

# THE PERCEPTION OF SOURCES OF SELF-EFFICACY AND THE INTENSITY OF THE DIMENSIONS OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS FUNCTIONING IN CONDITIONS OF FREEDOM IN INDIVIDUALS SERVING A SENTENCE OF IMPRISONMENT

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**Abstract.** The path of integration into society is a complex and challenging one. Immediately after completion of a prison sentence, the moment when the prison walls are left behind, individuals are tasked with confronting a new reality that is vastly different from the one to which they have become accustomed. There are many factors that prove to be helpful in the readjustment process, one of which is the individual's attitude towards freedom. The purpose of this article is to examine the relationships between the intensity of the dimensions constituting attitudes towards functioning in conditions of freedom in prisoners and the perceived sources of self-efficacy. The study was conducted in the Lublin Voivodeship, on a group of 116 prisoners. The results show that the emotional dimension of attitudes towards freedom correlates in a statistically

significant way with the perception of experienced achievements, the intensity of experienced stress and external persuasion.

**Keywords:** sources of self-efficacy; successes; failures; stress intensity; external persuasion; dimensions of attitudes towards functioning in freedom conditions; prisoners.

## INTRODUCTION

Persons incarcerated in prisons face a number of challenges, such as loss of autonomy and, the most potent for the inmate, diminished control over their lives. Under such conditions, the concept of self-efficacy becomes particularly interesting. Whilst operating in a prison setting characterized by routine and set schedules, inmates are forced to confront limitations not only on their freedom, but also on their sense of agency. However, within these constraints, many inmates demonstrate resilience and adaptability to a variety of conditions, often due to their motivation to take control of their lives. This motivation, adaptability and resilience has a direct impact on how those serving prison sentences relate to the prospect of leaving the prison environment and functioning in the free world.

What is freedom? In psychology, freedom is often understood as a sense of autonomy, which is closely related to personal agency, through which people perceive their person as capable of making appropriate choices as well as controlling their lives. Freedom includes the ability to achieve goals set by the person as well as one's own values and beliefs, without the influence of external factors. It is stepping outside of prison bars, it is a return to normalcy and the opportunity to direct one's own actions, to take control of one's own life again. Some may perceive freedom as distant or even unattainable, while others may adopt a positive attitude and nurture and maintain a sense of agency and autonomy despite actual physical imprisonment and the limitations caused by it [Niewiadomska and Fel 2016].

The term "attitude" has multiple meanings and definitions and each scientific field dealing with the issue has its own definition which means that there is no single definition of attitude. The first use of the term was in the context of the mind as a state of readiness to listen and learn, proposed by philosophers Spencer and Bain [Fidelus 2012]. Allport, on the other hand, defines attitude as a state of readiness that is organized by experience and influences individuals' responses to various objects or situations [Mądrzycki 1997].

Attitudes toward functioning under conditions of freedom consist of three elements described in the structural concept of attitudes: a) cognitive – knowledge, beliefs and thoughts related to functioning in freedom conditions; b) emotional – feelings directed toward freedom conditions,

they can be positive or negative; c) behavioral – the range of actions taken by the individual, the absence of any action is also relevant here.

The process of reintegration into society after serving a prison sentence is a complex process full of obstacles. The end of a prison sentence marks the beginning of a new chapter full of challenges. After leaving the prison walls, ex-prisoners face numerous obstacles that hinder their smooth return to optimal functioning in prison, from social stigma to limited employment opportunities, these difficulties are multifaceted. How an inmate perceives his ability to overcome the obstacles has a direct impact on what his attitude toward freedom will be.

Janusz Sztumski (1995) presents three different attitudes towards social problems, and they are; 1) conformist attitude; 2) opportunistic attitude and 3) heroic attitude. Based on these attitudes, Fidelus (2011) describes them as follows: a) indifferent attitude: characterized by lack of interest or indifference to serious problems, including social problems. It can be caused by egocentrism or lack of knowledge about these problems. It is often the result of losing oneself in one's own troubles, which prevents one from noticing other problems; b) fatalistic attitude: associated with a belief in the inevitability of certain social phenomena. People with this attitude believe that life is directed by supernatural forces, which makes them not believe in the effectiveness of corrective measures; c) cynical attitude: characterized by a selfish attitude, where individuals are guided solely by their own interests and downplay existing social problems, considering others naive or irresponsible; d) religious attitude: based on a belief in supernatural forces that affect the world, including social problems. People with this attitude often engage in prayers to solve these problems; e) sentimental attitude: manifests compassionate involvement, but is often limited to combating the symptoms of problems rather than addressing their causes; f) conformist attitude: consists in having no opinion of one's own and following the opinion of the majority. A conformist avoids presenting his own views and does not take steps to develop his own position; g) opportunistic attitude: means not only a lack of commitment to solving social problems, but also exploiting these problems for personal gain; h) heroic attitude: expresses a willingness to take on social problems even in the face of risk. It is characterized by a strong emotional and intellectual commitment to defending the values threatened by these problems.

These approaches show how diverse people's attitudes towards social challenges can be, and consequently also the inmate's attitudes towards the difficulties of daily life outside prison walls. Along with the existing social challenges associated with leaving prison, a person's sense of self-efficacy also influences what attitudes toward the outside world he or she will adopt, and how the inmate will view freedom and functioning within it.

Perception of the sources of self-efficacy, according to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, is a psychological mechanism used for modifying attitudes and taking action effectively, linking knowledge to behavior [Łaguna 2005]. The perception of self-efficacy enters the realm of personal action control, interpreted as a belief in one's ability and capacity to act toward set goals regardless of the obstacles encountered. This belief and related expectations are relatively permanent, formed in the process of individual development and differentiate people in terms of thinking, feeling and acting. Self-efficacy affects the choice of life goals – the higher they are, the more complex goals an individual chooses, as well as motivation and commitment to these goals, even in the face of setbacks and difficulties. Strengthening the belief that difficulties can be overcome increases motivation to take action and perseverance to solve them with a positive end result. Self-efficacy plays an important role in behavior change, enabling people to evaluate situations and seek effective coping strategies to overcome adversity, which can undermine motivation [Lewtak and Smolińska 2011].

Social Learning Theory [Bandura 1997] posits, self-efficacy is built through a variety of factors from sources such as: 1) mastery experiences – the individual's experience of success or failure; 2) affective and physiological states – emotions experienced when undertaking a task, affective states as well as the level of commitment to the action; 3) vicarious experiences – observation of successes by individuals in the environment; 4) verbal persuasion – receiving feedback [Bandura 1999; Niewiadomska et al. 2014].

These sources, influencing an individual's perceived self-efficacy, help shape subsequent attitudes toward an issue as well as subsequent actions or behaviors. Active task performance plays a key role in building this belief. Personal experiences provide the individual with relevant information as they are appropriately selected and acted upon, facilitating their integration into the existing belief system. Successes strengthen self-efficacy beliefs, while failures can weaken them, leading to avoidant or passive attitudes. Vicarious experiences, i.e., observing how others cope, also affect self-efficacy. Individuals seek coping strategies from people who have characteristics similar to theirs and whose opinions they consider relevant. Verbal persuasions, i.e., other people's opinions and evaluations of the behavior and performance undertaken by an individual, also have a significant impact on an individual's self-esteem [Pervin 1999; Bandura 2001; Kozička 2004; Niewiadomska 2007].

## 1. METHODOLOGY

### 1.1. Research problem and hypotheses

The article attempts to find an answer to the following research question: What are the relationships between the sources of self-efficacy and attitudes toward functioning in freedom conditions? In connection with the research question posed, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1. It is assumed that there are significant correlations between the perceptions of sources of self-efficacy and the intensity of the cognitive dimension of attitudes toward freedom in people serving prison sentences.

H2. It is assumed that there are statistically significant correlations between perceptions of sources of self-efficacy and the intensity of the emotional dimension of attitudes toward functioning in freedom, in persons serving a prison sentence.

H3. Sources of self-efficacy are predictors of the intensity of the dimensions constituting the attitude towards functioning in conditions of freedom in persons serving a sentence of imprisonment.

### 1.2. Method

The study was conducted in 2023, participation in the pen and paper study was anonymous and voluntary. Inmates participating in a master's seminar in Family Science at the Center for Inmates of the Catholic University of Lublin's Center at the detention center in Lublin were responsible for distributing the questionnaires and their supervision.

### 1.3. Characteristics of the subjects

The study involved 116 inmates, who were differentiated on the basis of variables such as age, marital status, education, occupational status, type of crime committed and number of convictions.

The largest group was 30-49 year olds (62%), followed by those under 29 (24%) and those over 50 (14%).

Among the respondents, the majority were single (48%), divorcees accounted for 26% of the survey participants, and married people accounted for 21%.

Secondary level education (49%) and vocational education (34%) were the most common, while the rest consisted of people with higher education (10%) and primary education (7%).

Analysis of the results shows that prior to incarceration, 80% of the respondents worked professionally, the unemployed accounted for 16%, and only 4% received a pension.

The most common type of crime committed by the respondents was those against life or health (45%), 21% of the respondents had committed a crime against property, and other criminal acts accounted for 34%.

The vast majority of respondents had been convicted once (58%), 34% had served a second prison sentence, and 8% had served a third.

#### **1.4. Tools for measuring variables**

Two methods were used to verify the research hypotheses: 1) *Life Evaluation Questionnaire* by Iwona Niewiadomska; 2) *Questionnaire of Prisoner Attitudes Toward Functioning in Freedom Conditions* by Mirosław Kalinowski, Iwona Niewiadomska, Robert Rachuba and Weronika Remijas.

The *Life Evaluation Questionnaire* was created to study perceived sources of self-efficacy and consists of two parts. The first part is used to assess the degree of difficulty in life situations, and the second part is used to determine the level of achievements. The first part of the questionnaire deals with the experience of stress. The questionnaire distinguishes seven types of difficult situations that lead to the development of stress; 1) lack of satisfaction of psychological and biological needs, 2) excessive physical and/or mental exertion, 3) physical and/or mental suffering, 4) internal and/or external conflicts, 5) a sense of threat, 6) frustration in achieving goals, and 7) new stimuli. Respondents answered test items by referring to a five-point scale: 1 – never, 2 – very rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often and 5 – very often. The sum of the scores is an index of stress severity. The coefficient of internal consistency,  $\alpha$ Cronbach's of perception of current problem situations is 0.83, it was calculated on a group of 296 offenders.

The second part of the questionnaire examines the severity of successes. Four types of success are listed; 1) personal success, 2) family success, 3) professional success and 4) social success. Respondents refer to successes using a five-point scale: 1 – never, 2 – very rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often and 5 – very often. The sum of the occurrence of achievements is an indicator of the intensity of the individual's successes. The  $\alpha$ Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient is 0.81 for the occurrence of achievements.

The third part of the questionnaire is designed to determine the severity of failures experienced by the respondent. This section includes four forms of failure: 1) personal failures, 2) family failures, 3) social failures, and 4) professional failures, and is answered using a five-point scale: 1 – never, 2 – very rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, and 5 – very often. The sum

of the appearances of failures from each listed form is an indicator of the severity of current failures. The  $\alpha$ Cronbach's coefficient is 0.86.

The last part of the method involves social persuasion, or more precisely, its ten categories: 1) concerning reassurance that a person is able to pursue his or her goals despite obstacles, 2) concerning the ability to cope with experienced fears, 3) concerning the ability to resolve conflicts, 4) concerning coping with mental and/or physical pain, 5) concerning professional success, 6) concerning family success, 7) concerning success in personal life, 8) concerning social success, 9) concerning effective satisfaction of needs, and 10) concerning effective task performance. A five-point scale also appears in this section: 1 – never, 2 – very rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, and 5 – very often, and the sum is an indicator of the intensity of feeling persuaded by others. The  $\alpha$ Cronbach coefficient is 0.93 [Niewiadomska et al. 2014].

The *Questionnaire of Prisoner Attitudes Toward Functioning in Freedom Conditions* by Miroslaw Kalinowski, Iwona Niewiadomska, Robert Rachuba and Weronika Remijas, consists of 15 items. Respondents answer using a five-point scale of acceptance of each statement: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – undecided, 4 – agree and 5 – strongly agree.

The first part of the questionnaire includes 10 statements based on the cognitive dimension of attitudes toward functioning in freedom: 1) You have a life plan after you are released – factor loading (f.l.): 0.564; 2) After you are released, you will look for a job – (f.l.): 0.659; 3) After you are released, you will take help from various support institutions – (f.l.): 0.482; 4) After you are released, you will fulfill all your dreams – (f.l.): 0.478; 5) After you are released, you will change your surroundings so that you do not return to prison – (f.l.): 0.539; 6) After you are released, you will go abroad to work – (f.l.): 0.516; 7) After you are released, you will repair the damage you have done – (f.l.): 0.456; 8) After you are released, you can return to crime – (f.l.): 0.693; 9) After you are released, you will find a well-paying job – (f.l.): 0.479; 10) After you are released, you will need the help of others – (f.l.): 0.536.

In the second part, there are 5 statements referring to the emotional dimension of attitudes towards functioning in freedom conditions: 1) You will prepare to be free – (f.l.): 0.654; 2) After you regain freedom, you will study or take courses – (f.l.): 0.518; 3) After you regain freedom, you will live honestly – (f.l.): 0.745; 4) After you regain freedom, you will start a family – (f.l.): -0.564; 5) After you regain freedom, you will be happy – (f.l.): 0.630. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient, calculated on a group of 116 respondents, is 0.734 for the cognitive dimension of attitudes toward functioning in freedom conditions and 0.634 for the emotional dimension

of attitudes toward functioning in freedom conditions in the *Questionnaire of Prisoners' Attitudes Toward Functioning in Freedom Conditions*.

### 1.5. Statistical analyses used

Pearson's  $r$  correlation test was used to analyze the relationships between perceptions of sources of self-efficacy and the intensity of dimensions constituting attitudes toward functioning in freedom conditions in persons serving a sentence of imprisonment. Subsequently, the regression analysis conducted allowed the determination of predictors of the intensity of the dimensions constituting the attitude of inmates towards functioning in conditions of freedom.

## 2. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results of the correlation analysis, which were used to verify the research hypotheses. These hypotheses, assumed that there is a relationship between the self-efficacy perceived by inmates and the intensity of attitudes toward functioning in conditions of freedom in dimensions: 1) Cognitive (H1); 2) Emotional (H2).

Table 1. Correlation results between the sources of self-efficacy (measured by Iwona Niewiadomska's *Life Evaluation Questionnaire*) and the intensity of the dimensions of attitudes toward functioning in conditions of freedom (measured by Miroslaw Kalinowski et al.'s *Questionnaire of Prisoner Attitudes Toward Functioning in Freedom Conditions*) in people serving prison sentences (N = 116).

Sources of self-efficacy	Dimensions of attitude towards freedom	
	cognitive	emotional
Stress intensity	$r=0,66$	$r=0,353^{***}$
Success intensity	$r=-0,05$	$r=0,265^{**}$
Failures intensity	$r=0,09$	$r=0,142$
Persuasion from social environment intensity	$r=0,135$	$r=0,271^{**}$

\*\*\* $p<0,001$ ; \*\* $p<0,01$ ; \* $p<0,05$

Analysis of the results presented in Table 1, allows us to conclude that the intensity of attitudes toward functioning in conditions of freedom does not correlate with the perception of sources of self-efficacy at a statistically significant level in the cognitive dimension. Instead, there are statistically significant relationships between the perception of sources of self-efficacy



and the intensity of attitudes toward functioning in conditions of freedom in the emotional dimension. This means that in a person serving a prison sentence, emotional reactions correlate with a greater intensity of: 1) Experienced stress caused by factors such as deprivation of personal needs, mental overload and/or physical overload, conflicts of an internal and/or external nature, perceived threat, intensity of new stimuli or frustration related to the implementation of activities ( $r=0.353;p<0.001$ ); 2) Experienced achievement in personal, family, social and/or professional contexts ( $r=0.265;p<0.01$ ); 3) Experienced persuasion from the environment relating to reassurance that the person is able to pursue his or her goals in spite of obstacles, ability to cope with experienced fears, ability to resolve conflicts, ability to cope with mental and/or physical pain, succeeding professionally, succeeding in family life, succeeding in personal life, succeeding in social life, effectively satisfying needs and/or effectively completing planned tasks ( $r=0.271;p<0.01$ ).

However, a lack of statistical significance appeared in the severity of the failures experienced, making hypothesis 2, which read “There are significant statistical relationships between perceptions of sources of self-efficacy and the severity of the emotional dimension of attitudes toward functioning in freedom in prison inmates,” only partially confirmed. Hypothesis 1, which stated that there were significant statistical relationships between perceptions of sources of self-efficacy and the intensity of the cognitive dimension of attitudes toward functioning at liberty in prison inmates (H1), was not confirmed.

Hypothesis 4, which claimed that sources of self-efficacy are predictors of the intensity of the dimensions constituting attitudes toward functioning in freedom in people serving prison sentences, was verified using linear regression analysis.

Table 2. Linear regression results indicating the predictive functions of the source of self-efficacy for the emotional dimension of attitudes toward functioning in freedom conditions in persons serving a prison sentence (N=116).

A predictive model for the emotional dimension of attitudes toward functioning in a detention setting	B	SE	Beta	t	p
Constant	6,067	1,419		4,275	<0,001
Stress intensity	0,105	0,026	0,353	4,047	<0,001
F=16,380; p<0,001; R2=0,125					

Table 3. Linear regression results indicating the predictive functions of the source of self-efficacy for the emotional dimension of attitudes toward functioning in freedom conditions in persons serving a prison sentence (N=116).

A predictive model for the emotional dimension of attitudes toward functioning in a detention setting	B	SE	Beta	t	p
Constant	6,289	1,851		3,398	<0,001
Success intensity	0,141	0,048	0,265	2,947	,004
F=8,686; p=0,004; R2=0,070					

Table 4. Linear regression results indicating the predictive functions of the source of self-efficacy for the emotional dimension of attitudes toward functioning in freedom conditions in persons serving a prison sentence (N=116).

A predictive model for the emotional dimension of attitudes toward functioning in a detention setting	B	SE	Beta	t	p
Constant	6,690	1,680		3,983	<0,001
Verbal persuasion intensity	0,054	0,018	0,271	3,016	,003
F=9,097; p=0,003; R2=0,073					

## FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The analyses conducted allow us to conclude that the intensity of experienced stress, experienced achievements and successes, as well as external, verbal persuasion – sources of self-efficacy, correlate with the emotional dimension of the attitudes of people in prison towards functioning in freedom conditions. The obtained regularities confirm the regularity that the behavior of people serving a prison sentence correlates significantly with the distribution (perceived gains and losses) of subjective management resources, which include self-efficacy [Niewiadomska 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2015].

Resource losses generating an increase in the severity of stress experienced by inmates can cause anxiety about their future out in the free world – including the difficulties faced by those leaving the prison walls. According to a study by Zhan et al, more than 80% of inmates experience high levels of stress associated with leaving an institution (2016). There are many reasons for this, including anxiety caused by the pressure to find employment or housing, the stereotypes society holds about people in prison, financial issues (Martin, 2018) or, of course, adaptation to new “free world”

conditions, even more so if the inmate has completed a long-term prison sentence.

A protective factor against the fear of freedom is social support, both from the family and from support institutions [Bahr et al. 2005]. Awareness that an inmate has access to support after leaving prison, including social persuasion or vicarious experiences, has a positive effect on self-efficacy as well as ultimately on attitudes toward functioning in freedom. The severity of the successes experienced, for example, when leaving the facility on a short-term basis thanks to a furlough, reinforces the inmate's belief that he will be able to cope outside of prison. This shapes his sense of self-efficacy.

Permission to leave prison on a short-term basis is seen as an opportunity for the inmate to plan or guarantee conditions that will allow him to function adequately upon his return to freedom [Cheliotis 2008; Hassin 1977]. As Bandura's theory demonstrates, the belief that one can succeed or accomplish an intended goal or task increases perceptions of self-efficacy [Bandura 1989]. The resource gains obtained by experiencing success have a positive effect on stress reduction [Hobfoll 2018] and, as the results of the study show, on attitudes toward functioning in freedom.

The research conducted can be useful in the context of building penitentiary and rehabilitation policies that will effectively support inmates in the process of social reintegration and reduce the risk of recidivism. Cooperation is needed between different sectors, including public administration bodies, aid institutions, non-governmental organizations and civil society. People leaving prisons should be provided with adequate psychological and social support.

Assistance institutions and rehabilitation programs available both during their sentences and after they leave prison can help inmates adapt to life outside and reduce stress about the future. No less important are activities aimed at changing social stereotypes and prejudices against former prisoners. Broad public education and information campaigns implemented by state institutions can contribute to greater social acceptance of people leaving prisons. According to the research, resource losses generating an increase in the severity of stress experienced by inmates can cause anxiety about the future in conditions of freedom, for example, in the professional aspect. Legal protection and anti-discrimination for ex-prisoners on the job market can improve their chances for social reintegration.

In summary, the state should provide access to psychological assistance, social support and rehabilitation programs after release from prison (including support in finding employment, building soft skills, learning new skills and/or psychological counseling) to help former prisoners maintain positive changes and strengthen subjective management resources, including self-efficacy.

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