

IZSAK, HAJNALKA¹**Public awareness of correctional education carried out in juvenile correctional facilities**

Special education developed for juvenile delinquents is intended to reduce recidivism, assist their entry and reintegration in society as productive citizens, to develop and strengthen delinquents' self-esteem, sense of responsibility and social utility, close learning gaps, as well as to address the deficiencies in their social, communication, emotional, cultural and learning skills and abilities. Our research aims at providing insight into the perception, awareness of, as well as knowledge and opinions of members of the public related to the education carried out in juvenile correctional facilities. As the social reintegration of former delinquents is a problem affecting the whole society, the public need to be made aware of issues related to juvenile delinquency and correctional institutions, in order to dispel negative perceptions of correctional education and of former juvenile offenders.

1. Introduction

The chief purpose of this study is to provide insight into the perception, awareness of, as well as knowledge and opinions of members of the public related to the education carried out in juvenile correctional facilities. When describing public opinion, it is crucial to establish the nature of public knowledge (Roberts, 2004). Juvenile delinquency is a serious social problem. Some of the most common causes and conditions of juvenile delinquency are poverty, drugs, gangs, abuse and neglect, and truancy. While there have been considerable studies relating to the causes of juvenile delinquency, there is little research on the public opinion, attitudes and knowledge about correctional education carried out in juvenile detention centers and former detainees. Although juvenile delinquency has long been a cause of concern for the public, Roberts (2004) found that most people in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have inaccurate views of juvenile crime and justice trends. According to his findings, Americans are of the opinion that young offenders are very likely to reoffend (Roberts, 2004).

Surveys conducted over the past years reveal that most members of the public subscribe to a number of misperceptions about juvenile delinquency and justice and as is the case with most public views of delinquency, inaccurate perceptions about youth crime and justice can be traced

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to the news media (Roberts, 2004). We can see crime stories in the news media, but we almost never have the chance to read or hear about the struggle of correctional educators working with juvenile offenders or the successful rehabilitation of former delinquents. Thus, media consumers tend to make generalizations, considering specific incidents as representing a general decline in society's moral standing. Although the news media play an important role in shaping public perceptions, we should take into consideration that people are more likely to have more direct contact with juveniles, than with other groups of offenders (Roberts, 2004).

Attitudes and values play an essential role in the development of public opinion. Even if they are strongly held, attitudes are subject to change if people come into possession of new facts or perspectives that challenge their earlier thinking. Thus, we cannot disregard the relationship between knowledge, attitude and opinion. For example, it has been demonstrated with respect to the British public, that those survey respondents who were least informed about juvenile crime statistics held the most negative views about the juvenile justice response to crime (Mattinson and Mirrlees-Black, 2000). Referring to the findings presented by Roberts and Stalans (1997), Roberts (2004) states that research confirms that the public's knowledge of punishment and correctional issues is limited and that public attitudes change following the provision of information.

2. Correctional education, reformatory institutions and juvenile offenders

The terms 'juvenile detention center', 'juvenile correctional facility' and 'reformatory institution' are used interchangeably for the purpose of this study, however juvenile detention is short-term confinement, primarily used after a youth has been arrested, but before they have been pronounced innocent or guilty by a court, while correctional facilities are longer-term placements for youth who have been adjudicated delinquent and ordered by a court to be confined. The juvenile detention center, i.e. reformatory operates simultaneously as a penal and a pedagogical institution. As part of the child protection system, it has an educational function, while correctional education is also a sanction involving deprivation of liberty for juvenile offenders. Today, in Hungary reformatories, where reformatory education and pre-trial detention of juvenile offenders is implemented, are under the authority of the Ministry of Human Capacities (EMMI).

Under the law, a juvenile offender is a person between the age of twelve and eighteen years at the time of committing a criminal offence. At the same time, according to Article 343(6) of the Penitentiary Code, a young offender, who has reached the age of eighteen but has not

exceeded the age of twenty-one shall also be considered a juvenile.² A juvenile offender is criminally liable for his or her unlawful acts and may be admitted to a correctional facility on the basis of a final court judgment or during criminal proceedings for the purpose of executing pre-trial detention.

Execution of sentences, such as correctional education, necessarily entails restrictions on certain rights, such as the right to freedom of movement, the right to choose one's place of residence freely, the right to peaceful assembly and the right to strike. At the same time, the reformatory institution provides full service for the young offenders, which includes their care, education and supervision. It also provides them training, work and leisure activities.³ During their stay at the institution, juveniles are compelled to participate in school education, and their student status does not end after passing the so-called compulsory schooling age.

Correctional education is conventionally defined as the educational activities that are carried out while an individual is under the supervision of the criminal justice system (Carver and Harrison 2016). Education carried out in reformatories is based on the premise that all people can be shaped and educated. Although personality traits and characteristics are partly innate endowments, learning, experience, and relationships also have a significant shaping effect (Ruzsonyi, 2006). According to Tamás Módos (1996), education is the activity in the course of which the influence of the personality takes place in such a way that it promotes compliance with the given society.

The aim of special education developed for juvenile offenders is to reduce recidivism, to support their entry and reintegration in society as productive citizens, to regulate their mental state, to improve their educational and professional qualifications, to promote acceptance of basic moral norms and to prepare them for a healthy lifestyle. The special education programmes in reformatories, as well as some individual and group activities, aim to develop and strengthen young offenders' self-esteem, sense of responsibility and social utility, as well as to address the existing deficiencies in their social, emotional, cultural, communication and learning skills and abilities. Reformatory education of juveniles is thus a penal measure, and although it involves deprivation of personal liberty, the correctional institution is not the same as the prison. Compared to the average pedagogical situation, juvenile offenders admitted to a reformatory are in a special life situation and their treatment is specific because their personality

² Act CCXL of 2013 on the execution of criminal sanctions and measures, certain coercive measures and detention (2013. évi CCXL. törvény a büntetések, az intézkedések, egyes kényszerintézkedések és a szabálysértési elzárás végrehajtásáról 343. § (6))

³ Decree of the Minister of Human Capacities no. 1/2015 on the rules of juvenile correctional institutions (1/2015. (I. 14.))

is not yet mature, the structures determining their behaviour are not irreparably fixed yet, so they can be educated and most likely diverted from the criminal career (Ruzsonyi, 2001).

Remarkably little is known about the public's views of correctional education, as there is little publicity of reformatory institutions and people rarely have the chance to hear positive things about them, such as a successful theatre performance given by or community work done by detainees. The first time people usually hear about juvenile correctional facilities is when they are threatened by their parents with the possibility of getting into one in case of bad behaviour. Thus, there is little chance that children will grow up with a positive image about these institutions and those who end up in them.

Nevertheless, research shows that it is important to develop a strategy for involving marginalised and vulnerable groups in the community. One of the major problems of offenders is that they must face significant social adaptation issues, such as family and community stigmatization and exclusion, which have a negative impact on their ability to find work or housing, return to formal education or build a strong network or rebuild individual and social capital. If they are not given help with facing these issues, they are exposed to the danger of unsuccessful social integration, reoffending, reconviction and social rejection (UNODC, 2018).

For most people the primary social influence during the years of early childhood is the family. Under regular circumstances the family provides emotional support, learning opportunities, moral guidance, self-esteem and physical necessities, parents being a critical factor in the social development of children. Empirical findings show that parental behavior can either increase or decrease an adolescent's risk for delinquency and other problem behaviors. On the other hand, in disorganized families in which there is violence and anti-social behavior children are more likely to engage in future delinquency and anti-social behavior (Hurley Swayze & Buskovich, 2014).

According to Hurley Swayze and Buskovich (2014), family structure or composition alone does not cause delinquency, if pro-social attitudes and behaviors are promoted within it. However, lack of clear expectations for behaviour set by the parent, poor monitoring, supervision and inconsistent discipline can be a precursor of later delinquency and substance abuse. At the same time, international research results show, that young people growing up in families with a low socio-economic position, living in poverty, are more likely to commit a crime. The explanation is that the conditions related to this, such as social exclusion, marginalization or undereducation are all decisive factors of criminal propensity. Another negative phenomenon in our society is that more and more children and young people live aimlessly, without having a vision for their future, spend their free time loitering, which

increasingly reduces the chance of their integration. Thus, reformatories and prisons are facing new challenges, as with the spread of drug use and expansion of aggression, the average age of offenders tends to decrease while the number of those who end up in a closed institution is growing.

3. Methodology and results

Although limited in scope this research raises questions about public perceptions of correctional education carried out in juvenile detention centers, as well as attitudes towards former detainees. We have used the virtual snowball sampling method using Facebook, which allowed us to reach a large population in a reasonable time frame, at a reasonable cost. The questionnaire was designed using the online survey software Survio and shared via Facebook. In the course of 23 days it was visited by 492 people and completed by 354, which can be considered to be a rather high response rate. The majority of the respondents agree that detainees need special education and that they should definitely be given a chance to become useful members of the society, however a great number are sceptical about their successful reintegration.

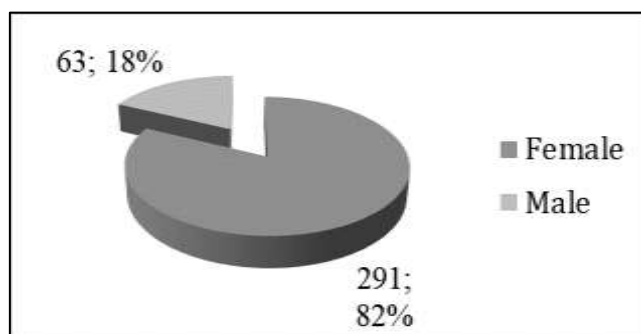


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by gender

As we can see in *Figure 1*, respondents were primarily female, 82 per cent, i.e. a number of 291 female respondents, while only 63 reported their gender as male out of the total 354. The age distribution of survey respondents is shown in *Figure 2*. below. Adults between the ages of 31 and 49 are over-represented (55%) in this survey sample, while children under the age of 18 are under-represented. The second largest age group is that of the young adults aged 18-30 (30%). Only 3% of the respondents are older than 65. This can be explained by the fact that many people of this age are still not using social media and/or do not have adequate computer skills or access to the Internet.

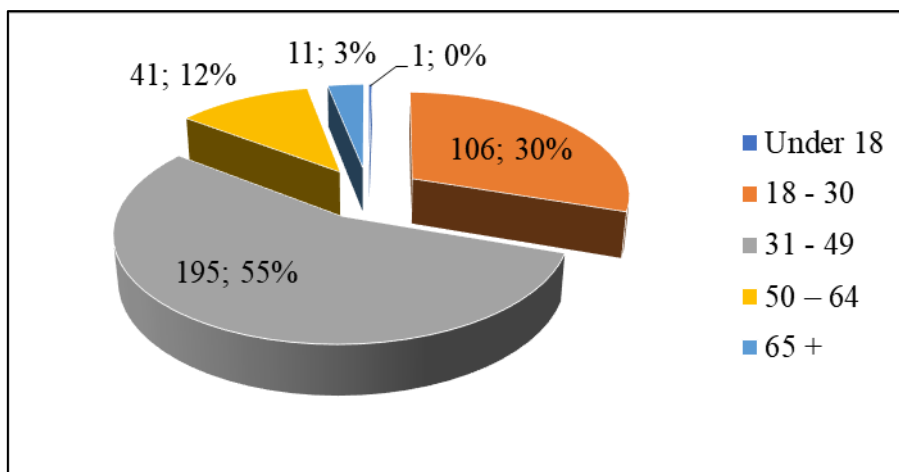


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by age

As far as respondents' level of education is concerned, as *Figure 3.* shows, 76% have a higher vocational education diploma, a university or a university college degree, 16% have a high school diploma, 5% have a PhD or a DLA degree and only 2% went to high school but did not graduate.

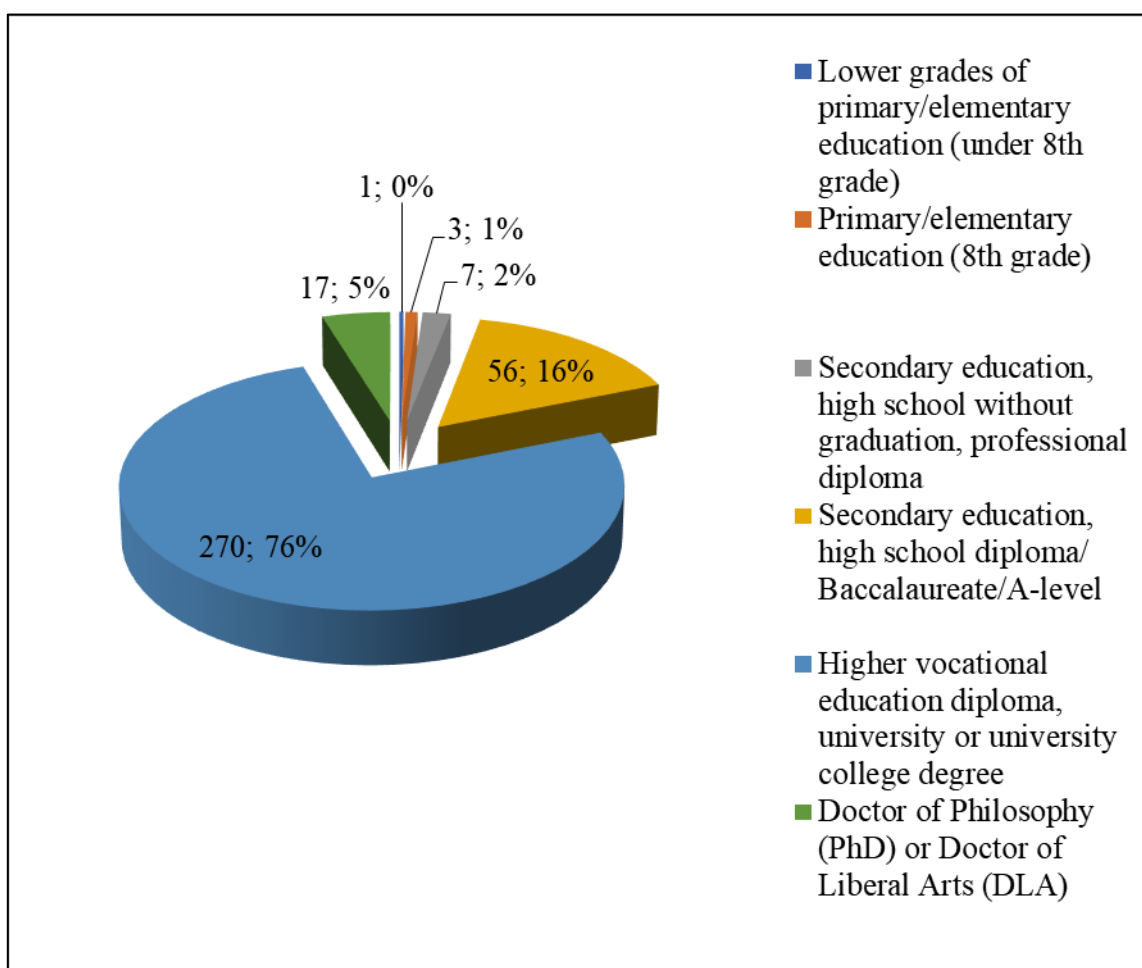


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents by education level

Regarding respondents' occupation, as shown in *Figure 4*, the majority (87%, i.e. 307 people) are employed, 5% are inactive, probably retired, 4% are unemployed and another 4% indicated that they were dependent on some family members.

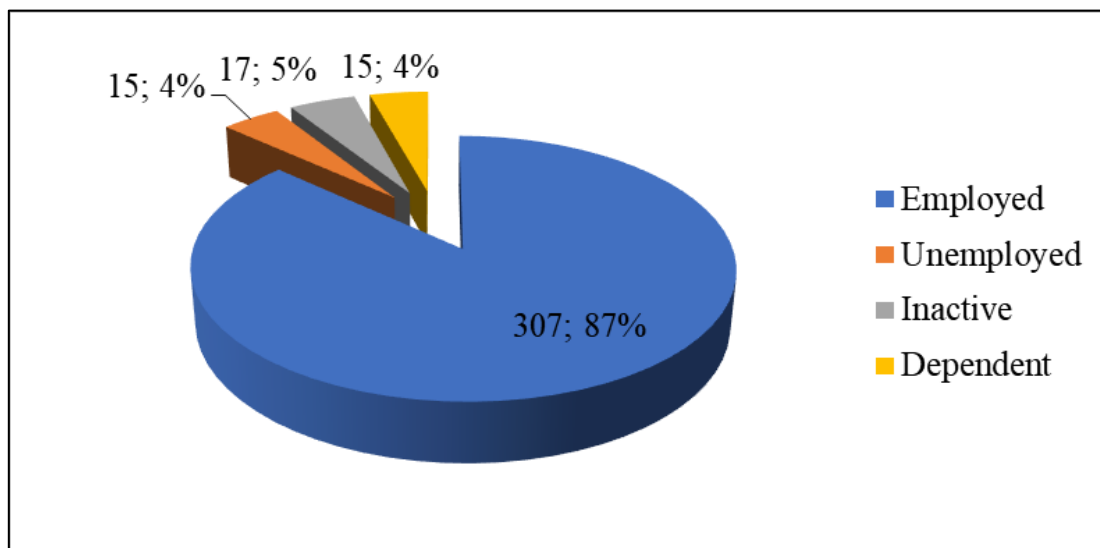


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents by occupation

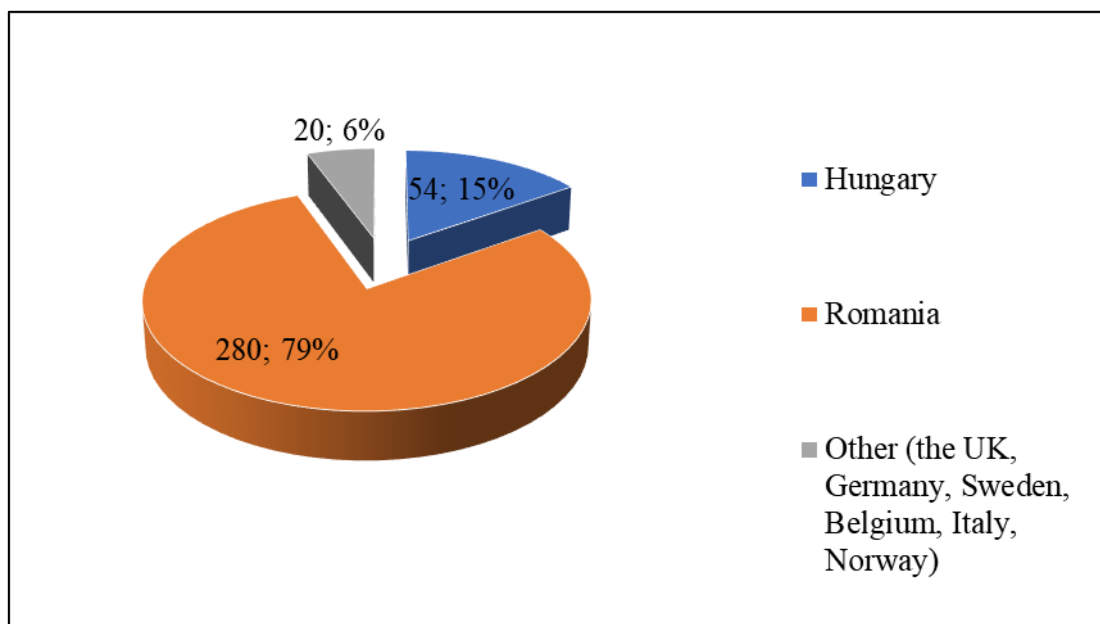


Figure 5. Distribution of respondents by country of residence

Figure 5 shows that the highest reported percentage is that of respondents residing in Romania (79 per cent), followed by that of those living in Hungary (15 per cent), while 6 per cent of the respondents have their residence in the UK, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Italy or Norway.

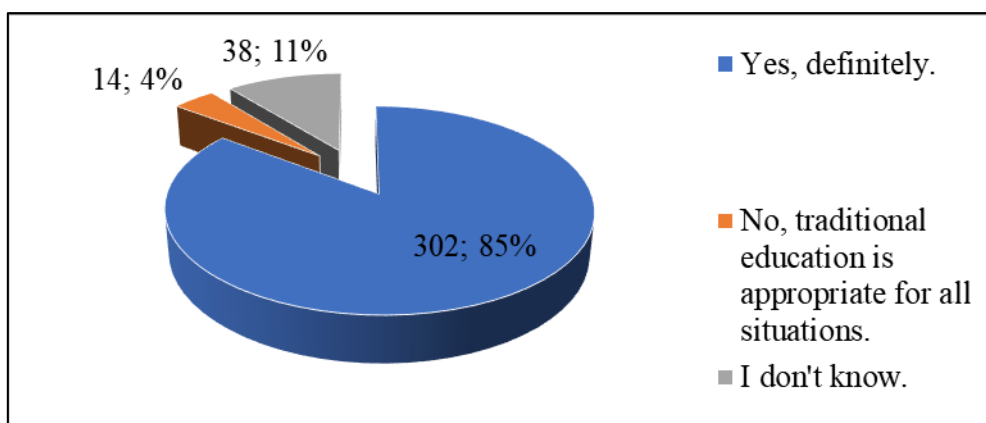


Figure 6. Distribution of responses to the question whether juvenile offenders need special education

To the question whether juvenile offenders need special education, 85% answered that they definitely do, 4% are of the opinion that traditional education is appropriate for all situations, while 11% admitted that they do not know the answer or cannot decide (*Figure 6.*). As already mentioned, the aim of special education developed for juvenile offenders is to regulate their mental state, to improve their educational and professional qualifications, to promote acceptance of basic moral norms, thus supporting their reintegration in society and preparing them for a healthy lifestyle. In addition to its inherent importance, education is also an opportunity for offenders to transform a negative experience (detention) into a positive experience (rehabilitation) (Hackman 1997).

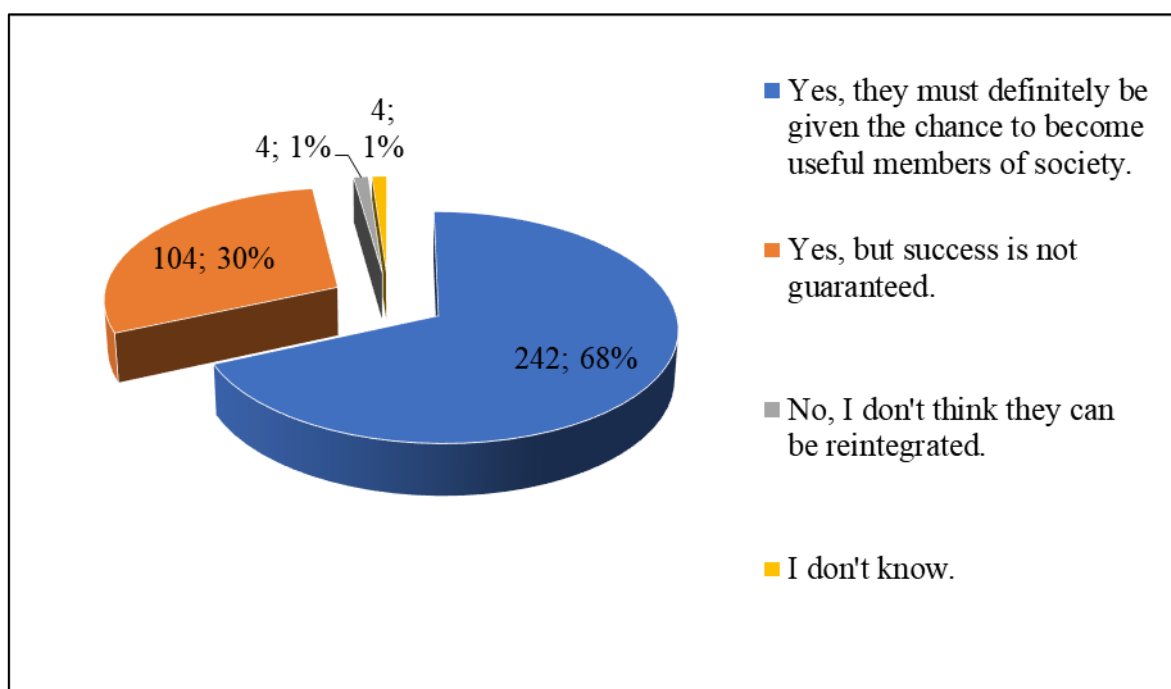


Figure 7. Distribution of responses to the question whether juvenile detainees can be reintegrated in society

As shown in *Figure 7*, in the case of the question whether juvenile detainees can be reintegrated in society, a large number of respondents (247), i.e. 68% believe that juvenile detainees must definitely be given the chance to become useful members of the society, while 30% are sceptical about the success of their reintegration. 1% do not think that offenders can be reintegrated and another 1% do not know.

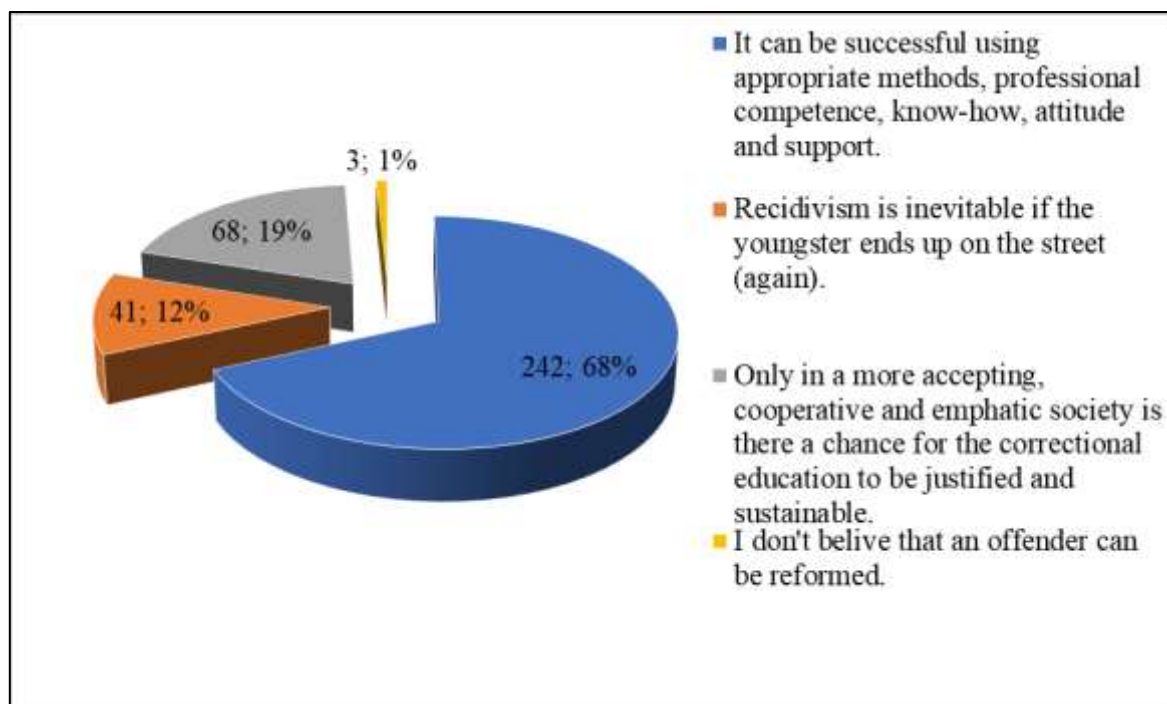
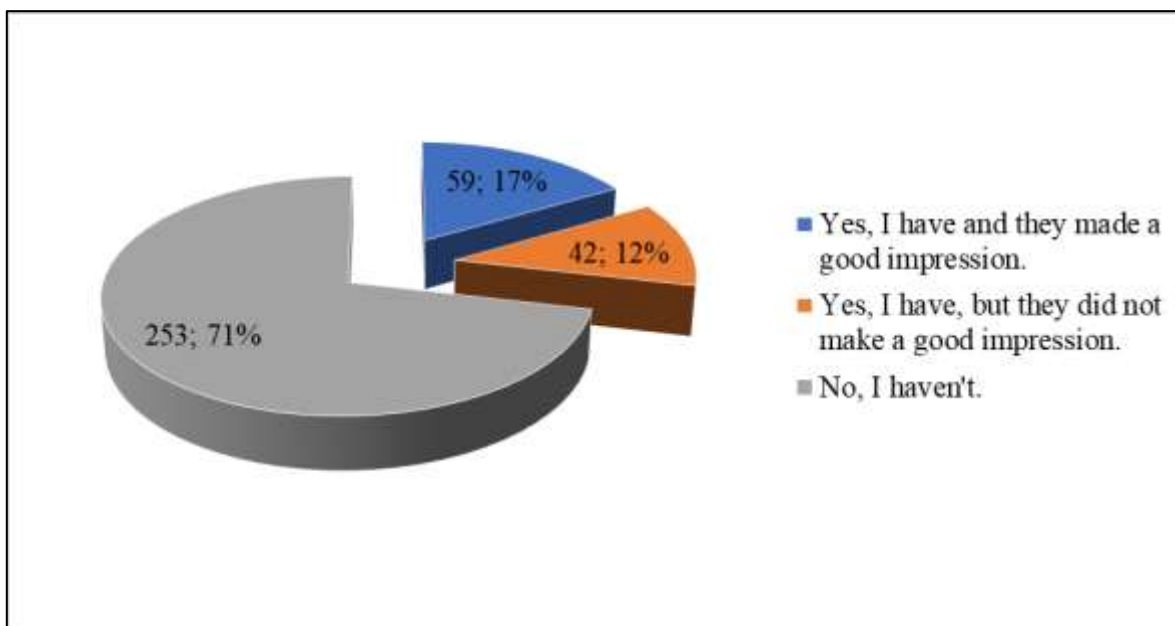


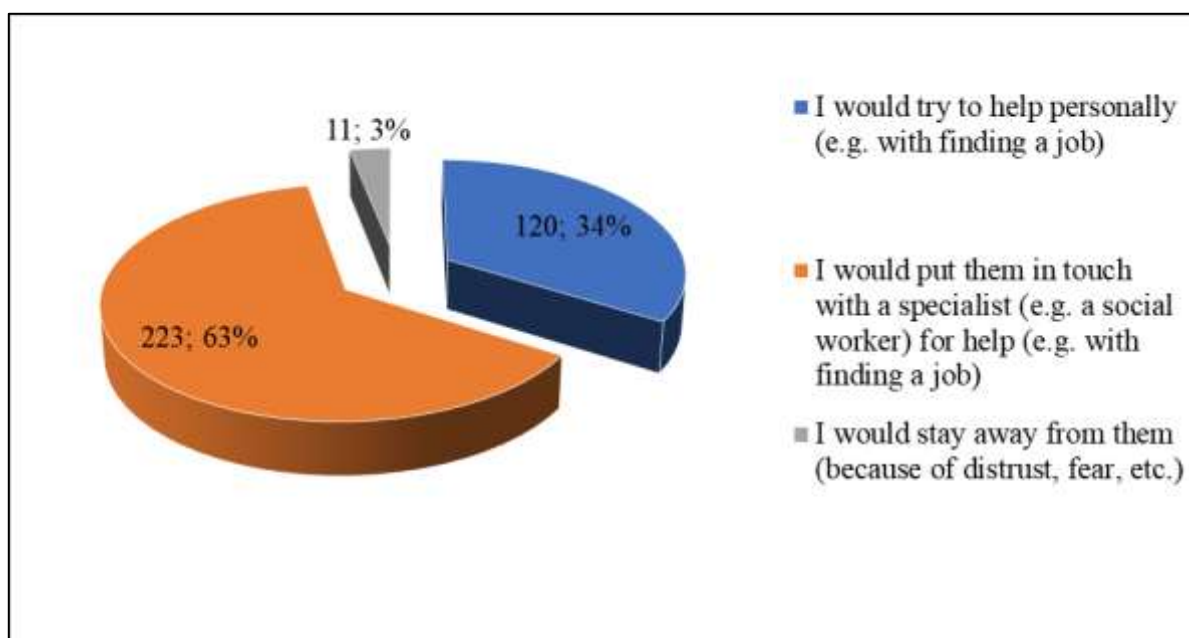
Figure 8. Distribution of responses to the question whether education carried out in juvenile detention centers can be successful

Figure 8. represents respondents' views on the success of education carried out in juvenile detention centers. As we can see the majority (68%) of the respondents believe that with appropriate methods, professional competence, know-how, attitude and support, correctional education can be successful. 19% think that only in a more tolerant, cooperative and empathetic society there is a chance for the correctional education to be justified and sustainable. 12% of the survey participants are of the opinion that recidivism is inevitable if the young offender ends up in the streets after their release, while 1% do not believe that an offender can be reformed.



**Figure 9. Distribution of responses to the question:
Have you ever met a former juvenile detainee?**

Out of the 354 people surveyed, as shown in *Figure 9.*, 253 (i.e. 71%) have never met a former juvenile detainee or offender in person. 17% have already met such a young person and they made a good impression on them, while 12% responded that the former young offenders whom they met did not make a good impression on them.



**Figure 10. Distribution of responses to the question:
Should a former juvenile detainee ask you for help, how would you relate to them?**

34% of the respondents have shown positive attitudes towards personally helping a former juvenile detainee (e.g. finding a job). If they were asked for help, 63% would put them in touch with a specialist, such as a social worker, while 3% would stay away from them because of distrust or fear (*Figure 10.*). This suggests, that on a general level, our respondents showed strong support for the rehabilitation and reintegration of former juvenile offenders.

4. Conclusions

The high rate of response suggests that the problem of juvenile detainees is a topic of interest for many people and that people are growing more and more aware of the fact that the social reintegration of the convicted is a problem affecting the whole society. A high number of respondents believe that with appropriate methods, professional competence, attitude and support correctional education carried out in juvenile detention centers can be successful. Nevertheless, many of the survey participants are of the opinion that recidivism is inevitable if the young offender ends up on the streets again.

On a general level, if being asked for help people prefer to put former juvenile detainees in touch with a specialist, a smaller proportion would help them personally and only a very small number of people would stay away from them because of distrust or fear.

The results indicate that the majority of the respondents agree that juvenile offenders need special education and that they should definitely be given a chance to become useful members of the society. However, a great number of respondents did not seem to believe that juvenile offenders can be successfully reintegrated, which points to the fact that raising public awareness of issues connected with correctional education and training is important to dispel negative perceptions of reformatory institutions and prejudice against former detainees.

We can conclude, that our findings coincide with those of Cullen et al. (2000), as the majority of the respondents strongly support „child saving” and encourage the direction of children at risk for future criminality into a conventional life course. Enhancing early protective factors like supporting juveniles to develop safe identities and helping them build a positive sense of self-worth can help diminish the likelihood of offending or reoffending and re-victimization.

While this study intended to present an insight into the knowledge and opinion of members of the general public related to correctional education, as well as their attitudes towards former detainees, it may establish a base for further study of the topic. Since most of the juvenile offenders will come back into the community, it is worth to get informed about and raise public

awareness of issues connected with the work of reformatory institutions and also to try to find ways to invest in their future. We cannot but agree with Hackman (1997) according to whom investment in education is returned in public safety, employment, and reduction of recidivism and all these can be regarded as crime prevention. Eckenrode's words are still valid today: „*What should really concern us is our contribution to the restoration of society's outcasts*”(1965, p. 9).

The fact that public attitudes change following the provision of information also leads us to the conclusion that further research is needed that explores how it is possible to effectively impart knowledge about reformatory institutions, correctional education and juvenile offenders. However changing public attitudes towards this field will probably require more than simply the provision of information.

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