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## **Contacts Between Fathers Deprived of Liberty and Their Minor Children in the Opinion of Imprisoned Men and Prison Service Officers**

**Kontakty ojców pozbawionych wolności z małoletnimi dziećmi  
w opinii uwięzionych mężczyzn i funkcjonariuszy Służby Więziennej**

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction.** The subject of this study is a qualitative analysis of the contacts of fathers, deprived of their liberty, with their minor children, and the factors that determine the nature of these contacts. The article focuses on the description of contacts and the identification of factors influencing them from the perspective of men serving a sentence of deprivation of liberty and the officials who organise the execution of the sentence.

**Aim.** The purpose of the article is to provide a qualitative description of the methods of exercising the right to contact with minor children by fathers serving a prison sentence in a closed-type penitentiary for first-time offenders.

**Methods and materials.** Data was collected through in-depth interviews conducted with both fathers deprived of their liberty and with prison service officers (psychologists

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and educators, and protection department staff who served in the penitentiary units where the fathers served their sentences).

**Results.** The interviews conducted allowed for the identification of several groups of fathers who use the right to contact with minor children in diverse ways, and the factors that influence the implementation of contacts in different ways were indicated. From the interviews with Prison Service officers, two different attitudes of fathers towards contacts with children were identified (indicating an instrumentally marked contact and a contact caused by a genuine need). The analysis of interviews with men deprived of liberty allowed for the identification of four attitudes that were selected on the basis of fathers' contacts with children before and after imprisonment.

**Keywords:** paternity, minor children, contact, penal isolation, prison

### **Abstrakt**

**Wprowadzenie.** Przedmiotem niniejszego opracowania jest jakościowa analiza kontaktów ojców pozbawionych wolności z małoletnimi dziećmi oraz czynników, które decydują o charakterze tych kontaktów. W artykule skoncentrowano się na opisie kontaktów i wskazaniu czynników na nie wpływających z perspektywy mężczyzn odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności oraz funkcjonariuszy, którzy organizują jej wykonanie.

**Cel.** Celem artykułu jest jakościowa charakterystyka sposobów realizowania prawa do kontaktu z małoletnimi dziećmi przez ojców odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności w zakładzie karnym typu zamkniętego, dla odbywających karę po raz pierwszy.

**Metody i materiały.** Prezentowane badania mają charakter jakościowy. Dane zostały zgromadzone w toku wywiadów pogłębionych przeprowadzonych zarówno z ojcami pozbawionymi wolności jak i z funkcjonariuszami Służby Więziennej (psychologami i wychowawcami oraz funkcjonariuszami działu ochrony, którzy pełnili służbę na oddziałach penitencjarnych, na których karę odbywali badani ojcowie).

**Wyniki.** Przeprowadzone wywiady pozwoliły na wyodrębnienie kilku grup ojców, którzy w odmienny sposób korzystają z prawa do kontaktu z małoletnimi dziećmi oraz wskazano na czynniki, które wpływają na realizację kontaktów w odmienny sposób. Z wywiadów z funkcjonariuszami Służby Więziennej wyodrębniono dwie odmienne postawy ojców wobec kontaktów z dziećmi (wskazujące na kontakt nacechowany instrumentalnie oraz kontakt powodowany prawdziwą potrzebą). Analiza wywiadów z mężczyznami pozbawionymi wolności pozwoliła na wskazanie czterech postaw, które zostały wyłonione na podstawie kontaktów ojców z dziećmi sprzed i po osadzeniu w zakładzie karnym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ojcostwo, małoletnie dzieci, kontakty, izolacja penitencjarna, zakład karny

## **Introduction**

The Polish legislator, when formulating the purpose of serving a prison sentence as one of the means to achieve it, indicated maintaining contact between the detained persons and their family and the outside world (Polski Kodeks Karny, art. 67 [Polish Penal Code, Article 67], 1997). The placement of this measure, among others that are intended to inspire the offender to cooperate in shaping his socially desirable attitudes, indicates the value of these contacts in dealing with prisoners (Kwieciński, 2012). The impact on inmates is a long-term process, spread over time, and requires creating appropriate conditions in daily work with them, the effect of which will be the development of permanent dispositions manifested in the behaviour of prisoners (Kalisz, 2021). Family contacts are an integral part of this process, and the presence of loved ones during the serving of a prison sentence brings real benefits to both the imprisoned individuals and their family members. At the same time, it is the family ties that are often destroyed or weakened during the course of serving a sentence (Ciosek, 2001). Family relationships maintained by persons deprived of liberty include those with children. This article presents the results of research characterising the contacts of men serving a prison sentence (in a closed-type prison, for those serving it for the first time) with minor children, as well as the factors that influence these contacts.

The role of the family in both the process of penitentiary resocialization of persons deprived of liberty and their social readaptation after leaving the prison walls has been analysed many times in Polish literature on the subject. The research focused on both the perspective of the relatives who remained free and the perspective of the prisoners. The families of prisoners provide support for the inmates in the process of returning to society and help them in taking on their previous and new social roles after leaving the correctional facility (Pindel, 2011). At the same time, penal isolation affects the family system in such a way that it forces necessary changes in the roles previously performed by the person deprived of liberty. The result of these changes may be a natural, gradual removal of the prisoner from tasks related to family life and their replacement by other individuals. Families often give up maintaining contact and sever ties with the prisoner over time. However, there are families that, despite dealing with a range of negative consequences of the imprisonment a close person, such as stigma, shame, and social isolation (Barczykowska, 2008), remain with their loved ones, reorganising the family system and applying strategies that are meant to help them survive until the imprisoned person returns home (Dzierżyńska-Breś, 2016).

This study focuses on one type of relationship between inmates: contact between men serving a prison sentence and their underage children. These contacts are a less frequently discussed topic in Polish literature than the issue of motherhood in the con-

ditions of penitentiary isolation, although women constitute only approximately 4% of the Polish population of all individuals deprived of liberty (Rocznik Statystyczny dla roku 2024 [Annual Statistical Information for the year 2024], 2024). Maintaining relationships between imprisoned parents (including fathers) and their children has both positive and negative effects, which are noted in the relevant literature (e.g., Nowak, 2020). As Anna Chańko-Kraszewska (2018) writes, in penitentiary work with persons deprived of liberty, awareness of the impact of these relationships (narrowly with children, and broadly with other close persons) allows for the implementation of appropriate actions when the bond is supportive or redirection of the inmate's resources to other social groups when the bond is absent or impaired. In both cases, a diagnosis is required, which allows for confirmation of the possibility of maintaining a relationship during the sentence and after its completion (Pindel, 2011). The establishment of such a diagnosis must be based on identified factors that have an impact on the relationship between parents (fathers) and children. The discovery of these factors is a task assigned to, among others, individuals who scientifically deal with the subject of relations between imprisoned parents and their children, hence the need to conduct research, the results of which are presented in this article.

The available literature presents a dichotomous image of imprisoned fathers, with one group actively engaging in maintaining contact with their children, and the other, citing the limitations resulting from the conditions of serving their sentence, gradually giving up their involvement in the lives of their children. According to Joanna Knapik and Hanna Przybyła-Basista (2015), who studied fathers in semi-open and open correctional facilities, men serving sentences exhibited two attitudes towards contact with their offspring and participation in their lives during their period of imprisonment. The first group of fathers (approximately 1/3 of the men surveyed) treated the time of imprisonment as a *break from being a father* and, as the sentence progressed, increasingly withdrew from their responsibility for the maintenance and upbringing of their children. They justified their stance by citing the lack of daily contact with the children and their inability to participate in their upbringing. Contacts with their children were maintained rarely or not at all, and half of this group was not visited by their children, did not receive letters from them, and did not have telephone conversations. The second group consisted of men who, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the correctional facility, tried to participate in the lives of the children. They did not believe that the imprisonment would weaken their bond with their children. These fathers cared for their offspring and for the children's perception of their actions. According to the cited authors, the fathers in the study most often maintained contact with their children in the form of telephone calls. 40% of the respondents used daily conversations, and another 30% used them once a week. Every fifth father sent letters to his children once a week and received letters from them. Just

over half of the fathers (18 out of 35 surveyed) met with their children during all their scheduled visits. Of the eight fathers who acquired the right to use passes, 4 fathers saw their children outside the facility once a week, 3 once a month, and 1 less than once a month. The remaining convicts rarely or never used the available forms of contact. The authors of the study pointed out that the factors that influenced the discontinuation of contact in all three forms were objective factors (*i.e.*, lack of funds for a stamp, a phone card, money for travel to the correctional facility, and distance from home) and subjective factors related to the father's beliefs (*e.g.*, the father's fear of talking to a small child, discouragement caused by a long wait for a letter, the conviction that a prison is not a place for children, fear of the child's emotional reaction and his own reaction during the meeting).

A dichotomous division of parents based on their maintaining contact with children was also made by Monika Badowska-Hodyr (2022). The author pointed out two different orientations of imprisoned parents (including fathers). The first group of inmates was oriented towards the *here and now* in the context of penal isolation. They focused on creating favourable living conditions for themselves and did not perceive maintaining ties with children and family as an essential element of their daily life. The second group consists of *future-oriented* parents who constantly maintained contact with their children, took all actions aimed at ensuring the children's sense of security and emotional balance (in the situation of imprisonment and separation from the parent), and supported the child in development and shaping of psychological resilience. Two different attitudes of fathers towards upbringing and contact with their children were also shown in their research by Emilia Kipka and Jolanta Malina (2018). The authors, analysing the attitude of incarcerated men towards their own parenthood, showed that more than half of the respondents (55%) believed that serving a prison sentence deprived them of any influence on the upbringing of their children. The remaining respondents (45%) saw opportunities for participation in the life of their offspring, but they acknowledged that their influence was limited.

The issue of imprisoned fathers seeing their children was also addressed by Aneta Jarzębińska. In her research on visits of fathers deprived of liberty to their children, she demonstrated that more than half (51.3%) of the 159 men studied were not visited by their children (first and subsequent) after being imprisoned (Jarzębińska, 2024). The remaining men took advantage of their meetings with their children, using the opportunity to maintain contact in this form whenever, or almost whenever, possible (taking advantage of all the meetings they were entitled to). The most usual form of contact between fathers and children was telephone calls (fathers made them with 59.2% of children). The author notes that this is a form of contact that is available and inexpensive compared to meetings and correspondence. Among the forms of contact chosen by the fathers, the second most popular was visitation, which was used by 48.7%

of the children. The third most usual form of contact was correspondence, which reached 41.2% of the children (Jarzębińska, 2024). Analysing the factors that influenced the more frequent use of visits, the Author indicated the father's age (the most visits were received by men aged 50 and older), marital status (the highest percentage of those seeing their children were married men, slightly lower – men in informal relationships), the level of education of fathers (the highest percentage was in the group of respondents with secondary and higher education). The length of the sentence also influenced the use of visits (a higher percentage of visits was observed among those sentenced to long-term sentences, which the Author defines as those exceeding 3 years) and the length of the sentence already served (more visits were received by men who spent less than 3 years in prison after their incarceration).

Contact between imprisoned fathers and their children is obviously not solely dependent on the parent and their offspring. Research available in the subject literature confirms the significant role of mothers of children in maintaining the bond between the child and the incarcerated father. Research by Knapik and Przybył-Basista on the paternal involvement of imprisoned men shows that good and correct relationships with the mother of the children significantly increase the degree of the father's involvement in the children's lives, even when the parents are not in a relationship (2014). The attitudes of mothers towards maintaining children's contact with their fathers in the form of meetings were also examined by Jarzębińska. The author, focusing on the obstacles that, in the opinion of mothers, hinder children's meetings with their fathers, identified several categories of these difficulties (Jarzębińska, 2022). The first group of obstacles were formal and organisational aspects, related to travel costs and unfamiliarity with the procedures in force in correctional facilities. The second group of reasons included concerns about the child's well-being related to the father's visits. The third group of obstacles related to the father himself and the way he fulfilled his role as a parent (e.g., demoralising influence on the child, lack of bonding, instrumental use of meetings). Another group of reasons for the lack of meetings was due to improper relations between parents, which included violence, blackmail, or lack of acceptance of the mother's new relationship. The last group of factors was related to the emotional costs incurred by the father during the meeting with the child.

## Research Methodology

The findings presented in this article are part of a research project titled *The impact of penitentiary isolation on the exercise of parental rights and obligations by men*

*serving their first sentence of imprisonment*<sup>1</sup>. The theoretical aim (Gnitecki, 2006) of the research was to determine the manner in which fathers serving their first sentence of imprisonment in a closed-type penitentiary facility make use of the possible forms of contact with their minor children, and to identify the factors that influence this manner. The main research problem was formulated as follows: in what manner do fathers deprived of their liberty exercise contact with their minor children, and what influences this manner?

The research was qualitative in nature. Data was collected using the interview method, with the use of an in-depth interview questionnaire, which allowed for the compilation of elements of respondents' statements in accordance with specific categories (Żelazo, 2013). These categories were identified based on the variables adopted in the research: the father's level of knowledge regarding parental rights and obligations (including contact with children), and the factors limiting and promoting the maintenance of contact between the father and minor children: the conditions for serving a prison sentence; the health condition of the convict and family members; conditions related to children, such as age, awareness of the father's imprisonment, distance of the facility from the child's place of residence, and family status; conditions concerning the child's guardians: the relationship to the imprisonment of the convict and the situation of the imprisonment; the length of the sentence and the time elapsed since the individual was incarcerated in a penal facility.

In-depth interviews were conducted with fathers serving a prison sentence and with Prison Service officials (educators, psychologists, therapists, and security officers who worked in penitentiary departments), who expressed their willingness and voluntary consent to participate in the study. The study excluded fathers serving sentences in therapeutic units and recidivists in penitentiaries. During the research, interviews were conducted with 15 male inmates and 10 officers. The research was conducted at the Prison in Rawicz, which is a closed facility for prisoners serving their first term of imprisonment. The research assumed that the highest degree of isolation of the convicts (in this type of institution) and serving a sentence for the first time would affect the quality of mutual contacts between fathers and children. The strategies used by fathers to maintain contact with their children and their dynamics during the period of serving a sentence (which is the first such situation in their lives) while simultaneously experiencing the highest degree of restriction of freedom in their previous contacts is a situation that has aroused the curiosity of the researchers.

<sup>1</sup> Project is carried out with employees of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the research presented in the article is part of the research results obtained.



## Results of the Research

### *Contacts Between Imprisoned Fathers and Their Children in the Opinion of Prison Service Officers*

The literature on the subject predominantly presents two attitudes of fathers towards maintaining contact with their children: the first is expressed in the fathers' engagement in contact, while the second is characterised by passivity or lack of relationship with the children. In the study, whose results are reported, a similar division was made by the Prison Service officers. In their opinion, fathers serving a prison sentence, due to their commitment to maintaining contact with their children, are divided into two distinct groups.

The first group, most frequently mentioned by officers (present in 7 out of 10 interviews), includes men who treat fatherhood in a manner defined as instrumental<sup>2</sup>. Officers noted that the use of the fact of being a father was primarily in situations that could affect the change of the conditions of serving the sentence by the father. The instrumental approach to meetings, phone calls, and correspondence was evident, according to the respondents, during the conversation preceding the periodic assessment of progress in rehabilitation, when applying for early conditional release, when applying for paid employment, and for additional meetings. In the opinion of officers, the purpose of the actions of fathers in this group was only to improve the daily functioning of the convict, and not to fulfil the real need to be with the child. This approach—according to officers—is a negative behaviour that distinguishes fathers deprived of freedom from other prisoners. An example of a statement describing this group of fathers is the words of the surveyed officers: “They treat the child like a bargaining chip to get something,” or “when they find out that they still have to pay child support in prison, they show surprise.” In addition to a selective approach to contacts with children, these fathers also attempt to avoid the obligations incumbent on them. As some of the respondents state: “It is enough to look at the statistics of convictions for non-payment of child support – where the obligation to support the child is one of the basic obligations of both parents,” or “the convicts usually transfer the obligation to support the child to the mother.”

The second group of fathers is comprised of men who are very committed to maintaining contact with their children, although this group is less numerous, according to the Prison Service respondents. In conversations with officers, these fathers did not raise issues related to their children only when it could affect the change of the conditions of serving the sentence, but they also asked about educational issues, for advice

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the small number of interviews with officers, the respondents' details were not provided when quoting their statements to avoid their identification.



on how to deal with difficult emotions, and they discussed general topics related to children and family (e.g., the consequences of their behaviour on their children, children's successes).

According to the data collected among the officers, fathers did not change their behaviour towards their children during the serving of their sentence: those who had good relationships before imprisonment maintained them in the correctional facility; those who did not have contact with their children before imprisonment did not try to regain it after being imprisoned. In the respondents' statements, the factor that primarily influences the father's maintenance of contact with the children is the father's will. The influence of the relationship with the mother on these contacts is not, in the opinion of the officers, the most important, as fathers often seek contact opportunities that do not involve the mother (most frequently, they ask for help from family members). What regulates the contact between fathers and children is the attitude of the prisoner towards the fact of imprisonment, *i.e.*, keeping this state a secret from the child for fear of how the father's actions will be perceived. Men who have not decided to inform the child about the imprisonment maintain contact in a way that excludes visitation.

### ***Contact Between Imprisoned Fathers and Their Children in the Opinion of Men Deprived of Their Liberty***

Data from interviews conducted with men deprived of their liberty allowed for the identification of four groups of fathers, who differed in the ways they maintained contact with their children<sup>3</sup>. The dividing factor of the subjects was the fact of maintaining contacts before and after imprisonment, which allowed for the following groups to be distinguished:

- *Group 1*, which consisted of fathers who had good, regular contact with their children before and during their imprisonment. In this group, the conditions of serving the sentence of imprisonment often modified the frequency and type of contact, but did not contribute to its termination.
- *Group 2*, which includes fathers who have had no contact with their children either before or after the start of their imprisonment. A characteristic feature of this group of fathers was planning to regain contact with the child after leaving the correctional facility exclusively through the court, while denying (at the time of the study) the necessity of rebuilding the relationship.
- *Group 3*, to which fathers who maintained good, regular contact with their children before imprisonment were assigned, but which gradually disappeared as the isolation progressed.

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<sup>3</sup> A detailed description of the groups is currently being prepared. This article focuses only on father-child contact, which is one aspect of defining the individual groups.

- *Group 4*, consisting of fathers who lost contact with their children before the start of their sentence, but during the sentence, decided to re-establish a relationship with their children. A characteristic feature of this group of fathers is their concern for rebuilding emotional ties with their children and their psychological well-being in connection with attempts to rebuild the relationship, and not just a formal establishment of contacts through the court. The following table presents the socio-demographic characteristics of fathers.

**Table 1**

*Selected socio-demographic characteristics of the surveyed fathers*

	Number of fathers in the group	Father's Age	Sentenc- ing for a crime against the family and care	The length of the sentence imposed	The length of the sentence served	Education	Status of the association
Group 1	6	31–57	No	From one year and nine months to five years	From 3 to 20 months	1 father basic, oth- ers average (voca- tional)	2 fathers in marital relation- ships, the rest in partner- ships
Group 2	2	Above 30 years of age	No	Up to 3 years	Up to 12 months	Profes- sional	Dissolution of the part- nership
Group 3	4	30–50 years	Yes – 1 father, the rest – no	From 6 months to 1 year	From 5 to 9 months	Average	Dissolution of the part- nership
Group 4	3	22–35 years	No	From one year to three years	From 9 months to 1 year	Profes- sional	Dissolution of the part- nership

As shown in the data presented in the table, fathers who maintained contact with their children were no older than the fathers in the other three groups and had the same level of education as the other subjects. They differed only in the status of the relationship, but it was not always a relationship with the mother of the children visiting them. Among the entire group of fathers who did not maintain contact with their children (specified groups 2, 3, and 4), only one was serving a sentence for a crime against the family and guardianship. The fathers who maintained contact and those who did not were not significantly different in terms of the length of the sentence imposed

(which was up to 5 years) and the length of the sentence already served. Comparing this data with the results of the research on the characteristics of Jarzębińska's fathers, the results confirm that in the group of fathers studied, the status of the relationship (marriage or a stable partnership) promotes maintaining contact with children during the period of serving the sentence. This is also confirmed by the observations of the officers surveyed. It should also be noted that the examined group is significantly smaller than the sample in the research of Jarzębińska, and the obtained result can be interpreted only in relation to the data from the research.

The first group of fathers, who maintained contact with their children before and after their imprisonment, used all available forms of contact with their children: meetings, phone calls, and correspondence, as well as, although less frequently, contact via messaging services. The fathers took advantage of all the visitation rights available to them, and almost every visit was attended by the children (exceptions were those visits where the parents agreed to discuss adult-related matters). Other family members, if they had any meetings, always did so in the presence of the children. The second form of communication, telephone calls, was almost exclusively used by the male subjects with their partners and children. They were provided with two telephone calls per week, at various times (morning and afternoon), and they tried to manage them in such a way as to be able to talk to each of the children (taking into account their stay in the institutions). The third form of contact, writing letters, was maintained with the children, partner, and other family members. Fathers who had several children tried to write to each of them separately, sending drawings and colouring books, prepared by themselves or other inmates, to the younger children. To maintain contact with the other family members, they chose correspondence, as it did not take away from the time spent on meetings and phone calls with the children and their partner.

The fathers in this group valued visitation the most, as this form of contact allowed them to hug their child, hold their hand, and see the changes taking place in them. They also emphasised that the manner in which the meetings were conducted, dictated by security considerations, did not facilitate contact (they pointed out that the father could not approach the child in the canteen or the play area, as he had to remain at the table at all times). Moreover, the time allowed for the visit was insufficient for them. A significant reason fathers from this group were not always able to take advantage of the visitation was the distance between the children's place of residence and the correctional facility, as well as the family's financial situation, which did not allow for frequent trips to the facility. The limited duration of the calls (10 minutes, of which approximately 1 minute was spent dialling the number), and the rigid times for making calls, were obstacles to contacting the children by phone. Organised contacts, in the form of meetings, phone calls, and letters, satisfied the fathers to the extent that they did not see the need to contact their family through messaging services. Furthermore, the following

obstacles hindered the maintenance of this form of contact: the presence of an officer in the room where the call was made, the family's difficulties in organizing the necessary equipment and their limited ability to operate it, and the fear that the children would see the conditions in which the father was being held (this was significant in the few cases where the younger children were unaware or did not understand the conditions of the imprisonment).

What enabled the fathers in this group to freely contact their children was their openness to explaining to the children the situation in which the father found himself and the involvement of former or current partners in the children's contact with the father. Important obstacles, other than the conditions of serving the sentence, in taking full advantage of the possibility of contact were the child's age (infants and toddlers rarely or never came to the meetings, which was caused by the parents' desire to protect them from the inconvenience of travel) and the child's health (both minor illnesses that excluded the child from the meeting for a short time, as well as the child's disorders, *e.g.*, neurodevelopmental disorders, the course of which excluded the child from the meetings due to difficulties in coping with an excess of stimuli during the meeting room). It should be noted that none of the fathers who reported neurodevelopmental disorders of the child as an obstacle to holding meetings knew that they could meet with the child in a separate room where the number of stimuli would be limited, which may indicate a lack of understanding of the possibilities offered by the correctional facility. It should be added that the fathers in this group willingly and actively used the assistance of Prison Service officers and other inmates in maintaining contact and coping with difficult family situations.

The second group of fathers did not maintain contact with the child in any of the available forms. They used them to communicate with other family members: parents and siblings. The lack of contact was primarily attributed to the child's reluctance to have contact with the father, which, according to the respondents, was the result of the child's negative attitude towards the father, which was also fostered by the mother, with whom the child also had no contact. The fathers themselves did not attempt to contact the child because, in their opinion, the child should not see them in a correctional facility (they did not explain why). Men postponed actions related to fatherhood until after serving their prison sentences, which is why they did not contact prison officials regarding their children. Their attitude of "I don't want anything from anyone, the prison will not help me anyway" could have led to the officers assessing them as disengaged fathers, although, to some extent, this was not the respondents' choice. A key characteristic distinguishing this group of fathers was their hostile attitude towards all actions of the child's mother. The respondents declared that due to the poor relationship with the former partner and child, the only way to influence the nature of contacts is through legal proceedings. It is disturbing that the subjects in this group

declared a lack of interest in rebuilding an emotional bond with their children, and were only focused on formally regaining the right to contact.

The third group of fathers had more frequent contact with their children at the beginning of the isolation period or had no contact at all if the child was placed in a care and education facility or foster family. Among the surveyed group, the main reason for the loss of contact in various forms is the lack of involvement of the mother in building a bond between the son/daughter and the father. Among the respondents surveyed, this lack was expressed in the form of active dislike, *i.e.*, open reluctance (the mother did not give the child the phone when the father called), hidden manipulation (*e.g.*, lying that the child was not available), and also in the form of passivity in the form of not motivating the child to maintain contact (which was particularly significant in the case of younger children who could not travel to the meeting or answer the phone on their own). Another reason for the gradual loss of contact was the attitude of the children, who, if they had a negative opinion of the father's actions, avoided contact. Additionally, as in the first group, the great distance between the child's place of residence and the penitentiary, as well as financial difficulties that made it impossible to bring the child to the visit (even by other family members), contributed to the weakening of contacts. Telephone conversations, which were initially conducted by the fathers with their children, became less frequent over time due to the actions of the mother or the children themselves. Telephone contact with the offspring who were placed in care and educational institutions was subject to the rules of the institution's work, which selectively limited this contact. The form of contact that fathers often and regularly used was writing letters to their children. They sent cards and pictures (actively seeking support from other inmates in their preparation), but due to the lack of contact with the child's mother and the child themselves, they were unaware as to whether the letters were reaching their intended recipients. The fathers in this group drew attention to another cause of the gradual loss of contact with the child – even if the partner did not enter into a new relationship, the child's life included a man (father, brother, cousin of the imprisoned father) who naturally replaced the father for the child. Male members of the convicted person's family, in an effort to maintain contact with the child, gradually took over the duties, activities, and rituals that connected the child with the father before his imprisonment. For this reason, fathers felt excluded from the life of the child, who learned to live without them. Among this group of fathers who observed a gradual reduction in contact with the child, there was a noticeable resignation from seeking help due to the inability to change their situation. They would like to have regular contacts; they would strive for them, but they did not see a way out of the situation that was unfolding somewhat beside them.

The fourth group of fathers was not visited by their children, and telephone or written contact was maintained only occasionally. This group consisted of men who

had lost contact with their children before their imprisonment and did not regain contact after their imprisonment, but during the course of their imprisonment, they decided to regain contact with their child. This group distinguished itself by changing the way it thought about its own fatherhood. Before being incarcerated, men, whether by their own choice or under the influence of requests and pressure from the child's mother, completely renounced contact with the child. The lack of contact with the child, often also with the child's mother, resulted in their non-participation in the upbringing of their offspring. A distinguishing feature of these respondents was their concern about rebuilding an emotional bond with their child after leaving the correctional facility. When examining the possibilities of re-establishing contact, the respondents were primarily interested in rebuilding an emotional bond with the child, they were concerned about how the child would cope with the appearance of the biological father (of whose existence they were unaware), they sought information about the father's influence on the child's development and tools that could help establish an emotional bond with the son or daughter. Unlike the respondents in the second group, they did not plan to limit themselves to formally regulating their contacts with the child.

As mentioned above, the conditions of the meetings were negatively assessed by the fathers who met with their children. The Rawicz Prison is implementing a rehabilitation program that promotes readaptation and social reintegration through the formation of parental roles and the development of family ties, known as *Dad, come back!*, which includes a regular 3-hour visitation. The organisation of this viewing: in a separate room, exclusively for fathers and children, without restrictions related to the need to stay at the table, with the possibility of hugging the child and free play was the point of the program, which all fathers mentioned except for respondents from the first group. This viewing was pointed out as exemplary, helping to spend valuable time with children, and for fathers it was a motivation to strive for participation in the subsequent editions of the program.

One of the factors that influence the contact of fathers deprived of their liberty with their children is the awareness of parental rights and obligations among the men under study. From the perspective of criminal law, convicts have the right to contact; however, from the perspective of family law, as a parent, they have the right, but also the obligation of a parent, which is not waived by their personal situation (Kodeks Rodzinny i Opiekuńczy, art. 113 [Family and Guardianship Code, article 113], 1964). The groups selected through interviews with fathers differed in terms of their awareness of parental rights and obligations, and their overall knowledge on the subject was incomplete. The fathers in the first group demonstrated the greatest awareness, discussing rights and obligations related to daily presence with their children, such as financing their needs and ensuring access to education, while also drawing attention to those that involve daily contact, including raising, talking, answering questions, and supporting their

children's hobbies. The subjects in the second group were either unaware of parental rights and obligations or believed that fathers in Poland had no rights and that nothing could be done about it. Fathers from the third group more often than other respondents emphasised the financial aspect of meeting the child's needs, explaining that regular payment of maintenance obligations is the only available form of caring for the child in their situation. Fathers from the fourth group more often emphasised issues related to the child's education, but also shared leisure time, which may reflect their efforts to rebuild an emotional relationship with the child. None of the fathers examined, during the course of serving their prison sentences, made use of the right to contact schools and health care facilities, often citing restrictions on the forms of contact (*e.g.*, short duration of phone calls).

## **Findings from the Research and Conclusion**

The results of the presented research confirm the division of fathers maintaining contact with their children into two groups, which is also present in the literature. Both in interviews with officials and with men deprived of their liberty, two groups are evident: fathers who are committed to maintaining contact with their children and fathers who are not. The first category of fathers, in the opinion of both groups of respondents, actively works to maintain relationships with their children, uses all available forms of contact, and seeks opportunities to benefit from additional visitation by participating in penitentiary programs. The behaviour of these fathers is noticed by the officers working with them. Obstacles to maintaining contact between fathers in this group are beyond their control: they depend on the child's health, the family's finances, and the distance between the place of residence and the correctional facility. The last two reasons for the lack of contact were pointed out by the research of Knapik, Przybyła-Basista, and Jarzębińska. The confirmation of these factors in the cited studies indicates that they persist despite the passage of several years between all three studies.

The second group of fathers, whose involvement in contact with children is not visible in their daily functioning in isolation, is diverse. According to the officers, these are fathers who are instrumentally focused on using their paternity to improve the conditions of their sentence. Such motivation is not evident in interviews with fathers who do not maintain contact with their children due to gradual alienation, lack of tools to rebuild contact, low level of awareness of their obligations (which may result in inability to establish contact with the child's mother) or a sense of injustice and loneliness in their own parenthood. Increasing awareness of the reasons for the lack of contact (supported by research in this area) may lead to conclusions regarding the creation of a support offer for these fathers in the form of psychoedu-



cational activities and legal education in the area of parental rights and obligations, which may result in greater awareness of their role as fathers. The reasons for the lack of contact indicated among fathers depend on both factors beyond their control (distance of the home from the facility, high travel costs, dysfunctional relations with the mother and child) and the father's internal attitude (feeling of losing control over the situation, fear of inviting the child to the facility, inability to rebuild the bond) which can be worked on in the conditions of penitentiary isolation, thereby increasing the chance of reconstructing the relationship after the completion of the sentence.

Both mothers (in Jarzębińska's study) and the fathers in the study pointed to the reasons for the difficulties in contact, which lay in the organisation of the meeting, the fear of the children's emotional reactions to the meeting, or the concealment of the fact of the imprisonment. Attempts to remove these causes, seen similarly by mothers and fathers, can become an element of family reintegration programs through the introduction of tools to cope with the child's emotions, to familiarize them with the situation of imprisonment (*e.g.*, in the form of children's books, support in explaining the situation) and organizing more frequent meetings exclusively in the family circle with children.

The results presented in the article, due to the small group of respondents, are limited, but will serve as a basis for designing further research on this topic.

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