

KS. WALDEMAR WOŹNIAK
Institute of Psychology
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF THE GIRLS IN REFORMATORY ON THE BASIS OF THEIR OPINIONS ON THE GIVEN SUBJECT

DEFINING A 'NEED'

The aim of this article is to penetrate, of course to a certain extent, the structure of the needs of female offenders in young offender institutions.

In his 'Dictionary of Psychology', N. Sillamy writes: "A need – the condition of a person sensing a lack of something. A need acts as an alarm signal, leading an individual to perform an action that may satisfy him. Between different types of needs, we may distinguish those connected with the physiological conditionings of body functioning as well as the ones linked to social conditionings. Satisfying the former is necessary to survive. These are the needs for food, air, warmth, sleep and excretion. There had been a long-recognized peripheral theory by W. Cannon, which links the occurrence of a need with a certain organ condition. For instance, hunger was claimed to result from regular stomach cramps. Although it seemed satisfactory, the theory did not account for certain aberrative behaviours, such as ones occurring in → anorexia or obesity. People suffering from anorexia may sometimes be famished while not sensing hunger at all whereas obese people, despite being overfed, will continually think about food. Apart from the senses from internal organs, mentioned by Cannon, there exist other nervous conditionings, discovered by such physiologists as K. Lashley. It appears that there are centres in the human brain responsible for the emergence and disappearance of particular needs. The stimulation of these centres by the incoming sense impressions (such as stomach cramps at the sight of tasty food) as well as the changing levels of certain substances (the lowering of blood sugar levels, for instance) in combination with sociocultural and psychoactive conditionings (Europeans usually have three meals a day), make an individual aware of the emergence of particular needs and enable their satisfaction. As regards obesity, it can be seen that the need satisfaction may not ultimately lead to its disappearance. It happens because sensing need that manifests itself in one's willingness to eat,

drink or sleep will frequently mask another shortage – of psychoactive character that the individual himself does not realise. In such a case the individual's 'reaction' is inadequate to satisfy his 'demand'. Other needs, described as minor (since meeting them does not influence the maintenance of basic life functions), occupy a significant position in human psychology. There are many of them, however three are of particular importance – namely the needs for safety, love and self-esteem. Meeting these needs is a source of an individual's happiness and development while the frustration arising from a failure to satisfy them may result in behaviour disorders"¹.

Along with defining a 'need', the above text indicates two basic need groups – physiological as well as social ones. The latter, essential for human psychological life, can be described as psychosocial.

L.M. Rulla regards needs as natural tendencies to act, resulting from the weakening of the body or the deficiency in human powers; the tendencies require experience and actualization². S. Siek puts forward a brief and accurate definition of a need as "a state of tension that demands to be relieved"³. For N. Cameron, a need is "a state of unstable or disturbed balance in the behaviour of one's organism, taking the typical form of an increasing or long lasting activity and tension"⁴.

According to K. Obuchowski, a need is "a characteristic of an individual X consisting in his inability to function normally (i.e. to achieve the optimum ability to preserve himself and his species as well as ensure his own development) without an object Y."⁵ J. Reykowski, in turn, defines a need as "a condition which, if not met, results in the harm or destruction, or at least in an inhibited development of a living creature; [...] it is an objective relationship between a living being and its environment"⁶.

All the above definitions show a direct link between a need and a lack of something. In extreme cases, this lack may lead to inhibiting one's development.

An important issue concerning needs is their functioning⁷. Needs dynamize human activity. Two following approaches can be distinguished, namely: 1. The functioning of needs takes place on the grounds of the reduction of tension; 2. A feature of a strong and healthy personality is a constant search of new ten-

¹ N. Sillamy, *Słownik psychologii (Dictionary of Psychology)*, Książnica Publishing House, Katowice 1995, pp. 216–217; cf. W. Szewczuk, *Słownik Psychologiczny*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1985, p. 217.

² L.M. Rulla, *Psicologia del profondo e vocazione. Le persone*, Marietti, Torino 1975, p. 38.

³ S. Siek, *Osobowość*, ATK, Warszawa 1982, p. 159.

⁴ N. Cameron, *The Psychology of Behavior Disorders*, Reverside Press, Cambridge 1947, p. 105.

⁵ K. Obuchowski, *Psychologia dążeń ludzkich*, PWN, Warszawa 1966, p. 94.

⁶ J. Rejkowski, *Obraz własnej osoby jako mechanizm regulujący postępowanie*, Kwart. Pedagog. (1970) 3, p. 41.

⁷ J. Bielecki, *Wybrane zagadnienia psychologii*, ATK, Warszawa 1986, pp. 64–65; J. Bielecki, Potrzeby, in: *Psychologia nie tylko dla psychologów*, ed. J. Bielecki, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, Warszawa 2002, pp. 116–117.

sion states, a steady growth of some needs proceeding without the reduction of tension. This results in the improvement and development of human activity⁸.

Another key problem is the location of needs. They may be placed at three levels⁹. The spiritual level encompasses the following needs: searching for the Absolute (God) as well as for the ultimate meaning of reality, possessing a general plan of existence and finding one's main life path (intention). The psychosocial level includes needs being generally related to the respect a group shows for an individual, such as the need for friendship. The third, rational level comprises the needs for self-knowledge, positive identification, creativity and productivity, self-realisation and security.

The direction of needs may have two signs: (+) for positive needs and (–) for negative ones. However, there are also needs labelled with the mixed (+ –) sign, which may either be positive or negative, depending on the situation. Consequently, the need for aggressiveness is always negative and includes, among other things, attacking, vague defense, lying, and irony. The study of criminals' profiles indicates an important position of that need in their personality structure¹⁰. Politicians, on the contrary, seem to display the need for dominance, 'infecting' and controlling other people's behaviour by suggesting, prompting, ordering, explaining, informing, interpreting, teaching as well as organizing. As we can see, the need for dominance appears negative. In some situations, however, it can prove positive. Psychology views the need of self-humiliation (the lack of self-trust) as negative (a tendency toward a negative self-assessment, a passive submission to some external force, a fear of doing things to which one is predisposed. In religious life, however, there is a need of humility rather than self-humiliation. The need is positive and describes our aspirations for full knowledge of God, the love of our brothers, the ability to forgive, the wish for the good even to our enemies, and the mortification of bodily acts. The work of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, for instance, can be viewed as the best representation of the need to 'help others' that was being cultivated by this great and humble woman. The need signifies: a) sharing your positive feelings with a person lacking hope in life, insecure, disorientated, sick, tired, humiliated, lonely, isolated; b) assisting someone who has found himself in broadly-understood danger. It was as early as Freud whose long intellectual considerations resulted in distinguishing between two opposing needs: the instinct of life and death.

⁸ J. Bielecki, *Potrzeby...*, p. 117.

⁹ A. Cencini, A. Manenti, *Psicologia e formazione. Strutture e dinamicismi*, EDB, Bologna 1989, pp. 60–68; cf. W. Woźniak, *I bisogni, positivi e negativi*, Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne (2002–2003) 11–12, p. 149.

¹⁰ C.R. Hollin, *Psychology and crime. An introduction to criminological psychology*, Routledge, New York 2001; J. Harrower, *Psychology in Practice: Crime*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 2001.

One of the best known classifications (lists) of needs has been put forward by Henry Murray¹¹. The list includes the following needs: security, abasement, achievement, affiliation, aggression, autonomy, competence, deference, excusing oneself, dominance, exhibition, feeding and caring, order, play, isolation, sentience, sex, succourance (receiving protection and support), understanding, creativity.

THE RESEARCH METHOD APPLIED AND THE STATEMENTS OF THE RESEARCHED CHARGES

The methods of researching needs can be divided in standard – and non-standard. The former include the H. A. Murray's Questionnaire, M. I. Stein's Self-Portrait, and the Thematic Aperception Test.

The research presented in this article employed a non-standard technique, which consisted in writing a text referring to the following topic: '*I would like my future home to be...*' as well as '*A Letter to God (What do you want to tell God today?)*'. The research, conducted in December 2002, involved the participation of 20 female juvenile offenders (aged 15–19) of the Reformatory in Zawiercie, Poland. The research proceeded in a favourable atmosphere, without the confines of time and volume. The outcome was receiving 40 texts, each of them no longer than one manuscript page (A4). The method has proved useful. Below there are five random-chosen texts, authentic in form but slightly revised in terms of punctuation and style.

Text 1 by charge A: "I'd like my future home to be full of warmth and love and to be filled with peace and harmony; I wouldn't want to worry about affording to feed and dress my children; I'd like my husband to be tender and caring and not a nuisance; I'd want my children to feel secure and not anxious. In fact, I've never imagined my future home to be as bad as my present one. The main problem involves my father, and that is why I dread suffering such misfortune as my mother does. I don't know which principle I should follow in my marriage – the one of love or reason? My mother was led by love and now she is forever strung up, living in constant fear and anxiety. I guess things would have turned out differently if our family hadn't had the problem of alcoholism. I know it's not easy to find a good, industrious and honest husband in our world. I sometimes wonder whether it is worth at all to enter the stage of adult life and start a family".

Text 2 by charge A: "I'm writing this letter to you, God, as I can't discover the truth. Why is there so much injustice in the world? Why are people so pitiless and cruel toward one another? Lord, You gave life to man and You also take it away. You are gracious and merciful. Tell me, please, why there are so many

¹¹ H.A. Murray, *Explorations in Personality*, Oxford Univ. Press, New York 1938; cf. L.M. Rulla, F. Imoda, J. Ridick, *Struttura psicologica e vocazione-motivazioni di entrata e di abbandono*, Marietti, Torino 1981, pp. 195–196; J. Bielecki, *Potrzeby...*, pp. 120–137.

tears shed in this world? Why do the people who know about Your existence, consider themselves Christian and are acquainted with the Ten Commandments, act in Your defiance? Oh please, Lord, fill this world with love, warmth, and peace. Prevent people from lacking their daily bread. Make the existence of reformatories or prisons unnecessary. I ask you with all my heart to make the world free of violence. I realize that no one is perfect and we are all sinners but there are still people who would like to live peaceful lives”.

Text 1 by charge B: “I’d like my future home to be a nice and happy place, free from quarrels, one I could always come to and feel welcome. I wish my family members would love one another, be healthy and have everything they need. That’s the kind of home I’d like to have”.

Text 2 by charge B: “Thank You God for finding myself in a reformatory because following my path of crime would surely have led me to a prison. Also, thank You so much for giving me such a wonderful loving family who takes good care of me, for my grandmother who takes me home, for all the vital powers you gave me. I’ve thought it all over and I know I’ve done much harm; I regret it all so much and I’m grateful for Your standing by me all the time”.

Text 1 by charge C: “My dream is a house somewhere near a lake, without many cars passing by. I’d like my happy and healthy children to be running around my house and my loving husband to be waiting for me. I’d like my home to be a place full of happiness and joy, without any sorrow, quarrels or alcohol. I know I can start such a family myself but I realise I myself need to make a lot of effort. I’m anxious to have healthy children, who do well at school, never lack anything (in particular food and clothing) and never take drugs or drink alcohol.

Text 2 by charge C: “Father, at the moment I would like to ask You to forgive all the evil and harm I’ve done to people, particularly to my closest relatives. I know, God, that You’ll help me survive all of this. Although I’ve done so much harm to others, I believe You will give me this only chance, God. You are the only one who knows that I want to change myself. Please, Father, give me the power I need, especially now that Christmas is coming. I’d very much like to spend it with my family, share the Christmas wafer (p. – opłatek) with my mum and relatives, participate in decorating the Christmas tree, help them prepare Christmas Eve dishes and sing carols together”.

Text 1 by charge D: “My future home (and my dream home, too) will first of all mean having the whole family around. All the family, a lot of children, and being happy is what I desire. I wouldn’t want my child to go astray just as I did; I’d like him or her to be better educated than me, have a good job and a harmonious family so that he or she doesn’t need to worry about anything. My husband should be good, caring and hard-working, and he must not abuse alcohol. I’ve already gone through the nightmare of my father’s habitual drinking. I don’t want to end up like my mother, who was made to go and stay at friends while her husband was drinking with his mates. I’m not going to live in constant fear and be

quiet so as not to wake my husband. I just want to have a happy marriage and eventually be a good person. That's the way my future home should be like – full of warmth, harmony and joy. I'd like each new day to be more beautiful than the previous one, not grey and gloomy like my mother's days. I want to have a sane and normal home, different from the one of my mother's".

Text 2 by charge D: "Lord, I'd like to tell You I know that You're always watching over me, both in good and bad moments, and I'd like to thank You for that. Thank You for saving my life when I was going to commit suicide by taking pills. I got so sleepy that I thought I wasn't going to wake up but You must have decided I should not die and helped me wake up. Thank You so much for my loving mother who, I know, is thinking about me and waiting for me all the time even though she is not here with me. Lord, you've helped me so much in my life. I was angry with You when my sister died, thinking she didn't do anything wrong but still You took her from me. I've been wondering all the time why she passed away. Now I've understood You need her there, in heaven; that she is useful for something. I miss her but I'm glad she's there with You, that she is not alone. I sometimes have suicidal thoughts, Lord, but I immediately realise there are people my life is worth living for, there is my mum who loves me very much and is waiting for me all the time. Thank You, God, for everything, for the place I can return to and the people who love me.

Text 1 by charge E: "I'd like my future house to be large and fully-equipped, one I could bring up my children in and have my mum and my brothers and sisters around. My home should be full of affection, happiness, family warmth and love. I don't want any violence or alcohol abuse there, any shortage of daily bread. If only that were possible, I would like my family members to have everything they crave for, everything they need. I'd give my children the most expensive thing in the world if I could so that they would have all those things I've never had myself. I would like to have a husband who would help me provide for our family, would love me and the children; I don't want him to drink alcohol or use violence. I'd like my home to have a lot of family warmth so that I could do my best and show how much I love my husband and children and hide everything that has happened to me so far."

Text 2 by charge E: "Lord, I'd very much like to tell You about my life and I need to be understood. When I was a little girl, I landed in an orphanage, together with my two little brothers. It was because my mother (who abused alcohol) escaped from our home and left us alone. Our father lived with our granny then, but we didn't want to join them.. I missed my sister and her children so much that I began to escape from the orphanage. I loved them very much and that's why I thought my stay at the orphanage was the worst punishment I could get. As a consequence of my escapes, I had been moved from one centre to another until I was finally placed in a reformatory. I bear a serious grudge against my mother as I may not have been faced with all those hardships if mum had taken better

care of us. I hope I'll be able to forgive her one day and we'll be a complete family again. I have a dream that I'll be close to my mum and my beloved brothers and sisters again That's all I had to tell You, Lord; that's what hurts me so much".

The above texts were selected at random. One of the twenty charges being researched also wrote '*A Letter to God*' although she declared herself a non-believer. For this reason, it is worth becoming acquainted with her statement. "I'd like to tell God I don't believe in Him in the depth of my soul because He has never proved His existence to me.

If I were certain that God exists, I'd thank Him for His care of my dear mum who's got to work very hard. I thank Him for all the good things He has done to my family and me. I'd also want to ask Him to let me leave the reformatory (because I think I've already paid a penalty for the evil acts I committed) and to give my family some money as they need it badly, as well as ask Him for a long and healthy life for my family members. As long as I deserve that, I'd like to have a hard-working, loving and clever husband and one child – since I love children very much.

If God did all these things to me, I'd be grateful to Him with all my heart and I'd never say He doesn't exist."

TOWARDS THE ANALYSIS

The sample texts presented above have been random-selected. However, the analysis of the researched subject takes into account all the texts received (40). The actual research was followed by talking to the female charges involved in the research for 2 more hours and the material collected during these directed conversations has also influenced the analysis. The analysis is based on H. Murray's Needs List. Below I present only the main reflections.

The repeated studies of the texts written by young female offenders have led me to the conclusion that the need for security (i.e. life without violence or alcohol) is the basic need within that population. According to Murray, the need for security ought to be understood as threefold: a) a tendency to escape or avoid physical injury; b) a tendency to avoid being self-humiliated or embarrassed; c) a disposition to avoid psychical injury caused by other people¹².

Another need, noticeable in the lives of young female offenders, is the need for affiliation (understood largely as strengthening family bonds). The main tendency of the need is expressed through establishing contacts with other people, making efforts to win other people's feelings, being a loyal friend¹³.

¹² In: J. Bielecki, *Potrzeby...*, pp. 124–126.

¹³ *Ibididem*, p. 127.

The third major need occurring in the statements of the girls researched is the need for being cared for and supported. The main tendency of this need is to satisfy an individual's needs and wishes, or help to satisfy them, by someone an individual feels affinity for. The need can be characterized by the feelings of anxiety, helplessness, solitude and, in extreme cases, the feeling of despair¹⁴.

CONCLUSION

It seems relevant to employ non-standard methods more frequently when conducting research involving juvenile offenders. They may be particularly helpful in designing one's individual rehabilitation scheme.

It is also clear that rehabilitative actions toward juvenile offenders in reformatories ought to appeal to their needs for security, affiliation, care and support.

The statements of the researched offenders are valuable for the rehabilitation process due to their highly personal character, which is particularly noticeable in the *'Letters to God'*.

The statements also paint an indirect picture of the population of female charges in juvenile offender institutions and reformatories. The charges ought to be perceived not only as juvenile criminals (sometimes through no fault of their own, in fact), but as girls, human beings, having their own feelings, desires, needs and dreams. If the society allows these needs to be satisfied, it will be more secure.

POTRZEBY PSYCHOSPOŁECZNE DZIEWCZĄT Z „POPRAWCZAKA” NA PODSTAWIE WYPOWIEDZI NA ZADANY TEMAT

Streszczenie

Celem tego artykułu jest wnikięcie, oczywiście tylko częściowe, w strukturę potrzeb wychowanek zakładów poprawczych. Najpierw przytoczyłem wybrane definicje „potrzeby” oraz przedstawiłem szersze określenie tego elementu struktury osobowości, a następnie zaprezentowałem badania własne, przeprowadzone w Zakładzie Poprawczym w Zawierciu. W badaniach uczestniczyło 20 wychowanek. Posłużyłem się niestandardową techniką, polegającą na napisaniu tekstu na temat: „Chciałabym, aby mój przyszły dom był ...” oraz „Listu do Pana Boga (co byś chciała dziś Panu Bogu powiedzieć)”.

Wczytując się wielokrotnie w teksty wychowanek doszedłem do wniosku, że podstawowymi potrzebami w populacji wychowanek zakładów poprawczych są następujące potrzeby – bezpieczeństwa, stowarzyszania, doznawania opieki i oparcia. Dokonując analizy tekstów odniosłem się do klasyfikacji potrzeb Murraya.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 135–136.