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Prisoners` Social Representations of Justice and Just World

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Abstract: The study of psychological features of offenders and prisoners has interdisciplinary nature; however, there are still disagreement in issues that concern the view on the prevention of recidivism and successful prisoners` re-socialization. This problem is particularly topical in Latvia as, according to statistical data, Latvia has one of the highest crime and recidivism indicator among EU countries. The choice of law-obedient or criminal behaviour is determined by several factors, though one of the most important is the level of individual`s moral and legal cognition. In turn, representations of justice and the belief in a just world are constituent parts of moral and legal cognition that largely determine the choice of socially accepted social norms in everyday life. The aim of this research is to study social representations of justice and just world of prisoners (N=100) and law-obedient citizens (N=600) of Latvia on the basis of S. Moscovici theory of social representations by developing three factor model of social representation of justice that includes justice of legal, moral and interpersonal relations.

Keywords: Prisoners`, Justice, Just World, Social Representations

REPRESENTATIONS OF JUSTICE is an important component of everyday life that determines the tendencies of individuals` mutual interaction in practically all spheres of life, thus influencing individuals` behaviour and emotional states. Several researchers stress that justice is the most important issue because individuals want to get what they deserve and want to be treated just, as well as to be able to trust the justice of others (Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, Maes, 2010). There is no single definition of justice in the present day psychology. Some authors (Belickis et al., 2000) define justice as a feature that characterises certain assessment of moral cognition, attitude and that expresses as conformity with reality, truth; a moral obligation that is derived from representations of a human being and his rights. Myers (Myers, 2007) argues that justice is a condition where the “income” from mutual relations of every participant is proportional to his “contribution”; in addition, justice does not always mean equal “income”. Kluchin (1997) interprets justice as conformity of human relations to legal norms. In turn, Guseinov and Apresjan (2000) explain justice as one of the principles that regulates humans` mutual relations that is connected with distribution of social values; in addition, such notions as freedom, beneficial opportunities, income and wealth, signs of respect and other values are perceived as social values. Montada (1998) provides broader definition of this phenomenon and stresses that justice is a need, moral requirement for social life; it is not a mean to achieve personal goals but a goal in itself. In the context of social psychology justice traditionally is perceived as psychological state of individual`s experience that is connected with his contribution and the conformity of reward

that has regulating power in humans' mutual relations. This state is connected with social identification of the individual (Sosnina, 2006).

Gulevich (2007) defines justice as an important criterion that a person uses to assess other people and events, emphasizing the fact that justice is an integral part of legal and moral cognition. As it can be seen from the above mentioned definitions of different authors, there is no single opinion about justice, thus, it indicates complex and multidimensional nature of this phenomenon and determination of its essence needs specification. There are at least two leading approaches in psychology for justice research – justice as a phenomenon of cognitive action and justice as a determinant of behavioural processes. The origins of justice studies in the context of cognitive psychology can be traced in the works of Kohlberg's (1984) moral theory and his followers (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, Bebeau, 2000), in turn, the other approach is connected with justice studies in social psychology, including theories of distributive (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1961; Walster, Berscheid, Walster, 1976; Deutsch, 1985; Powell, 2005; Bar-Hillel, Yaari 1993; Gulevich, Golinchik, 2004 a.o.) and procedural (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler & Smith, 1998; Lupfer et.al., 2000; Murphy, 2009 a.o.) justice.

Several perspectives on justice research in the context of cognitive approach were established. One of the most extensive present day approaches is connected with the study of this phenomenon in the context of entirety, studying representations of justice (Sosnina, 2006; Golinchik, 2004; Gulevich, 2007 a.o.) in the context of moral and legal cognition. Several studies stress that justice is the leading element of moral cognition (Kohlberg, 1984; Vasquez et.al., 2001; Mullen & Skitka, 2006; Sosnina, 2006) and representations of justice make the content of legal cognition (Shmitt, Eid, Maes, 2003; Golinchik, 2004). In addition, some studies (Dalbert & Filke, 2007; Otto & Dalbert, 2005) revealed that perception of justice is connected with the choice of socially acceptable norms of behaviour and serves as an important adaptive function that helps individuals to control such negative emotional reactions as hostility and aggression. Taking into consideration the fact that offenders differ from law-obedient members of the society with a specific level of moral development, difficulty of legal socialization and generally distorted perception of the world (Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Tapp & Levine, 1977; Caspi & Moffitt, 1993; Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Antonjan, Jenikejev, Eminov, 1996; Wolf, Addad, Arkin, 2003; Gulevich, 2006 et.al.), it serves as one of the reasons why the study of social representations of justice in terms of this social group is essential. The other aspect for the justification of the choice of social representations theory (Moscovici, 1961, 1988; Jodelet, 2008; Abric, 1994; Wagner et.al., 1999; Markova, 2003, 2008 et.al.) as a methodological study is connected with a fragmented nature of justice problem. Justice studies in the present day psychology have a multidimensional nature and justice generally is viewed through narrow interpretations, for example, in the contexts of benefit distribution or norms of just procedure control, thus losing the social nature of this phenomenon. Considering Moscovici's opinion that social representations are the entirety of notions, statements and interpretations that arise in everyday life from interpersonal communication (Moscovici, 1984) and they are the entirety of emotional and cognitive components (Moscovici, 1988), the theory of social representations allows to view justice phenomenon in the entirety context and to reveal the essence of this notion's content, thus providing answers to such questions as what is justice and what is its structure? The third problem that had an impact on the necessity of the realisation of this study is the lack of such studies in Latvia. Statistical data show that the level of crime and recidivism in Latvia is one

of the highest among European countries that indicates the necessity to study the socio psychological factors for antisocial behaviour. Considering the fact that justice is a component of moral and legal cognition, the analysis of prisoners' social representations of justice and determination of differences from the representations of law-obedient inhabitants would enable to use the acquired results from the study for the improvement of re-socialization programmes in Latvia, thus facilitating the reintegration of this social risk group in the society.

The main aim of the study is to study prisoners' social representations of justice in the context of the factors of the just world perception – interpersonal, legal and moral. Several questions were raised in the study: a) what is the content of social representations of justice in the group of imprisoned respondents? b) what variables (criminal experience, admission of guilt, socio demographic characteristics) influence prisoners' social representations of justice? c) are there any differences in social representations of justice between the groups of imprisoned and law-obedient respondents?

Method

Participants

195 prisoners within the age group from 18 to 60 ($M=32,4$; $SD=9,5$) from Daugavgrivas prison and Ilguciema female prison (Latvia) took part in the study, out of which 94 were females within the age group from 18 to 60 ($M=32,4$; $SD=10,5$) and 101 males within the age group from 18 to 52 ($M=32,5$; $SD=8,4$), and 502 respondents in control group that were not put to trial within the age group from 18 to 60. There is no statistically significant difference between experimental and control group in terms of gender or age. It was determined that according to prisoner's level of education 90 participants (46%) did not completed or have only compulsory education, 100 (51%) have secondary or vocational education, and only 5 participants (3%) had higher education. In the control group 14% law-obedient participants had compulsory education, 45% - secondary education and 42% - higher education. Participants' marital status analysis revealed that 62 prisoners (32%) have a spouse and 133 (68%) are single; in turn, in the group of law-obedient participants 41% have a spouse and 59% are single. The analysis of prisoners' criminal experience revealed that 61 participants have the first criminal record that makes 31%; in turn, more than 4 criminal records have 69 participants (35%); in addition, imprisoned males have higher criminal experience – more than 4 criminal records had 50 (38%) males. According to the type of offence, 54 (28%) prisoners are sentenced for violent crimes – homicide, crimes against health, morality, 70 (36%) participants – for offences connected with hooliganism, breach of general order, smuggling, corruption, road safety violations, distribution of drugs; in addition, only 22% of females are sentenced for violent crimes and 43% for other offences connected mostly with distribution of drugs or drug use. In turn, 33% of males are sentenced for violent crimes and 37% for crimes against property. 60 (59%) male and 16 (17%) female prisoners had the first criminal record before the age of 18, 22 male and 38 female prisoners - from the age of 18 to 23, after the age of 24 – 19 (19%) male and 40 (43%) female participants. According to the overall time spend in prison, 22 (22%) male and 51 (54%) female participants have spent less than 3 years, 47 (46%) male and 37 (39%) female prisoners – 4 to 10 years, and more than 10 years in prison have spent 32 (32%) male and 6 (6%) female participants. The

most of prisoners (143) plead themselves guilty for crimes they are sentenced for; only 27% (52 participants) do not plead themselves guilty for crimes they have committed.

Procedure

Participants were offered to fill in the questionnaire that included the general part – questions about age, the level of education, marital status, for prisoners – criminal experience (the type of offence last sentenced for, the age of the first criminal record, overall time spent in imprisonment, and the period of time since the last imprisonment) and the subjective admission of guilt.

In the second part the participants were asked to range the indicators of a just world on the basis of their representations of a just world; at first, in three rows reflecting three different factors that are conditionally labelled as *interpersonal justice*, *legal justice*, *moral justice*, where the indicator that is assessed as the highest parameter of a just world gets rank 3, and then, indicators were ranged within the framework of each factor from 1 to 7, where the highest rank is 7 and it has the indicator that the participant assesses as the highest. The values of testing the just world indicators are acquired through double ranking and further multiplying of rank values. Acquired rank values are multiplied and further are viewed as the significance of corresponding indicators. The assessment of factors is gained summarizing the values of corresponding indicators. For the further interpretation the standardisation of initial testing values of indicators and factors was made.

Instrumentation

To determine the social representations of justice the questionnaire “Social representations of justice in interpersonal, legal and moral context” was used. The questionnaire includes three factors’ model – interpersonal justice, legal justice and moral justice, each factor has 7 indicators of the just world (see Table 1.)

Table 1: Three Factors’ Model – Interpersonal Justice, Legal Justice and Moral Justice

	Factor 1 Interpersonal justice	Factor2 Legal justice	Factor 3 Moral justice
Indicator	Love towards people	Equality in country	Peoples’ sincerity in everyday life
	Compassion and help for the weaker	Vindication for the offence	Action according to conscience
	Forgiveness for the offence	Punishment for crime	Magnanimous action
	Reward in accordance with contribution and competence	Equality in benefit distribution	Fair people
	Respect towards the others	Objective decisions	Observance of moral norms
	Family support	Fair trial	Responsibility for actions
	Reliable friends	Compliance with law	Observance of honour principles

The questionnaire is developed on the basis of previous studies (Mihailova, 2009, 2010) on social representations of justice that were carried out using the method of associative analysis.

Results

To answer the first question raised in the study – what is the content of social representations of justice in the group of imprisoned respondents – the analysis of average values of indicators of justice perception factors was made (see Table 2.)

Table 2: The Assessment of Separate just World Indicators in the Group of Imprisoned Participants

Interpersonal justice (F1)			Legal justice (F2)			Moral justice (F3)		
	(M)	(SD)		(M)	(SD)		(M)	(SD)
Love towards people	10.24	6.02	Equality in country	6.08	4.46	Peoples' sincerity in everyday life	7.66	5.58
Compassion and help for the weaker	8.35	5.06	Vindication for the offence	5.87	4.53	Action according to conscience	8.19	5.87
Forgiveness for the offence	6.11	4.96	Punishment for crime	6.26	5.41	Magnanimous action	7.64	5.11
Reward in accordance with contribution and competence	7.32	6.27	Equality in benefit distribution	6.28	4.47	Fair people	11.57	6.20
Respect towards the others	8.42	5.39	Objective decisions	9.74	5.52	Observance of moral norms	7.71	6.43
Family support	11.92	6.60	Fair trial	8.44	5.74	Responsibility for actions	8.34	5.53
Reliable friends	10.32	6.02	Compliance with law	8.26	5.51	Observance of honour principles	9.40	5.85
Total	62.69	11.52		50.93	12.01		60.51	12.45

The results showed statistically significant differences between Legal justice factor and Interpersonal justice (Paired Samples Test, $p < 0.01$) and perception of Moral justice (Paired Samples Test, $p < 0.01$); in turn, between Interpersonal and Moral justice no statistically significant differences were found (Paired Samples Test, $p = 0.112$). Imprisoned participants assess in general the Interpersonal justice as the highest, in turn Legal justice as an indicator

of the just world – as the lowest. Analyzing the indicators of representations of just world, the highest assessment got such components as Family support (F1), Fair people (F3), Reliable friends (F1), Love towards people (F1) and Objective decisions (F2); it shows that representations of justice are made by those indicators that are responsible for justice in interpersonal relations, including moral value – fairness and the indicator of legal factor – objectiveness. Representations of just world are the least characterized by such indicators as Vindication for the offence (F2), Equality in country (F2), Forgiveness for offence (F1), Punishment for crime (F2) and Equality in benefit distribution (F2) that generally make the content of Legal justice factor.

To answer the second question raised in the study – what variables (criminal experience, admission of guilt, socio demographic characteristics) influence prisoners' social representations of justice – initially, to ease the analysis of different rates or one and the same rate among different groups of participants, testing values of factors and indicators were standardised, for the further analysis single factor dispersion analysis of variance (ANOVA) with subsequent Multiple Comparisons and Student-t criterion were used.

Results revealed that the just world factors are generally influenced by only few participants' characteristics. The assessment of Interpersonal justice is influenced only by gender; it was found that there is a tendency of statistically significant difference in the assessment of F1 between men and women (Independent Sample Test, $p=.070$), imprisoned males assess justice of interpersonal relations higher than females. The assessment of legal factor is influenced by the type of offence that participants are sentenced for ($F=2.58$, $p=.078$). Prisoners that are sentenced for violent crimes (homicide, serious bodily injuries, sex crimes) show higher results in the assessment of legal justice than participants with less serious crimes (hooliganism, drug distribution or use, etc.), who perceive the just world with the indicators of Moral justice; in turn, violent offenders in average assess the Moral justice factor as the lowest, although these differences are not statistically significant ($F=1,868$, $p=.157$). The tendency of statistically significant difference is found in the assessment of Moral justice among respondents in terms of overall time spent in prison ($F=2.519$, $p=.083$), the highest assessment of F3 is among those respondents whose overall time spent in prison is 4 to 10 years, in turn the lowest assessment for this factor is among prisoners who have spent more than 11 years in prison. The analysis of other criminal career parameters (the age of the first imprisonment, the number of criminal records and the general level of criminality) and socio demographic parameters (age, education, marital status) revealed that social representations of the just world are not sensitive to these characteristics and statistically significant difference in these groups was not found in any of the just world perception factors. However, the just world assessment factors F2 and F3 are sensitive to participants' sense of guilt; the results revealed a statistically significant difference among participants that plead and do not plead themselves guilty for crimes in the assessment of Moral justice (Independent Sample Test, $p=.001$) and the tendency of difference in perception of Moral justice (Independent Sample Test, $p=.06$). Legal justice had higher rates in the group that denies their guilt in the crime they are sentenced for, in turn Moral justice is higher assessed by those participants that plead themselves guilty for the crime they have committed.

To determine the distribution of participants into clusters according to social representations of the just world, cluster analysis was made and three homogeneous groups were created – the first group – participants with low Legal justice (LJ), the second group – participants with low Interpersonal justice (IPJ), and the third group – participants with low Moral justice

(MJ). The results revealed that there are statistically significant differences in the assessment of all justice factors among these clusters ($F=108.382$, $F=132.141$, $F=127.522$, $p=0.0001<0.05$). In the low IPJ group the highest assessment is for MJ, in the group with low LJ the highest assessment is for IPJ, and in the group with low MJ the highest assessment is for LJ.

The analysis of sensitiveness to participants' characterising elements of the indicators of the just world assessment factors revealed that separate Interpersonal justice indicators are influenced by participants' age, the level of education, the number of imprisonments, the type of offence, gender, marital status, sense of guilt; some Legal justice indicators are sensitive to participants' education, criminal experience, gender and sense of guilt; and Moral justice indicators to the number of imprisonments, time spent in prison, overall level of criminality, gender and sense of guilt. For example, statistically significant differences were found in the assessment of Interpersonal justice factor's indicator Respect towards the others among the participants with the higher education and groups with other education levels ($F=4.994$, $p=.002$), male and female participants ($p=.015$), participants who plead and do not plead themselves guilty ($p=.073$). The indicator Reliable friends had the highest assessment among participants with more than 6 criminal records and the lowest assessment among participants with 2-3 criminal records ($F=2.598$, $p=.054$), as well as participants that do not plead themselves guilty assess this indicator higher than those who plead themselves guilty for the crime ($p=.02$). The indicator Forgiveness for offence had higher assessment among the participants who are sentenced for crimes against property (burglary, robbery) and the lowest assessment among participants sentenced for other crimes ($F=2.652$, $p=.073$); in turn the indicator Compassion and help for the weaker is sensitive to marital status, single participants assessed this indicator higher than married ($p=.012$).

Statistically significant differences in Legal justice factor were most often found in the assessment of such indicators as Compliance with law, Equality in country and Fair trial; moreover, these indicators are the most sensitive to the parameters of criminal career. For example, the indicator Compliance with law had the highest assessment among those participants who are sentenced for the first time ($F=2.136$, $p=.097$) and whose overall time spent in prison is less than 3 years ($F=3.939$, $p=.021$); in turn, the lowest assessment among those who are sentenced more than 6 times and whose overall time spent in prison is 4 to 10 years. The tendency of statistically significant difference is found in the assessment of Equality in country indicator among groups according to the age of the first imprisonment ($F=3.001$, $p=.052$); participants who has the first criminal record before the age of 18 assess this indicator the highest; in turn, the lowest assessment this indicator has among participants with the first criminal record after the age of 24. Statistically significant differences in the assessment of this indicator are found also among the groups according to the overall time spent in prison ($F=4.132$, $p=.017$) and the general level of criminality ($F=6.111$, $p=.014$); participants with a high level of criminality that is characterized by the number of criminal records 4-5, overall time spent in prison more than 11 years and the age of the first imprisonment before 18 assess this indicator the highest, in addition the other indicators, except Fair trial, have lower than average assessment.

Statistically significant differences among groups according to the type of offence were found in the assessment of the indicator Vindication for offence ($F=5.027$, $p=.007$); the highest rates were within the group of offenders who were sentenced for crimes against property and violent crimes, in turn participants with less serious crimes assess this indicator

the lowest. Statistically significant differences were found according to the parameter of gender in such indicators as Equality in country ($p=.003$) and Fair trial ($p=.029$); in addition, females assess Fair trial as more important indicator of the just world than males. Statistically significant differences and high rates showed those participants that do not plead themselves guilty in the indicators Fair trial ($p=.029$) and Compliance with law ($p=.055$).

Among the Moral justice indicators the most sensitive to participants' parameters was the indicator Action according to conscience, the highest assessment this indicator had among those participants that have spent more than 11 years in prison ($F=2.940$, $p=.005$) and whose general level of criminality is high ($F=5.070$, $p=.025$); in addition, statistically significant differences in the assessment of this indicator were found among males and females, males assess the indicator of conscience higher than females ($p=.0028$); in turn, females show higher rates in Observance of moral norms as the indicator of the just world in the context of Moral justice ($p=.065$). Such indicators as Fair people ($p=.072$), Responsibility for actions ($p=.028$) and Observance of honour principles ($p=.077$) are sensitive to sense of guilt, these indicators of the just world have higher assessment among participants that plead themselves guilty, in addition, Observance of honour principles has the lowest assessment among participants who have spent more than 11 years in prison ($F=2.767$, $p=.065$).

To answer the second question raised in the study – are there any differences in social representations of justice between the groups of imprisoned and law-obedient respondents – comparison of justice perception factors average rates was made using the Student-t criterion (see Table 3).

Table 3: The Differences of Perception of Representations of the just World Factors between Prisoners and Law-obedient Participants

<i>Factors</i>		<i>(M)</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>t-test</i>
Interpersonal justice	Prisoners	62.66	11.54	-.055
	Law-obedient	62.72	11.93	
Legal justice	Prisoners	50.93	12.04	-2.078*
	Law-obedient	53.35	14.46	
Moral justice	Prisoners	60.48	12.47	-.667
	Law-obedient	61.13	11.28	
* Difference is significant at the 0.05 level.				

The results revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the groups of prisoners and law-obedient participants in representations of the just world in perception of Legal justice ($p=.038$); law-obedient participants assessed Legal justice higher than prisoners, in addition in both groups Interpersonal justice was assessed as the most important and Legal justice as the least important indicator of the just world. However, the average rates of representations of the just world within the group of law-obedient participants are a bit higher than in prisoners' group.

Discussion

The main aim of the study was to study social representations of justice within the social group of prisoners on the basis of the three factor model of the just world perception that includes interpersonal, legal and moral justice parameters. Several similar studies in Russia (Gulevich, 2003, 2006; Golinchik, 2005; Volovikova, Sosnina, 2001, 2002; Sosnina, 2006) inspired to carry out the study of social representations of justice within Latvia's sample; taking into consideration the fact that justice is a component of legal and moral cognition it was assumed that representations of justice form individual's legal representations, thus influencing the choice of socially acceptable behaviour in everyday life. That is why the present study was carried out within the group of prisoners. The study of social representations of justice was not previously done in Latvia, as well as the study of prisoners as a social risk group in such context of social psychology was carried out for the first time.

The results of the study partially reflect the opinion of the authors of some previous studies (Gulevich, 2003, 2007; Golinchik, 2004) that the perception of justice through the legal prism and justice as entirety of moral values form social representations of justice, however, for this study moral values were separated from parameters that characterize interrelations distinguishing the interpersonal component separately. This distinction of interpersonal factor from legal and moral component showed its efficiency in formation of representations of justice as the results revealed that interpersonal justice as the indicator of the just world has the highest assessment in comparison with moral or legal aspects. Hereby, we may conclude that both imprisoned participants and law-obedient population assess justice as a sum of value of mutual relations interpreting the world with the notions of friendship, respect, family, help and love. In turn, legal justice within both groups proved to be comparatively insignificant as the indicator of the just world despite the fact that law-obedient participants assessed this indicator of justice higher than prisoners. Moreover, staggering is the fact that participants link equality indicators very little with the just world, although several authors (Rawls, 2003; Miller, 2003; Gulevich, 2003, 2007; Golinchik, 2004) previously emphasized the importance of these norms in justice interpretation; moreover, law-obedient participants assess the indicator of equality higher than prisoners that does not link this norm with the perception of just world on principle, despite the fact that individuals with a high level of criminality yet assess this legal justice indicator higher than individuals with lower level of criminality.

In sum, the analysis of the results among prisoners leads to the conclusion that criminal experience does not influence some justice factors as significantly as it was assumed at the beginning of the study. However, some indicators of justice factors are sensitive to several characteristics of criminal experience – the age of the first imprisonment, the number of imprisonments, the type of offence and the overall time spent in prison, in addition, the most sensitive to criminal experience are the indicators of legal factor. The results also revealed that representations of justice are influenced by the participants' sense of guilt, those participants who do not plead themselves guilty for crime characterize the just world more through the prism of legal justice that suggests that these participants feel the lack of legal justice in their everyday life and thus activate its importance for the characterization of the just world; moreover, the most sensitive to the sense of guilt were the indicators of fair trial and compliance with law.

The results of the study allow advancing several perspectives for the further research. This study did not pay much attention to gender differences in social representations of justice; however, the results revealed that several justice indicators are sensitive to gender that indicates the necessity of further studies in the context of prisoners' gender differences. The other perspective that was not fully surveyed within this study but the results indicate the necessity of further study is the study of the differences between social representations of justice of prisoners and law-obedient population, paying special attention to the differences of perception of each justice factor indicator. The third aspect that requires deeper analysis is that proposed justice factors proved to be less sensitive to different parameters of participants than separate indicators of these factors, wherewith there is a necessity to specify the essence of the content of social representations of justice paying more attention to analysis of its structural components and interpretation of indicators.

To sum up, we may conclude that research questions were answered with affirmative answers. Respectively, prisoners' social representations of justice include three components of the just world perception – interpersonal, legal and moral, and values of interpersonal justice form the core of these representations, thus justice can be characterised as a component of moral and legal cognition that determines individual's mutual relations and the choice of behavioural norms in everyday life. Prisoners' social representations of justice are influenced by the criminal experience, sense of guilt and gender and there are differences in social representations of justice of prisoners and law-obedient population in the context of legal cognition.



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