78.5% versus 66.7%) and with stepchildren (tab. 2).

Tab. 2 Gender and maintaining contact with a given source

Source of contact		W having given source n	W maintaining contact with a given source		M having given source n	M maintaining contact with a given source	
			n	among W having given source of contact in %		n	among M having given source of contact in %
contact with at least one source		51	50	98,0	294	290	98,6
Mother		37	28	75,7	225	204	90,7
Father		24	19	79,2	149	104	69,8
wife/husband		14	12	85,7	44	37	84,1
Partner		22	20	90,9	114	105	92,1
ex-wife/ex-husband		3	0	0,0	40	23	57,5
child	first	46	39	84,8	159	105	66,0
	total children	79	62	78,5	267	178	66,7
stepchild	first	2	2	100,0	29	28	96,5
	total stepchildren	3	3	100,0	37	32	86,5
brother	first	25	13	52,0	169	136	80,5
	total brothers	42	20	71,4	272	191	70,2
sister	first	28	19	67,9	176	145	82,4
	no answer	1					
	total sisters	42	25	59,5	255	201	78,8
friends from outside	first	30	28	93,3	185	166	89,7
	Total ffo	54	43	79,6	360	319	88,6
friends from prison	first	15	13	86,7	62	53	85,5
	Total ffp	23	19	82,6	106	91	85,8
total^b		343	251	73,2	1869	1485	79,4

b – without missing responses and without the category *those maintaining contact with at least...* Data compiled from the own research.

2.3. Age of study participants and contact with family members and other close ones

The highest rate of contact with family members and close ones was recorded for respondents in the age group of 22–28 years (87.0%), while the lowest was for

respondents aged 50 and older (67.2%). The youngest respondents maintained contact with all their friends they met in prison and with most of their sisters (96.3%). Respondents aged 22–28 years, whose mother was alive, had contact with her, except for one case (98.4%). For those in the 29–35 age group, a high rate of contact with a partner was characteristic (96.3%). A similar trend was observed among the oldest respondents. Respondents aged 36–42 primarily maintained contact with all their friends from prison, while in the 43–49 age group, the highest percentage was noted for contact with mother (90.0%)⁸.

Tab. 3a Contacts of study participants and their age

Source of contact <i>n</i> having given source		up to 21 years			22–28 years			29–35 years		
		<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	
at least one		25	25	100,0	77	77	100,0	82	82	100,0
mother		20	17	85,0	61	60	98,4	64	55	85,9
father		17	10	58,8	51	42	82,3	45	33	73,3
wife/husband		0	–	–	1	1	100,0	19	17	89,5
partner		11	10	90,9	33	31	93,9	37	36	97,3
ex-wife/ex-husband		1	0	0,0	3	2	66,7	6	5	83,3
child	first	4	1	25,0	24	14	58,3	53	38	71,7
	total	4	1	25,0	33	22	66,7	78	53	67,9
stepchild	first	0	–	–	5	5	100,0	8	8	100,0
	total	0	–	–	7	6	85,7	13	11	84,6
brother	first	14	9	64,3	53	45	84,9	47	37	78,7
	total	23	15	65,2	90	70	77,8	77	54	70,1
sister	first	17	16	94,1	55	49	89,1	47	37	78,7
	no answer	1								
total		27	26	96,3	90	74	82,2	64	46	71,9

⁸ In three cases, responses were included from study participants with a sentence of over 15 years, imposed according to the principle of extraordinary aggravation of the fixed-term imprisonment.

ffo	first	14	13	92,9	54	53	98,1	47	44	93,6
	total	22	21	95,4	103	101	98,1	100	92	92,0
ffp	first	6	6	100,0	19	17	89,5	26	23	88,5
	total	8	8	100,0	35	32	91,4	42	39	92,9
total^{bb}		133	108	81,2	507	441	87,0	545	441	80,9

Tab. 3b Contacts of study participants and their age

Source of contact <i>n</i> having given source		36–42 years			43–49 years			50 and older		
		<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	
at least one		72	71	98,6	41	39	95,1	48	46	95,83
mother		51	44	86,3	30	27	90,0	36	29	80,55
father		31	24	77,4	17	7	41,2	12	7	58,33
wife/husband		11	11	100,0	11	9	81,8	16	11	68,75
partner		29	24	82,8	14	12	85,7	12	12	100,0
ex-wife/ex-husband		9	7	77,8	9	5	55,5	15	4	26,67
child	first	50	35	70,0	33	23	69,7	41	33	80,49
	total	78	54	69,2	60	40	66,8	93	70	75,27
stepchild	first	8	7	87,5	6	6	100,0	4	4	100,0
	total	9	7	77,8	7	7	100,0	4	4	–
brother	first	37	28	75,7	22	16	72,7	21	14	66,67
	total	59	36	61,0	30	19	63,3	35	17	48,57
sister	first	38	28	73,7	24	17	70,8	23	17	73,91
	no answer	1								
	total	53	38	71,7	29	19	65,5	34	23	67,65
ffo	first	45	44	97,8	27	20	74,1	28	20	71,43
	total	77	72	93,5	61	43	70,5	51	33	64,70
ffp	first	11	11	100,0	9	6	66,7	6	3	50,00
	total	19	19	100,0	16	9	56,2	9	3	33,33
total^{bb}		426	336	78,9	284	197	69,1	317	213	67,19

^{cz} – Although it is known that the study participants were in contact with 177 people representing the category of close family members and relatives, it is not known how many such people were in their families. Therefore, the proportion of those maintaining contact with close family members and relatives among those who have such individuals was not calculated. Data compiled from the own research.

2.4 Education of study participants and contact with family members and other close ones

Comprehensively, the highest percentage of contact with family members and other close ones was found among respondents with vocational education (84.5%). They were followed by respondents with primary or incomplete primary education, and then, with a similar result, by study participants who completed secondary education. The lowest percentages were recorded for respondents with higher education.

After comparing numerical data illustrating contact with specific family members and other close ones among respondents with education no higher than primary, the highest rate of contact was with a spouse (93.1%). For those with vocational education, the leading result was for contact with friends from prison (100.0%). Analysing the sources of contact for respondents with secondary education, the highest percentage was found in the category of friends from the penal institution (100.0%). Additionally, a high rate of contact with the father was noted (93.1%), which did not occur in the other subpopulations.

Tab. 4 Contacts of study participants and their education

Source of contact <i>n</i> having given source <i>n</i> having given source	not higher than primary ⁹			vocational			secondary			higher		
	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	
at least one	213	210	98,6	47	46	97,9	56	55	98,2	29	29	100,0
mother	161	141	87,6	43	38	88,4	38	35	92,1	29	18	62,1
father	110	78	70,9	25	16	64,0	29	27	93,1	9	2	22,2
wife/husband	29	27	93,1	9	7	77,8	12	10	83,3	8	5	62,5
partner	82	76	92,7	22	21	95,4	23	20	87,0	9	8	88,9
ex-wife/ex-husband	19	9	47,4	6	4	66,7	13	8	61,5	5	2	40,0

⁹ With the reservation that measuring the effectiveness of social reintegration is complex and requires the use of additional indicators. An example list of such indicators can be found in the work of Niewiadomska and Chwaszcz (2010).

child	first	112	77	68,7	25	18	72,0	45	31	68,9	23	18	78,3
	total	186	128	68,8	31	23	74,2	76	54	71,0	53	35	66,0
step-child	first	14	14	100,0	8	8	100,0	6	5	83,3	3	3	100,0
	total	19	16	84,2	10	10	100,0	7	5	71,4	4	4	100,0
brother	first	123	94	76,4	23	20	87,0	31	23	74,2	17	12	70,6
	total	198	138	69,7	39	28	71,8	42	26	61,9	35	19	54,3
sister	first	133	110	82,7	20	16	80,0	35	27	77,1	16	11	68,7
	no answer	1											
	total	204	159	77,94	26	21	80,8	47	33	70,2	20	13	65,0
ffo	first	132	122	92,42	31	28	90,3	36	33	91,7	16	11	68,7
	total	248	225	90,72	61	53	86,9	75	66	88,0	30	18	60,0
ffp	first	48	39	81,25	14	14	100,0	10	10	100,0	5	3	60,0
	total	82	66	80,49	25	25	100,0	15	15	100,0	7	4	57,1
total^{bb}		1338	1063	79,45	297	251	84,5	377	299	79,3	200	128	64,0

Data based on the results of own research.

2.5. Number of stays in the penal institution and study participants' contact with family members and other close ones

After comparing the overall percentage of those maintaining contact with family members and close ones, calculated for the subpopulation serving their sentence for the first time, with the percentage determined for the group of repeat offenders, it turned out that the percentage was slightly higher for the first subpopulation (78.9% and 78.0%). However, after breaking down the repeat offenders into smaller groups, depending on whether they were in isolation for the second, third, or fourth time and beyond, the analysed percentage was highest for those serving their sentence for the second time (79.4%) (tab. 4).

Among those serving a prison sentence for the first time, the highest percentage was for contact with a partner (94.3%), while for those in isolation for the second time, the highest result was for contact with friends from the penal institution (94.4%). Among those isolated for the third time, the highest percentage was in the category of contact with friends from outside (94.4%). For respondents who had been in prison four times or more, the leading percentages were for contact with friends from outside and friends from prison (97.7% and 100.0%).

Tab.5 Contacts of study participants and the number of stays in penal isolation

Source of contact		stay in penal institution														
	first			second			third			fourth and more			total repeat offenders			
	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source among having given source of contact in %		<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source among having given source of contact in %		<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source among having given source of contact in %		<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source among having given source of contact in %		<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source among repeat offenders having given source of contact in %		
at least one		179	178	99,4	66	65	98,5	61	59	96,7	39	38	97,4	166	162	97,6
mother		137	121	88,3	55	49	89,1	43	39	90,7	27	23	85,2	125	111	88,8
father		96	68	70,8	33	26	78,8	29	18	62,1	15	11	73,3	77	55	71,4
wife/husband		33	28	84,8	12	11	91,7	6	5	83,3	7	5	71,4	25	21	84,0
partner		70	66	94,3	25	23	92,0	26	23	88,5	15	13	86,7	66	59	89,4
ex-wife/ex-hus- band		18	8	44,4	10	4	40,0	13	10	76,9	2	1	50,0	25	15	60,0
child	first	103	78	75,7	37	23	62,2	37	25	67,6	28	18	64,3	102	66	64,7
	total	163	122	74,8	74	46	62,2	61	43	70,5	48	29	60,4	183	118	64,5
step- child	first	17	17	100,0	4	4	100,0	5	5	100,0	5	4	62,5	14	13	92,9
	total	22	20	90,9	6	5	83,3	5	5	100,0	7	5	71,4	18	15	83,3
brother	first	90	67	74,4	42	32	76,2	40	31	77,5	22	19	86,4	104	82	78,8
	total	138	93	67,4	69	48	69,6	70	41	58,6	37	29	78,4	176	118	67,0
sister	first	108	85	78,7	37	32	86,5	39	33	84,6	20	14	70,0	96	79	82,3
	total	161	119	73,9	54	47	87,0	53	41	77,4	29	19	65,5	136	107	78,7
	no answer	1														
ffo	first	111	98	88,3	45	40	88,9	36	34	94,4	23	22	95,6	104	96	92,3
	total	222	188	84,7	80	70	87,5	68	61	89,7	44	43	97,7	192	174	90,6
ffp	first	39	33	84,6	13	12	92,3	16	12	75,0	9	9	100,0	38	33	86,8
	total	66	56	84,8	18	17	94,4	32	24	75,0	13	13	100,0	63	54	85,7
total ^{bb}		1126	889	78,9	436	346	79,4	406	310	76,3	244	191	78,3	1086	847	78,0

Data based on the results of own research.

2.6 Length of the sentenced term and study participants' contact with family members and other close ones

Among those serving short-term sentences, a smaller percentage of people maintaining contact with family and close ones was recorded compared to those serving long-term sentences (72.5% versus 84.5%) (Tab. 6). After the 'long-term sentences' category was further detailed by dividing it into three subgroups, it turned out that the results for each were consistently higher than those for short-term sentences.

Respondents serving short-term sentences primarily maintained contact with their partner (91.1%), while among respondents serving long-term sentences, the highest rate, at 100%, was recorded for contact with their wife.

Tab. 6 Contacts of study participants and the sentenced term length

Source of contact <i>n</i> having given source		short-term sentence from <3 to 15 years ¹⁰			long-term sentences								
					eliminary penalty			total long-term sentences					
		<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	Among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	<i>n</i> having given source	<i>n</i> maintaining contact with a given source	among having given source of contact in %	
at least one		180	176	97,8	150	149	99,3	15	15	100,0	165	164	99,4
mother		140	121	86,4	109	99	90,8	13	12	92,3	122	111	91,0
father		83	56	67,5	82	61	74,4	8	6	75,0	90	67	74,4
wife/husband		35	26	74,3	22	22	100,0	1	1	100,0	23	23	100,0
partner		79	72	91,1	52	48	92,3	5	5	100,0	57	53	93,0
ex-wife/ex-husband		21	9	42,9	21	14	66,7	1	0	0,0	22	14	63,6
child	first	111	74	66,7	84	61	72,6	10	9	90,0	94	70	74,5
	total	189	126	66,7	141	99	70,2	16	15	93,7	157	114	77,5
stepchild	first	13	13	100,0	15	14	93,3	3	3	100,0	18	17	94,4
	total	13	13	100,0	22	17	77,3	5	5	100,0	27	22	81,5
brother	first	95	61	64,2	89	79	88,8	10	9	90,0	99	88	88,9
	total	158	86	54,4	134	112	83,6	22	13	59,1	156	125	80,1

¹⁰ Including those with completed lower secondary education.

sister	first	105	78	74,3	91	80	87,9	8	6	75,0	99	86	86,9
	no answer	1											
	total	141	98	69,5	137	112	81,7	19	16	84,2	156	128	82,0
ffo	first	106	90	84,9	97	93	95,9	12	11	91,7	109	104	95,4
	total	202	161	79,7	188	180	95,7	24	21	87,5	212	201	94,8
ffp	first	35	27	77,1	35	32	91,4	7	7	100,0	42	39	92,9
	total	52	39	75,0	66	60	90,9	11	11	100,0	77	71	92,2
total		1113	807	72,5	974	824	84,6	125	105	84,0	1099	929	84,5

Data based on the results of own research.

3. Summary

Study participants, with a few exceptions, had contact with at least one person from their family or close ones who remained outside prison. After considering all reported contacts with children, stepchildren, sisters, brothers, and friends (where the respondent could have multiple contacts in each category), the highest percentages were found in the categories of contact with a partner, followed by a mother, and then with stepchildren. The one before last place was the result for contact with children, meaning that participants had contact in some form with just under 70 percent of the children they reported. The lowest result was for contact with a former wife, although more than half of the divorced participants maintained contact with their ex-spouse. At the same time, extended family members also appeared in the list of contact sources. The result obtained is difficult to compare with other studies, primarily due to differing methodologies—previous research established percentages of those maintaining contact in relation to all participants, whereas in this study, the percentage was calculated only for those who had a specific family member or other close person. It should be noted that the result differs from the hypothesis initially proposed, as the highest percentage for maintaining contact with family members and other close ones was calculated for the category ‘contact with a partner,’ while ‘contact with a mother’ came only in second place.

During the study, it was determined that being in contact with a specific source depends on certain socio-demographic characteristics of the convicted individuals. Differences were observed when grouping results based on gender, with the findings favouring male participants. Therefore, the hypothesis that assumed the opposite relationship must be rejected. However, it is worth mentioning specific details, such as the fact that women surpassed men in terms

of contact with children, an observation consistent with the findings of Murray (2005).

Age turned out to be a significant factor in maintaining contact with family members and other close ones. Overall, the highest percentage of contact was recorded for respondents aged 22–28, followed by young adults up to 21 years old. In the remaining age groups, the analysed percentage progressively decreased. The result aligns with the assumption outlined in the research hypothesis.

Education also influenced maintaining contact with family members and close ones. The highest percentage of contact was observed among respondents with vocational education, while the lowest was among those with higher education. Thus, the assumptions made during the formulation of the research hypothesis were not confirmed.

The length of the sentence proved to be significant for maintaining contact with family members and close ones. Among respondents serving long-term sentences, there was a percentage of contact with family and close ones that was several points higher than among those with short-term sentences. This provides a basis for rejecting the assumption outlined in the research hypothesis.

Among the factors used as criteria for analysing the contact of incarcerated individuals with family members and other close ones was the number of stays in penitentiary isolation. A comparison of the overall percentage of those maintaining contact with family and close ones between first-time offenders and repeat offenders showed a slight advantage for the former, though the difference was minimal. After dividing repeat offenders into smaller categories, the percentage of contact was highest among those incarcerated for the second time. A similar observation was made in another study, with the difference being that the highest number of contacts was noted among those serving a sentence for the third time (Jarzębińska, 2020). Despite the outlined contexts, the obtained results support accepting the research hypothesis in part, specifically where the first stay in penitentiary isolation is associated with a higher percentage of contact with family and close ones compared to repeat offenders.

4. Conclusions

- 1) After comparing the percentage of those maintaining contact with individuals in symmetrical roles, significant differences were observed. The percentage of those with a living mother and maintaining contact with

her was higher than in the case of the father. Similarly, a comparison of those maintaining contact with sisters versus brothers, as well as the results for partner versus spouse, also showed notable differences.

- 2) The data showing how many of the reported children incarcerated individuals maintain contact with were significantly lower compared to results related to other sources of contact. It shows that participants had no contact whatsoever with a quarter of the reported children. Maintaining contact with a child was more characteristic of the female participants in the study than the male ones, as well as for the oldest age group, those with vocational education, first-time offenders, and those serving long-term sentences, particularly if it was a life sentence.
- 3) The results consistently showed high rates of contact with the mother. However, it is unclear whether this observed trend indicates that the mother, as an 'ever-present' figure, can be an ally in correctional work, or if it is rather an indicator that mothers accept their adult child's criminal behavior, thereby reinforcing socially unacceptable attitudes.
- 4) Some characteristics of convicted individuals can be seen as conducive to maintaining contact with family members and other close persons. These characteristics include being between 22 and 28 years old, having vocational education, and serving a long-term prison sentence. Convicts lacking these characteristics should be given special attention by the penitentiary staff, including being encouraged to establish contact with their loved ones (even if only in the form of correspondence) and being included in programs to develop communication skills.
- 5) In principle, study participants had contact with someone from their family or other close individuals. The obtained result is evidence that such contacts are widespread and, as the literature suggests, potentially valuable tools in penitentiary treatment. Therefore, it is important to utilize this potential in penitentiary work. However, it is essential to maintain a critical perspective, acknowledging that some, albeit few, types of contact may carry negative consequences, including potentially reinforcing recidivism.

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