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Could the Peer-Mentored Intervention Work in Romanian Criminal Justice?

Cristina ILIE GOGA¹

Abstract

The peer mentoring system is used in many areas, especially in vocational training, politics, in the labor market, in the educational and medical systems, but in recent years it has begun to be used in the field of criminal justice, both in the penitentiary system and in probation. Most definitions of mentoring include elements such as “education, counseling and support for the mentee”. The peer mentoring program in the criminal justice field, aims the coordination and training of an inmate by a rehabilitated ex-offender or by other inmate, in order to support him in choosing the appropriate options at the time of the release. Such a system has been used in several states. The article analyzes in the first part the concept of peer mentoring in the field of criminal justice, presents the models of good practice used worldwide and finally, presents the results of a sociological survey conducted in the “Penitentiary of Maximum Security” in Craiova, in which the opinions of persons deprived of liberty are presented, regarding the opportunity of applying such a program in the Romanian penitentiary system.

Keywords: peer-mentoring; rehabilitation; criminal justice; Romania; penitentiary system; sociological inquiry.

Résumé

Le système de mentorat des pairs est utilisé dans de nombreux domaines, en particulier dans ceux de la formation professionnelle, de la politique, du marché du travail, de l'éducation et du système de santé. Toutefois, ces dernières années il a commencé à être utilisé dans le domaine de la justice pénale, tant dans le système pénitencier, aussi bien qu'en probation. La plupart des définitions du mentorat incluent des éléments tels que “éducation, conseil et soutien pour les personnes protégées”. Le mentorat des pairs dans le système de justice pénale vise à coordonner et à former (soutenir) un détenu par un ancien détenu qui a été réhabilité ou par une personne à l'exécution d'une peine de prison, afin de faciliter le choix des options appropriées au moment de la libération. Dans la première partie, l'article analyse le concept de “mentorat de pairs” dans le domaine

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de la justice pénale, présente les modèles de bonne pratique utilisés dans le monde et dans la deuxième partie, il expose les résultats d'une enquête sociologique menée dans le Pénitencier à sécurité maximale de Craiova, dans laquelle sont présentées les opinions des personnes privées de liberté, sur la possibilité d'appliquer un tel programme dans le système pénitentiaire roumain.

Mots-clés: mentorat par les pairs; la réhabilitation; justice pénale; Roumanie; système pénitentiaire; enquête sociologique.

Rezumat

Sistemul de mentorat al semenilor este folosit în multe domenii, cu precădere în domeniul formării profesionale, în politică, piața muncii, în sistemul educațional și în cel medical, dar în ultimii ani a început să fie uzitat în domeniul justiției penale, atât în sistemul penitenciar cât și în probațiune. Majoritatea definițiilor mentoratului, includ elemente precum “educarea, sfătuirea și sprijinirea protejantului”. Mentoratul semenilor în sistemul justiției penale vizează coordonarea și instruirea unui deținut de către un fost deținut reabilitat sau de către o persoană aflată în executarea unei pedepse privative de libertate, în sensul sprijinirii în alegerea opțiunilor oportune la momentul liberării. Articolul realizează în prima parte o analiză a conceptului de mentorat al semenilor în domeniul justiției penale, prezintă modelele de bună practică folosite la nivel mondial și în cele din urmă, expune rezultatele unui anchete sociologice desfășurate în Penitenciarul de Maximă Siguranță din Craiova, în cadrul căreia sunt prezentate opiniile persoanelor private de libertate, vizând oportunitatea aplicării unui astfel de program în sistemul penitenciar românesc.

Cuvinte-cheie: mentoratul semenilor; reabilitare; justiție penală; România; sistem penitenciar; anchetă sociologică.

Peer mentoring in the criminal justice field

In the Oxford Dictionary, the “mentor” is defined as “an experienced person who advises and helps somebody with less experience over a period of time” (Oxford Advanced American Dictionary 2019)

Mentoring is a vague concept and is difficult to define. In most definitions we find elements such “teaching, advising and supporting the protégés, even if a person can be mentored by more than one person” (Clutterbuck 2001). The origin of the word mentor is considered to be the character “Mentor” from Homer's “Odyssey”, Mentor being found as “coach, tutor, teacher, protector” for Telemachus (Johnson and Ridley 2004, xv; Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2019). Later, we find in literature in many famous works the relationship between the mentor and the protégé (Eby *et al.* 2007, 7; Ilie 2014). All the experts agree that “modern mentoring has its origins in the concept of *apprenticeship* and follows a certain structural pattern” (Culleton and Hogan 2008, 21). Clutterbuck defines it as “a protected relationship in which learning and experimentation can occur, potential skills can be developed, and in which results can be measured in terms of competencies gained rather than curricular territory covered”. Also, mentoring can be defined as an attempt “to help and support people to manage

their own learning in order to maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be” (Morselli *et al.* 2006, 17-43; Niță and Sorescu 2014). In the specialized literature we find many studies done on mentoring on the labor market, in education, in the medical field, even in politics and we find various roles of mentoring, as, advising, orientation, instruction, role-modeling, supervision, socialization, cooperation etc. (Cherrstrom, Zarestky and Deer 2017, 48; Udangiu 2017).

Rehabilitation and reintegrating people who have been deprived of their liberty is a great challenge and we must take into account that along with the decrease of the recidivism rate, will also increase the social welfare (Sandu 2018, 18; Ilie Goga 2015; Grignoli and Șerban 2018). Many offenders have difficulties after release, represented by the resumption of connection with their families, the availability of affordable housing and jobs with wages that could provide them a decent living, reintegration into groups that could encourage criminal behavior. Most inmates fail to successfully complete the transition to community life (Ilie 2014, 193-194; Pricină and Ilie 2014). In this context, the moral support and the indications offered by an rehabilitated ex-offender to an inmate who is about to be released, seem to work much better than the support offered by a person who has not had criminal problems.

According to South, Bagnall and Woodall, persons with delinquent behavior, show resistance to authority and therefore, they “might be more open to support and advice coming from peers” (South, Bagnall and Woodall 2017). Peer support is based on the principle that people who have gone through the same experience can provide support to others that could not be provided by professionals, being more easily accepted by the person in difficulty (Farrant and Levenson 2002, 9; Blair 2006, 7). So, peer mentoring intervention is based on the “principle of homophily” and the idea it is more likely that people will create a good connection with people similar to themselves (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001; Davidson *et al.* 1999).

Here is the difference between mentoring and peer mentoring in criminal justice: the mentor is an inmate or a former rehabilitated inmate. Effective peer-to-peer mentoring should help the mentee resolve difficult situations in his life (Culleton and Hogan 2008, 22). In particular, in the case of mentoring for former inmates, the mentor should try to promote change for the mentee and it is recommended that “the role of mentor to be carried out by former detainees, because they have executed a prison sentence and are familiar with all the traps of the penitentiary, and thus will be able to play an important role in helping others to reintegrate”, after release (NESF, 2002 *apud* Ilie 2014, 193).

Starting from Carl Rogers's concept of “core conditions” of good counsellors, identified as “genuineness, empathy and warm acceptance” (Roger 2004, 37-38), after a detailed analysis of the mentors' opinions, Gillian Buck identifies that the “core conditions” for the peer mentoring efficiency, are “*caring, listening, encouraging small steps*” or even “*setting manageable goals*” (Buck 2017). M. Lenkens and the collaborators consider that seven mechanisms need to be

functional in order for the peer mentoring process to achieve its goal: “empathy and acceptance”, “social learning”, “social bonding”, “social control”, “narrative and identity formation”, “hope and perspective”, and “translation and connection” (Lenkens *et al.* 2019).

Of course, it is desired, that the peer-mentored intervention to have maximum effects, in the field of personal development, elimination or reduction of delinquent behavior and improvement of personal circumstances. Tolan and his collaborators, after conducting an evaluation on almost forty mentoring interventions, observed positive effects on “delinquency, aggression, drug use and the success” (Tolan *et al.* 2008).

Mostly, the programs applied in the field of criminal justice, which involved the use of peer mentoring, presented the results as positive, only that it is difficult to separate the actual result of the mentoring from the rest of the interventions applied within the programs. The main idea of these projects, the support offered by the peers, is correlated each time with another kind of support, not only emotionally, but also educational, vocational, support for finding a home or a job, and that is why, the effects are difficult to be separated.

Worldwide, we find a number of models of good practice, projects in which the concept of peer mentoring has been used in order to reintegrate detainees, such as: the project “Ready 4 Work” from the United States of America, implemented by Department of Labor, Department of Justice, Public/Private Actions (NGOs) and Annie E. Casie (US Department of Labor 2005, 7); the StAMP Mentoring Program, from Australia, implemented by Community Rehabilitation Center in New South Wales, Australia (Culleton și Hogan 2008, 24); the project Chance, implemented by Czech Penitentiary Service, Regional Educational Center, Probation Service and Czech Salvation Army; the project You're Equal, from Ireland; SOS project, from UK (implemented by St. Giles Trust) etc. (Ilie 2004, 194-196).

Great Britain is the best example of good practice for implementing the project involving the peer mentoring. It seems like in the UK peer mentors are 92% of inmates mentors (Willoughby *et al.* 2013, 7). Different prisoner support schemes are implemented here, by involving other mentor-inmates or ex-convicts, like : The “Insiders” Scheme, where prisoners act as a source of information on prison life, especially for newcomers ; the “Toe by Toe” Project, where prisoners help each other to improve their literacy skills ; the “Listener” plan, in which detainees act as a source of emotional support for other prisoners ; Projects implemented by St Giles Trust, like “Straight to work” Project or “SOS” Project, that focuses on assisting and mentoring the inmates since the detention period and to the time of release by former rehabilitated detainees, to help them qualify, find a job and a home; SOVA Projects, aimed at rehabilitating prisoners, through different support modalities, which involves volunteering, a part of them using the concept of peer mentoring (Culleton and Hogan 2008, 24; Ilie 2014, 197).

Doing a review of the main interventions and actions applied and the types of support provided in working with offenders, Margriet Lenkens and the

collaborators, identified the main peer-based interventions: “peer support” (offering social and emotional support and also practical aid), “peer workers” (providing information and establishing links with the institutions in the community), “peer mentors” (creating a supportive relationship between the mentor, which is a role model for the mentee) and “peer education” or “peer training” (with educational role, but, but, for which, the mentors must have specific competences and skills) (Lenkens *et al.* 2019, 3; Hurkmans and Gillijns 2012, 2217).

The results of a sociological research in the Romanian penitentiary system

In this section we will briefly analyze some of the results of a sociological survey conducted within the “Maximum Security Penitentiary” in Craiova, by applying a questionnaire containing over 40 questions. The questionnaires were personally applied on a sample of “104 inmates, more precisely, 8 women and 96 men”, representing 20% of the total number of inmates, maintaining the percentage by gender, out of the total prison population of “520 persons”. The questions aimed at identifying a large number of aspects related to life in the penitentiary, from the assessment of the conditions of detention, the observance of inmates' own rights, the degree of influence of the reintegration programs, and at the same time, we were interested in the perception of the prisoners on the effectiveness of a potential peer-mentoring program applied in the Romanian criminal system (Goga 2017). To the respondents, we briefly explained the concept of peer-mentoring and were subsequently asked for their opinion on this program.

We started from the hypothesis that a program that would involve the use of the peer-mentoring, is preferred by offenders to the detriment of the programs implemented by the staff of the institution.

In the first question, the prisoners were asked to give a grade from 1 to 10, for the level of confidence they would have, to discuss their current and future problems (in prison) and future (after release) with the following categories of persons: a. An employee of the penitentiary; b. An inmate trained to discuss with other inmates and to provide counseling and assistance and c. A former inmate, reintegrated into the society and trained to provide counseling and assistance to persons still in detention.

The next question concerned the opportunity of applying a program that involves peer mentoring in the criminal justice system in our country.

Question no. 1. Give a score of 1 to 10 for the level of confidence that you would have to discuss your current (during the detention period) and future (after release) problems and needs with:

a. An employee of the penitentiary

| Choices | Percent |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1.00 | 5.8 |
| 2.00 | 3.8 |
| 5.00 | 9.6 |
| 6.00 | 12.5 |
| 7.00 | 10.6 |
| 8.00 | 13.5 |
| 9.00 | 12.5 |
| 10.00 | 26 |
| NR | 5.8 |
| Total | 100 % |

This set of questions is intended to identify the trusting relationships that can be built between a person deprived of liberty and other persons.

When the respondents were asked to give grades for the level of confidence they would have to discuss about current (in prison) and future (after release) problems and needs with a prison employee, a percentage of 29.8% of respondents offered grade 10, a 13.5% gave note 7, for 12.5% of them note 5 was considered appropriate, 10.6% gave note 8, 8.7% gave note 9, 5.8% gave note 1 and 3.8 % note 2.

Doing an arithmetic average of the grades offered by the inmates for the trust given to the employee of the penitentiary, grade 7.3 was obtained.

b. An inmate trained to discuss with other inmates and to provide counseling and assistance

| Choices | Percent |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1.00 | 19.2 |
| 2.00 | 5.8 |
| 3.00 | 1.9 |
| 4.00 | 10.6 |
| 5.00 | 22.1 |
| 6.00 | 5.8 |
| 7.00 | 1.9 |
| 8.00 | 6.7 |
| 9.00 | 5.8 |
| 10.00 | 14.4 |
| NR | 5.8 |
| Total | 100 % |

The respondents, being asked to give grades for the level of confidence they would have to discuss current and future problems (in prison) and future (after release) with a detainee trained to talk to other detained persons and to offer them advice and help, a percentage of 22.1% of the respondents gave note 5, a percentage of 19.2% gave note 1, for 14.4% of them note 10 was the one considered appropriate, 10.6% gave note 4, a percentage of 6.7% gave note 8, a percentage of 5.8% gave grades 9 and 2, and 1.98% offered grades 7 and 3.

Making an arithmetic average for the trust given to other inmates trained to discuss with convicts and to provide counseling and assistance, grade 5.2 was obtained.

c. Former inmate, reintegrated into society and trained to provide counseling and assistance to persons still in detention

| Choices | Percent |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1.00 | 1.9 |
| 2.00 | 15.4 |
| 5.00 | 2.9 |
| 6.00 | 5.8 |
| 7.00 | 10.6 |
| 8.00 | 17.3 |
| 9.00 | 6.7 |
| 10.00 | 30.8 |
| NR | 8.7 |
| Total | 100 % |

Being asked to give grades for the level of confidence they would have to discuss current and future problems (in prison) and future (after release) with a former inmate, reintegrated into society and trained to provide counseling and help to people still in detention, a percentage of 30.8% of the respondents gave grade 10, a percentage of 17.3% gave grade 8, for 15.4% of them grade 1 was considered appropriate, 10.6% gave grade 5, a percentage of 6.7 % gave note 9, a percentage of 5.8% gave note 7, a percentage of 2.9% among respondents gave note 6, and 1.9% offered note 2.

Doing an arithmetic average for the trust given to former inmate, reintegrated into society and trained to provide counseling and assistance to persons still in detention, grade 7.3 was obtained.

Question no. 2. Do you consider that a peer mentoring system (a system by which a current inmate or former inmate, currently reintegrated, gives you advice / counseling) would help you more than the classical system (people currently employed in the penitentiary) in the execution of the punishment and in the process of social reintegration?

| Choices | Percent |
|--|--------------|
| Yes, in the execution of the punishment | 7.7 |
| Yes, in the process of post-detention social reintegration | 7.7 |
| Yes, in both situations | 55.8 |
| No | 28.8 |
| Total | 100 % |

Wanting to test the degree of acceptance in Romania of a peer mentoring system in the criminal justice, described in the theoretical section, we asked a direct question that addressed this aspect. Thus, the respondents were asked to specify whether they consider that a peer mentoring system would help them more than the classical system (people currently employed in the penitentiary) in the execution of the sentence and in the process of social reintegration. A percent of 7.7% of the respondents thought that such a system would help them in the punishment execution, 7.7% considered that the system would help them more in the process of social reintegration post-detention and a percentage of 55.8% of the interviewees considered that such a system would help them in both situations, and 28.8% of those surveyed did not see the usefulness of such a program.

Conclusions

We note that even the inmates interviewed consider that there is a high degree of usefulness in applying a peer mentoring program and the inmates show a high degree of availability in working with their peers (former convicts, reintegrated into society and trained to provide counseling and assistance to inmates).

In the UK, peer mentoring is a concept accepted by the Ministry of Justice, from the application during detention, to the support at the time of release, so that, was even floated the idea that every ex-inmate should have his own mentor, which will help him after release, “to get their lives back together” (Grayling 2012 *apud* Buck 2017, 190). Of course, the activities in the field of rehabilitation are based primarily on the active involvement of NGOs, on voluntary activities and on high funding in this field.

As G. Buck said, projects involving peer mentoring, “are now an increasing feature of the criminal landscape” (Buck 2017, 191). The good results obtained in projects through the joint application of peer-mentoring with other actions, represent aspects that should arouse the interest of the public and private

institutions in Romania and try to implement such actions, at least with the title of experiment.

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