

**ISMGE 2020****II International Scientific and Practical Conference "Individual and Society in the  
Modern Geopolitical Environment"****WOMEN'S SENSE OF SELF AND ATTITUDES IN PLACES OF  
DETENTION**

Alexei Kombaev (a), Elizaveta Badmatsyrenova (b)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Political Science and Sociology Department, Dorzhi Banzarov Buryat State University, Smolina st., 24a, Ulan-Ude, Russia, kombaex@mail.ru

(b) Department of Theory and History of Law and State, Dorzhi Banzarov Buryat State University, Smolina st., 24a Ulan-Ude, Russia, el.leonidovna@mail.ru

***Abstract***

Considering the social diseases of society, we rarely associate women with them. A woman is synonymous with the birth and upbringing of children, homemaking, but by no means with crimes and prisons. It should be noted that female crime is running rampant, the number of recidivism among women is increasing. And if the morals prevailing in male prisons are known to almost everyone, then the female prison remains out of the focus of sociological research. This article doesn't claim to be completely scientific, but to a greater extent, it is aimed at lifting the veil on the life of convicted women, their sense of self in places of detention, and can serve as a basis for creation of the picture of the life of a woman in Russian prisons. The paper discusses the peculiarities of serving sentences in places of detention for women who have committed crimes. Based on a semi-structured in-depth interview, we have described the women's sense of self in prisons. Today it is improper to discuss the issues related to female crime or even to the closed community of convicted women. We made an attempt to reproduce the women's sense of self in the social environment of a closed social system and to analyze the patterns of behavior and social conditions that determine them. Summarizing the characteristic traits of this uncommon social group, the authors described everyday life of women serving sentences, their social motivation and attitudes.

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## **1. Introduction**

Considering the social diseases of society, we rarely associate women with them. A woman is synonymous with the birth and upbringing of children, homemaking, but by no means with crimes and prisons. Unfortunately, this is a stereotype, and today in Russia 43,874 women are in custody, or 7.9% of the total number of prisoners (Malkov, 2019). It should be noted that female crime is running rampant, the number of recidivism among women is increasing. And if the morals prevailing in male prisons are known to almost everyone, then the female prison remains out of the focus of sociological research. This article doesn't claim to be completely scientific, but to a greater extent, it is aimed at lifting the veil on the life of convicted women, their sense of self in places of detention, and can serve as a basis for creation of the picture of life of a woman in Russian prisons (Osinsky & Gaidai, 2006).

## **2. Problem Statement**

When obtaining empirical data, we tried to create a trusting atmosphere, which in our opinion, allowed us to get the unique material on the feelings, sense of self and perception of everyday life by convicted women. We've leaved this material as it is since in our view it is the only possible way to feel the atmosphere of a women's prison and understand the importance of the problem under discussion. We made an attempt to draw an attention of the scientific community to the consideration of such a sociological object as women in correctional facilities.

## **3. Research Questions**

It is difficult to study the selected object of sociological research, because of the specific conditions of women's isolation and supervision in places of detention.

There are 223 women convicted in offences of varying gravity in the colony with a strict regime No. 7 of the Republic of Buryatia in Ulan-Ude, the total limit of the colony, i.e. the maximum capacity of the facility is 239 convicted.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The paper discusses the peculiarities of serving sentences in places of detention for women who have committed crimes. Based on a semi-structured in-depth interview, we have described the women's sense of self in prisons. Today it is improper to discuss the issues related to female crime or even to the closed community of convicted women. We made an attempt to reproduce the women's sense of self in the social environment of a closed social system, and to analyse the patterns of behaviour and social conditions that determine them.

## **5. Research Methods**

With the permission and assistance of the Administration of the Buryat Republic Federal Penitentiary Service, we have carried out an in-depth interview and a questionnaire with convicts. In our opinion, such a combination of methods allowed us to obtain the objective data and create the most

truthful social portrait of a specific social group of convicted women. The study was carried out in the framework of the specialized secondary school No. 15, which is located in the colony with a strict regime No. 7. The convicted women were interviewed in specialized classrooms without the presence of correctional educators. The questionnaire also took place in classrooms. In such conditions, which are as close as possible to the conditions outside of isolation and supervision, in our opinion, a person feels more comfortable and more disposed to conversation. We conducted 30 semi-standardized in-depth interviews, and using the questionnaire interviewed 100 convicted women and 10 employees of the correctional colony No. 7. In this regard, such interviews or conversations are different from the structured or semi-structured interviews used in sociological research (Siegel, 2008).

## 6. Findings

Social passport of convicted women serving sentences in the correctional colony No. 7.

The women in the correctional colony committed grievous and extremely grievous crimes. Many of them have more than 2 convictions. The main age group is from 18 to 35. It should be noted that in recent years female crime has a tendency to rejuvenation (Radnaeva, 2015). The ethnic composition is predominantly Russian. Most of the women in the correctional colony do not have a family, are orphans, or came from a single-parent family. The overwhelming majority of convicts are healthy, employees of the correctional colony maintain records of patients and their treatment. There is a medical center on the basis of the colony, which provides medical care for convicted. 105.1, 162.3, 228 and other less grievous articles are the most common articles of the Russian criminal code under which women are convicted. Many of the interviewed women cite domestic violence as the reason for committing crimes (Badonov, 2017). Men often become victims of violent crime, because of their own unlawful behaviour. Women, being latent victims of domestic violence, can't withstand further spousal abuse and batteries, and commit murder or cause grievous bodily harm to their spouse or cohabiter, who often insulted and beat them (Radnaeva & Badonov, 2019).

In recent years in the Russian Federation there has been an increasing number of such crimes committed by women as the murder of a newborn child by a mother, kidnapping, illegal imprisonment, hooliganism, robbery, robbery, extortion, rape, receiving and giving bribes, illegal arms and ammunition circulation (Mongush & Mongush, 2017).

Before serving their sentences, almost all the interviewed women in one way or another faced the manifestations of criminal activity in their families or surrounding community, often their cohabitants, husbands or one of the parents had /have served time in prison (Grudinin, 2018).

Anastasia, convicted under Articles 162.2, 158.2, 150:

"I am in jail, and my husband is in jail, I am here because of him, and he will do a full term in prison, this means that I should also be inside. It's easy for me to serve under my article. After release, it will be clear what to do further..."

Victoria, convicted under Article 228:

"My father was in jail, but my mother and I did not really see him. He was a good man, as it's said, there is no fence against ill fortune..."

Svetlana, convicted under Article 105:

“I don’t know my parents, only grandmother. They say, my father was in prison, he was ill for a long time and died. I didn’t know him, and I don’t know anything about my mother...”

Anna, convicted under Article 105:

“The longer I am in jail, the more thoughts are in my head. I understood many things, talked with two brothers who serve the prison terms”.

Many interviewed said that the prison was known to them before their conviction.

Women's sense of self, status and role attitudes in places of detention.

We should note that sense of self is a very subjective state of a person, which depends on many factors, ranging from mental health to the social environment. Discomfort and transformation of familiar patterns of social behaviour are usual in the conditions of isolation. Many of our respondents said that in the colony distrust prevails over almost all other feelings. There are no friends in the conventional sense, moreover, many convicted women identify themselves not as criminals like all others, but to a greater extent as victims of circumstances and injustices of the legal system (Kombaev & Yumozhapov, 2019).

Milinda, convicted under Articles 105, 228:

“At first, it was uneasy, the situation and people were very scared, I had to live as people dictate. I had a feeling of a real prison. Now, after 5 years, everything has changed, it has become habitual, I don’t fear, as if this feeling was removed from the body, as if it should be so, fatigue is strong from everything, I haven’t instincts of self-preservation, my thinking is changed, the naivety disappeared, but a distrust of others appeared”.

Anastasia, convicted under Article 166, part 2:

“When I first went to jail, I was very withdrawn, embittered, useless to anyone, and now, having lived here for 11 months, I still can’t get it together and understand where I am, it’s very difficult for me to understand all this, it’s not mine and not my world. The convicted annoy me here, I can’t understand their attitude, here we need to adapt to everyone, a little is decided by the administration, they don’t listen to everyone, they pay heed only to the chosen people. And so I live alone, where no one understands me, and will never understand”.

Lyudmila, convicted under Article 105:

“From the first days of being put in jail, I felt scared, sad and lonely. I didn’t trust anyone, suspected a trick, was withdrawn. And after 4 years, I take a new look at all. Convicted woman are sociable, funny, and at the same time lonely, short-spoken. I talk only with those, who are trusted, and there are few such people here, out of a total of 200 convicted only 30 are reasonable, sincere and fair minded”.

It is interesting that most of the convicts consider money, connections and acquaintances with people who have an influence on the administration of the colony a basis for more comfortable cohabitation in custody. 43% of the convicted women have such an opinion, 21% of respondents said that visits of relatives, their support, both moral and material (food and things not prohibited in the colony) provide them with physical and psychological comfort.

Some women have a psychological attachment to officers of the colony administration, which activates the mechanism of denying themselves as criminals, and their further self-identification with the colony officials.

Ekaterina, convicted under Article 105:

“The colony No. 7 is a morass, where convicts don’t understand how hard is the work of corrections officers, no one understands them, it’s very hard here, you live in fear all the time, everyone condemns you, I hate this colony and the convicts here, they psyche me out”.

Usually, such convicted women are more inclined to cooperate with the colony administration and willingly engaged in the public activities encouraged by the administration.

There is a completely different behavioural attitude, determined by the denial of the rules and norms that exist in the colony. Many convicted women are absolutely convinced of the absence of justice and regard their stay in prison either as ill fate or as the injustice of the judicial system.

Evgenia, convicted under Article 228:

“...” A colony is a place wrought by an unfair court. Justice does not exist, but everyone has his own justice. “...”

“Justice certainly must be, but is not obliged! And as a rule, it is practically absent! And for those who are trying to find it, everything is even more complicated! And there is a phrase: ‘Do not seek for justice, it is not here!’ At least that’s what they very often here, in the colony. “...”

The embodiment of injustice and the instrument for the implementation of injustice is the colony itself, and the colony officers provide injustice (Zudaev & Badonov, 2015, p. 35). So, as far as possible the convicted comply with the internal rules as a necessary evil, but at the same time, they should follow the internal code of prisoners, “unsettle the regime”, i.e. resist some decisions of the administration, defend their own rules. Such a behavior is typical of convicted women, as well as convicted men. It should be noted that the degree of disobedience to internal regulations largely depends on the colony in which prisoners serve their sentence. (Kombaev, & Badmatsyrenov, 2020) Among the convicts, all colonies are divided into “red” and “black”. In the “red” colonies, the regime and undeniable rules instituted by the administration are abided by. In “black” colonies, internal relations are almost completely regulated by convicts, many of them in such colonies have incomprehensible privileges and social influence on other convicted. Usually, they are women convicted under so-called proper articles — robbery, plundering, disorderly conduct. From the point of view of the underworld, murder is also the proper article. But it is necessary to take into account the motives: the murder of the rapist as a result of self-defense is justly in the world of convicts, and the murder of children or parents is contemptible. Those of convicted, who killed parents or children, are usually socially excluded and considered castaways along with convicted under Article 240 of the Russian Criminal Code “Involvement in prostitution”.

Many women are forced to adapt to the existing rules; in fact, they have double or even triple punishment: sincere repentance, punishment by other convicts, and isolation.

Olga, convicted under Article 105, part 1, Article 111, part 2:

“When I was taken from the courtroom to the temporary detention center, I felt uncomfortable, I lost track of time, my thoughts were confused, and above all else I did not know what would happen next... And this uncertainty scared me a little, although I’m not timid. When they brought me to the pre-trial detention center, and I had undergone inspection and all these banal procedures, I couldn’t believe that this was happening to me ... I couldn’t believe that I could kill a person, not the unknown, but closed

one ... And this feeling of guilt... Passing through the corridors and hearing the banging, the roll calls of other convicted or accused, the clang of these iron keys and doors, I felt loneliness and hopelessness, then I crossed the threshold of the cell, which was about 10 m<sup>2</sup> in size, and there were already three girls. First, I thought that I would have to spend 10 long years here in the pre-trial detention center... And, of course, I was scared ... I probably smoked a couple of packs of cigarettes right away, I didn't want to eat at all ... Unconsciously my arms reached out to my trouser pocket — to see the time, but no one had watched here. The confined space ... I could not find a place for myself, I could not sit, I walked from corner to corner. When they had already transferred me to the correctional colony No. 7, the attitude of the officers immediately caught my eye. We are nothing for them and have no names, worse still we are women. It was difficult to get used to the daily regimen and morning exercises, and to the life under video surveillance. A strict day's routine and a lot of unnecessary information. A colony is a place where there are many people, but each of them is alone, so, life here is survival. One must always be on the alert”.

Anastasia (did not name the Article, under which she was convicted):

“When I got to prison for the first time, my first impression was that I fell into some kind of hell. It was very scary: strange people, bars, cameras. It was frustrating for me. Then, when I arrived at the colony and saw a lot of women in a green uniform here, honestly speaking, my legs gave way. Many of them seemed to me malicious, they have black look. Then, when I went up to my section and got to know everyone, it wasn't so scared, many convicted mask their true feelings. They are different than they seem. Various events are held here, funny and not. Anyway, whether it is good or bad here, it's better at home with my loved ones. I don't wish anyone to get here”.

In addition to deep remorse and punishment in the form of isolation, pressure from convicts some women feel fear. The reasons for this fear lie in the fact that the relatives of their victims can get their own back on them. And this feeling along with many others causes persistent depressive states.

The social structure in places of detention for women seemed to us less aggressive and hierarchical than in male colonies (Gilinskiy, 2000). Social roles in female prisons depend on the age, social and professional skills of a certain woman. Thus, women who are good with a needle or have other socially useful skills often have a rather high status in the community of convicted. As we have already mentioned above, the article under which a woman was convicted also is important, murderers of children or parents, prosecutors of prostitution are despised, and often such convicts do not participate in collective decision-making. But women almost don't use complete isolation or violence towards them, as it takes place in male prisons. Parcels from outside (unprohibited food and things) are of great worth in the female colony, the more often woman get parcels from relatives and friends, the more solid they are, the more stable is the status of the convicted.

In women's colonies there are trusties, they can be orderlies and brigade leaders. These are people who are in some way connected with the administration or have clout with them. Therefore, they have privileges in relation to other convicts. It should be noted also that in the colony there are also the convicted who use destructive practices. They purposely violate the regime of serving sentence and the established order in the colony, trying to gain authority among other convicts (Gambetta, 2009). The governing motives for such behavior are adherence to the ideals of the criminal world and woman's social

status in the criminal community before conviction, as a rule, in the male criminal community, in which a woman was involved for one reason or another (Zugumov, 2015).

Marina (did not name the Article, under which she was convicted):

“...” I can’t live according to their rules, my boyfriend is in jail in the correctional colony No. 2, he’s ‘blatnoy’ (a person involved in a corruption, informal agreements, exchanges of services) and he will do a full term in prison, I should also ‘unsettle the regime’ so that no one can challenge me on the outside. That’s life “...”

Ekaterina (did not name the Article, under which she was convicted):

“...” There is no life here, I only exist, sometimes I don’t want to live, because there is no meaning in life here. It is a struggle for survival, I have to be cruel in this life”.

## 7. Conclusion

Speaking with women in the colony with a strict regime, we came to some obvious, but very interesting and sometimes frightening conclusions. The perception of the colony by women is different, firstly, it depends on their level of education and previous social practices. For example, for many young criminals from a difficult background, being in jail is not something out of the common, but a normal occurrence, as in their surrounding community one of the relatives or friends served or serve a sentence in prison (Grabelnykh, 2000). We can say that a certain group of women consider the prison as an inevitable stage of growing up like army for young people. Many of the young criminals get education, learn to keep within the law, to live in a way that their relatives and social environment didn’t offer them until isolation from society.

Long periods of isolation lead to a distortion of social reality. The world around even outside of isolation is perceived as a hostile environment, which must be resisted by any possible means. And since there is no justice in women’s perception, they can only rely on themselves, and achieve their goals by any means. For many of convicted women landing up in jail again is not a question of if but when.

The key determinant of the correctional rehabilitation is not the practice of isolation, but strong social ties on the outside and family support.

The colony and officers providing penitentiary regime are perceived through a lens of the social experience and social environment before isolation from society, the so-called trustees consider the colony administration the evil that must be confronted.

During the interview, we had noted that almost all women experience discomfort caused by compliance with a day's routine and pressure of the social environment. The obligation to obey the formal and informal rules in places of detention leads to emotional breakdowns and, as a consequence, to violation of the established rules, such behaviour entails sanctions both from the administration and from other convicted. Many women, trying to escape from the reality surrounding them, attempt suicide or replace reality with religious practices.

In our opinion, women's sense of self is a kind of indicator that allows one to estimate the efficiency of the system of isolation, to reveal the weaknesses in organization of female isolation, and to propose the changes, which will make it possible to create a system for treatment, but not for suppression of the personality resulting in return to crime.

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