THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF INCARCERATED WOMEN IN ROMANIA

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Abstract - Various studies highlight that factors such as poverty, disorganized family environments, lack of parenting skills, of flawed parenting practices, as well as educational relationships with parents and close individuals, as well as legal means of fulfilling needs, have a significant impact on the tendency to commit criminal acts. Therefore, we have set out to investigate these aspects regarding the social context of women serving definitive sentences for various types of offenses.

Keywords - Crimes, Social Context, Incarcerated Women

I. INTRODUCTION

The significant influence of the social context in which an individual grows and develops is recognized by theorists concerned with the study of human development. A person gradually acquires socialization skills starting with interactions within the family environment, continuing with school, and later extending to the professional environment. Through interactions with those around them, children learn the norms, values, and behaviors specific to their community; they develop their personal identity; they shape their behavior through observation and imitation; and they come to understand and comprehend the world.

Wilson and Herrnstein assert that human actions, including criminal behaviors, are generated by the social context in which the individual grows and develops, where they learn which behaviors are rewarded and which are punished. From their theoretical perspective, to clarify the causes of criminal acts and the inclination of certain individuals to engage in such acts, it is essential to understand how the environment influences the individual. Factors included in this category of contextual influences on antisocial human behavior are: the quality of the family environment, such as disorganized families, lack of parental skills, school failure/abandonment, and disadvantaged social environments.

The connection between disorganized families and criminal behavior has been studied since the 1920s. Slawson (1923) and later Burt (1925) suggest that delinquents are twice as likely to come from disorganized families compared to those who do not engage in criminal acts. This idea is further emphasized by other researchers, including Stratta (1970), Bottoms, and McClintock (1973). Additionally, numerous studies have correlated antisocial behavior with the quality of parenting practices. Parenting practices that generate antisocial behaviors include: how parents care for the child in the early stages of development, such as rejection and lack of responsiveness (Campbell, Shaw, and Gilliom); parental non-responsiveness (Shaw, Keenan, and Vondra; Wakschlag and Hans); parental rejection, the association between excessive control, abusive behaviors, and rejection of the child (Dishion; Dodge, Pettit, and Bates; Campbell; Younge, Oetting, and Deffenbacher).

I. Nye (1958) conducted an extensive study emphasizing the importance of the family in preventing criminal acts. He showed that delinquents come from families where they either had absolute freedom or none at all, did not respect parental authority, and were rejected by their parents. His research concluded that criminal acts are favored by the absence of direct control through restrictions and punishment, internal control by conscience, and indirect control manifested through the affective relationships that youths have with their parents and other close individuals, as well as access to legal means of fulfilling needs.

Attachment theory proponents have highlighted the risk of antisocial and disruptive behaviors in children who develop insecure attachments with their parents or caregivers in early childhood (Greenberg & Speltz; Shaw; Sroufe). Insecure avoidant attachment (Sroufe) and disorganized attachment (Lyons-Ruth, Alpern & Repacholi) to the mother are associated with early-onset criminal behaviors.

An essential stage for the socialization and adaptation of the child to the external world is entry into the community, namely schooling, which involves not only cognitive but also social components. In this phase, criminologists emphasize the importance of parental authority in ensuring that children

consistently attend classes. A. Reiss (1951) found that juvenile delinquents do not attend school regularly and are characterized by teachers as problematic students.

J. Toby points out that students with poor academic performance are more likely to engage in criminal behavior because they have nothing to lose, having lower expectations for the future. Low academic achievement, a negative attitude towards school, indifference towards results, absenteeism, and behaviors that violate institutional rules are factors that manifest during this period of schooling and have been correlated with delinquent behavior (Glueck, Sheldon & Glueck; Lishner; Rutter; Giller).

Socially disadvantaged environments are also included in the category of external factors that influence human behavior by promoting criminality. Reckless includes limited material opportunities, inadequate living conditions, low social status, unstable and conflict-ridden family environments, and delinquent peers. Shaw and McKay find that the rate of violent crimes is higher in areas with very low economic levels or the most disadvantaged economic situations. S. Spitzer, in 1973, showed that the proportion of violent criminal acts is higher in rural areas, where crime is viewed with more leniency.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

In the doctoral thesis titled "The Personality Profile of the Female Offender Deprived of Liberty," one of the established objectives was to characterize the sample in terms of their background, education, marital status, recidivism, professional qualifications, and occupation at the time of arrest.

The sample consisted of 200 women deprived of liberty from all types of imprisonment regimes within a penitentiary that houses women in Romania, representing 42.11% of the total number of incarcerated individuals at that time. The sample was structured into equal groups of inmates who had been definitively convicted of crimes such as murder, drug trafficking and use, theft, and economic crimes.

The tool used for identifying abuse was the Abuse and Trauma Detection Scale (Sander, Becker-Lausen). Additionally, for this objective, data from the PMSweb software application, as well as information from individual and psychosocial assistance files of the incarcerated individuals included in the research, were utilized.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

In this article, we will present the results concerning the background, early environment quality, education, marital status, recidivism, professional qualifications, and occupation at the time of arrest for the 200 incarcerated women included in the research.

Regarding the background, the analysis of the information indicates that the majority of the inmates, specifically 66%, come from urban environments, while 34% come from rural environments.

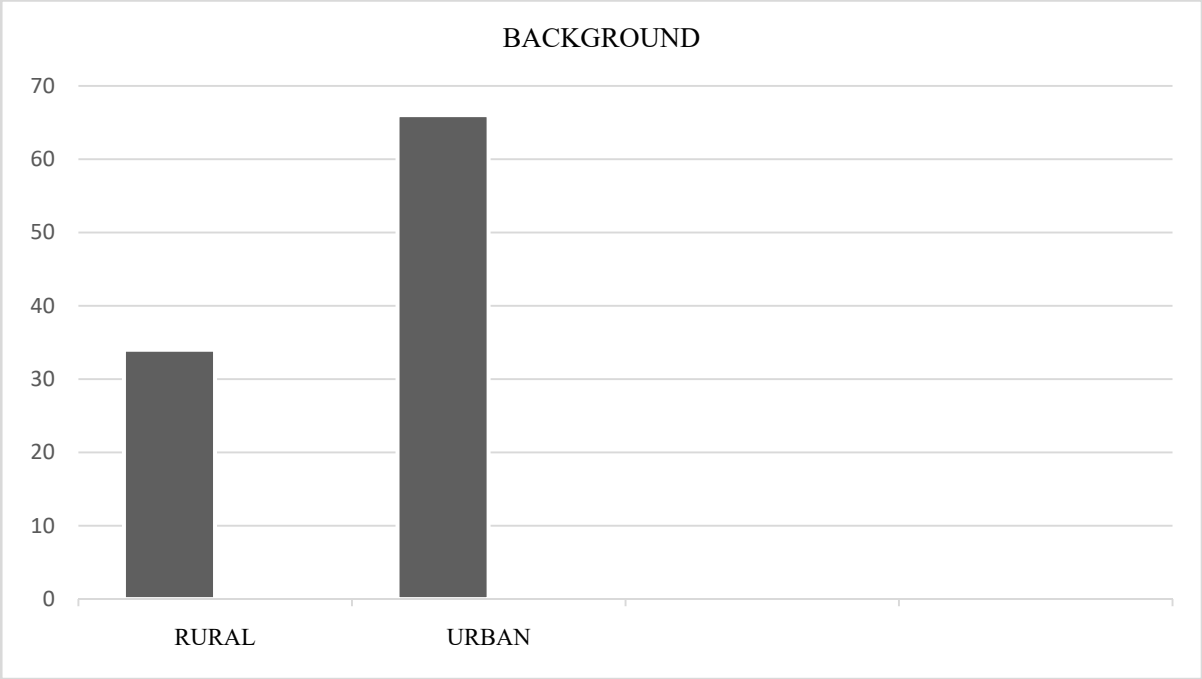

Figure 1. Percentages for the Variable Background

When referring to the quality of the early environment in which the incarcerated individuals included in the study grew up, it is observed that 59% of them experienced abuse during childhood, manifested through physical punishment, verbal violence, and even sexual abuse.

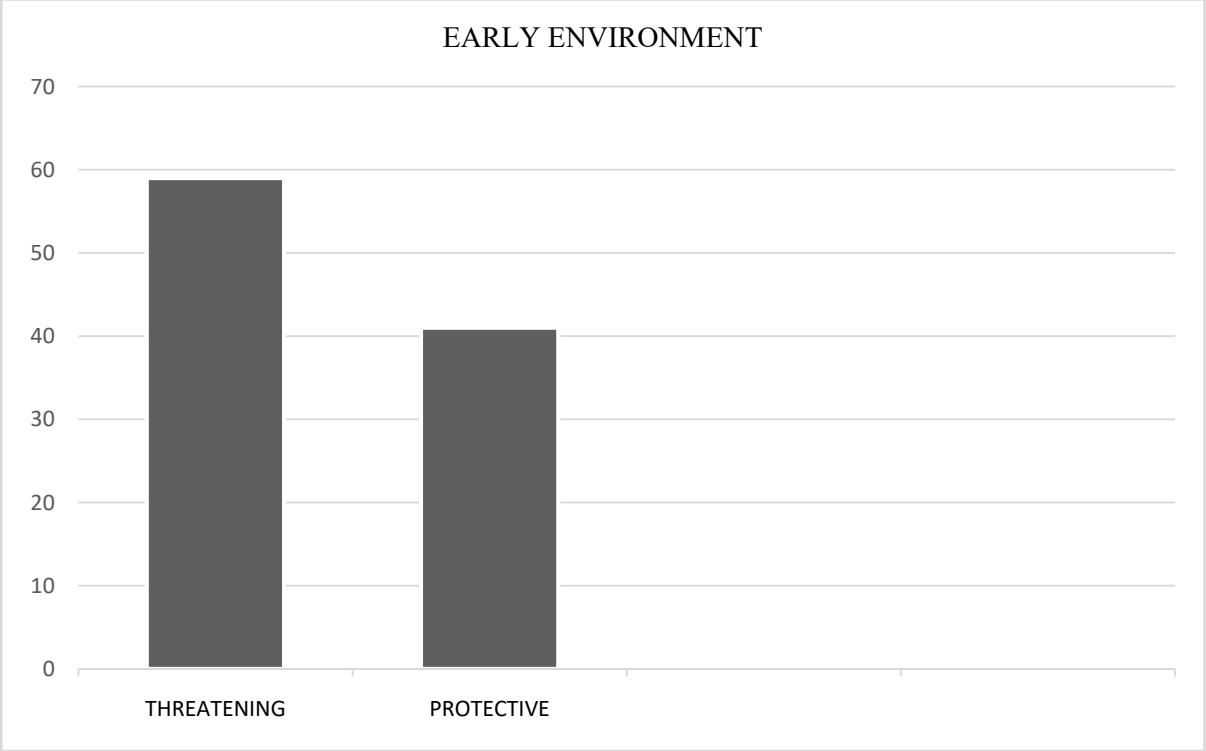

Figure 2. Percentages for the Variable Early Environment

Regarding the educational level of the female inmates, the research found that 33.5% of the respondents have completed junior high school, 36% have graduated from high school, 32% have higher education, 14% have completed primary education, 11% have completed 10 grades, and 7.5% are illiterate, having not participated in any form of formal education. A more detailed analysis of this factor shows that the highest level of education is found among inmates who have committed economic crimes.

The analysis of the marital status of the incarcerated individuals included in the study is presented in the table below.

		Percent
Valid	single	21.0
	married	38.0
	widow	6.0
	cohabitation	24.5
	divorced	10.5
	Total	100.0

Table 1. Percentages for Marital Status

The analysis of the legal status of the incarcerated individuals included in the study, in terms of the persistence of criminal behavior manifested through recidivism, indicates that the majority, specifically 53% of the respondents, have no prior criminal record. The percentage of those who have had elements of legal violations in their life history is 47%, with 19.5% having a criminal record and 27.5% being repeat offenders.

		Percent
Valid	No prior criminal record	53.0
	With a criminal record	19.5
	Repeat offender	27.5
	Total	100.0

Table 2. Percentages for Recidivism

Regarding the professional qualifications of the female inmates, it was found that a significant proportion, specifically 74%, have no qualifications, while the remaining 26% have various qualifications.

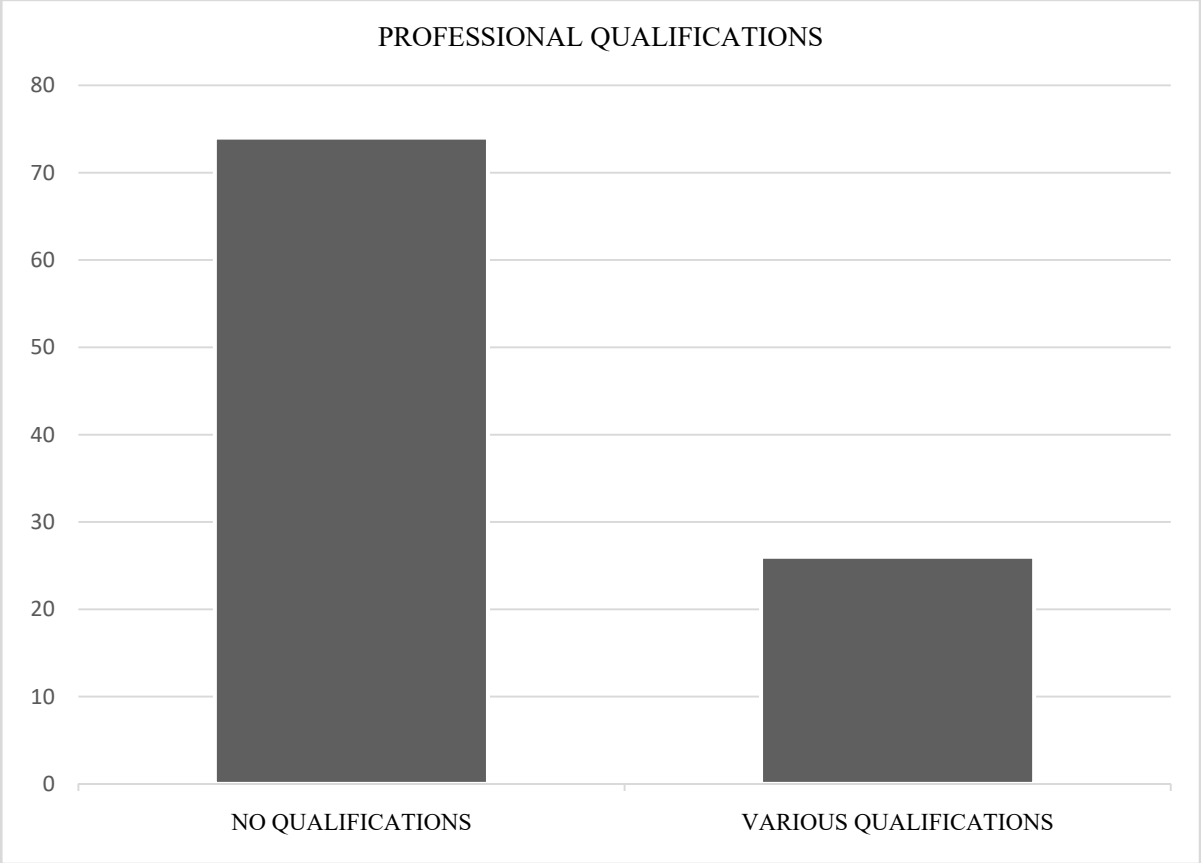

Figure 3. Percentages for the Variable Professional Qualification

Regarding the occupation of the incarcerated individuals at the time of their arrest, there is a similarity with the previous variable in that the majority of the inmates in the research sample had no occupation. Specifically, 82.5% of the 200 female inmates included in the study had no occupation at the time of their arrest, 14.5% were employed, and 3% were retirees.

CONCLUSIONS

By analyzing and synthesizing the data presented earlier, we can conclude that women incarcerated in Romania:

- Primarily come from urban environments
- Have a history of abuse, including physical punishment, verbal violence, and sexual abuse
- Have a low level of education
- Most are married
- Most of them do not have a criminal record, although the difference from those with past legal violations is only 6%
- A significant percentage do not have any professional qualifications and were not employed at the time of arrest

If we evaluate the similarities and differences between the studies presented in the introductory section of this article and the results of the research experiment, we can observe that the ideas of theorists who correlate the tendency to engage in criminal behavior with inadequate parenting practices are confirmed for our research sample as well. Although the effects of the early environment may vary depending on individual factors and specific circumstances, it cannot be ignored that a significant percentage of the women included in this research have a history of abuse. Thus, we can consider that the early environment has a significant impact on the development of criminal behavior.

In the introductory section, we highlighted the importance of education in child development and the views of criminologists who, in turn, emphasized the significant role of education in preventing antisocial behaviors. Our research results support these claims, indicating a low level of education among women who have engaged in criminal behavior. Therefore, we can conclude that adequate education can contribute to the development of prosocial behaviors and the prevention of criminal behaviors.

One of the disadvantages of a lack of education is the reduction in opportunities to develop or acquire practical skills and knowledge, resulting in limited employment opportunities and, ultimately, financial problems. As observed from the data presented above, a significant percentage of the incarcerated individuals included in the study had no professional qualifications and no employment that would provide a steady income at the time of their arrest.

We consider that identifying the risk factors of criminality is an essential step in reducing crime, allowing for the development of a delinquency prevention strategy tailored to social realities.

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