

## The Training of Prison Guards: The Case of Greece

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### Abstract

Prison guards play a key role in the penitentiary system and it is apparently believed that the quality of the work accomplished directly depends on the quality of the prison guard himself. The present paper aims at studying and exploring the institution of the in-service educational training of the prison officers. The sample of the present research project consists of 37 guards serving in Greek penitentiary institutions. Results show that the guards of the Greek penitentiary institutions have not been trained in new methods or techniques either of dealing with difficult situations or of dealing with the psychological problems of the detainees. Most guards believe that they do not need training and that they can handle in other ways the daily routine in prisons. Finally, the analysis showed that guards' educational level and years of service does not differentiate their opinion about knowledge and training they have.

### Introduction

The policy the state adopts to cope with criminality includes either precautionary or oppressive measures and is significantly influenced by the general policy applied both at the social level and at the level of handling crime (Alexiades 2004; Kourakis 1994; Lambropoulou 2001 2002 2005; Aduba 1993; Thomas 1974). Part of this policy is also the statutory organization of the penitentiary policy including, on one hand, measures regarding the social compliance of the prisoner through special measures "conforming to the rule of law" followed by the implementation, on the other hand, of social policy measures aiming at the social rehabilitation of the prisoners (Georgoulas 2007; Dauber and Shichov 1979; Emshoff et al. 1980; Johnson and Hasegawa 1987; Stallwitz and Stöver 2007; Watson et al. 2004).

Penitentiary policy is mostly exercised in prisons which are questioned for their effectiveness. The researchers doubt not only the capability prisons have to reach their goals regarding the rehabilitation of prisoners, but also their contribution to their mentality while there is severe criticism regarding the conditions under which prisons operate which are not considered to be appropriate (Foucault 1975; Hogan et al 2009; Irwin 1970; O'Lery et al 1977; Sykes 1958; Watson et al. 2004). As a result, the legislative and organizational framework at the prison, the level of security and administration, the increased number of detainees, as well as, the communication procedures among the prisoners and their guards affect the operation of prisons. Part of what has been mentioned above can be attributed to the devitalization of the welfare state, the strengthening of the universal governing, the

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increasingly greater penetration of the private sector into anti-crime policy, the development of social risk as well as to the cultural differentiations (Brown 2005; Garland 2001).

The most frequent as well as the most thoroughly examined factors that influence the operation of prisons are three: a) Their organization, b) Their personnel in relation to their demographic and psychosocial characteristics and c) the social conditions prevailing in them (Griffin 2001; Lambert et al. 2007; Moon and Maxwell 2004; Rison and Wittenberg 1994; Wright and Sweeney 1990).

### **The Professional Team of Prison Guards**

The professional team of prison guards plays a key role in the penitentiary system since on them many of the strategies the states follow regarding the anti-crime policy are based (Thomas 1972). It is apparently believed that the quality of the work accomplished directly depends on the quality of the prison guard himself. The personnel in the prison is important not only for the prevalence of discipline and order in prison but also for the quality and formation of the social life of prisoners. The prison guards consist both the intermediaries of the system of the anti-crime policy application and its victims (Kaufman 1998).

In international bibliography there is an on-going debate regarding the power that prison guards have. A number of researchers state that the guards have less power than they should because of the position they have (Sykes 1958). Others support the idea that the guard's power is one of the main fears of stress causing factors to the prisoners (Mackenzie 1987) while other researchers mention that the guards do not make use of all the power they have at their disposal (Liebling and Price 2001). The prison guards are depicted as individuals that adapt themselves to the structure of the prison without having the opportunity to improve or change this specific structure (Hawkins 1976). The education and training of the prison guards combined with the promotional framework of their professional development in general contribute significantly to the management of their social role.

### **Professional Development of the Prison Guards**

The new challenges in the field of social construction, the changes in the state governing policies, the financial interdependence (Liberaki 2002), the shrinking of the welfare state, the increasing cultural incongruity of the population (Kasimati 1998; Tzortzopoulou 2005) as well as the special conditions prevailing in prison related to the increase in number and dissimilarity of prisoners (ages, offences, psychopathology, health problems, religious and cultural views) (Aduba 1993; Fotiadou et al. 2006; Hochstetler and DeLisi 2005; Sakellidis et al 2010; Watson et al. 2004) point out, on one hand, the necessity to improve the guards' knowledge and working skills and, on the other hand, the emergence of the concept of continuous long-term and lifelong professional development of the individuals.

Furthermore, what has been mentioned above is more than a necessity for the prison guards because: a) they are faced with multidimensional and complex problems which are related not only to distortional factors such as stress, occupational wearing out but also to in-service administrative and environmental factors (negative stereotypes of society, prisoners' characteristics) (Auerbach et al 2003; Finn 2000; Fotiadou et al. 2006; Lambert et al. 2002; Whitehead 1987). b) They are quite often led to resignation because of these factors. The resignation rate which internationally reaches 17% on average (Lambert 2006) or a higher percentage (Philliber 1987) has a serious impact on the way the prison guards work because it is closely related not only to the quality of the services rendered but also to the cost of training and upgrading of the in-service personnel (Dick et al 2004; Dowden and Tellier 2004; Keinan and Malach – Pines. 2007; Rogers 1991) and c) the formed ideas, views and behaviour of the prison guards who consist a factor of decisive importance affecting the quality of the penitentiary system, are influenced not only by the dimensions the working

framework takes but also by both the formal and informal, socialization procedures which are used in prison and shape their occupational mentality (Poteyeva and Sun 2009; Stojkovic and Farkas 2003; Lambert et al. 2005; Lopez and Russell 2008)

### *Prison guards' training*

The training prison guards receive is a strategic selection that provides all the necessary information that enables them to realise the prison environment framework and deal with the relations and dynamics prevailing there. Internationally the prison guards' training either takes place before they start working professionally or it is in-service. Their training can either be in the form of training seminars lasting a few days (in – service training) or it can be educational sessions lasting 16 months and the subjects it includes refer to the legislation, communication, the coping with sexual violence, aggressive behaviour, riots and occupational stress (Finn 2000; Nellis 2002; Steinhart 2009; Stichman 2002) The European Penitentiary Rules refer extensively to the training of the prison officers recognizing its importance in rendering, on one hand, the guards' work more effective and, on the other hand, in improving the operation and administration of the penitentiary establishments. Furthermore, the texts issued by the United Nations (U.N.) and the European Council mention the stages that should be included in a training programme suitable for prison guards. What is mainly stressed in these texts is the importance of a preliminary stage during which the candidate officer is practically integrated in the working environment of the prison initially experiencing the daily routine in prison watching the personnel there at work. Then the candidate officer is trained in an organised framework and once his training is over he is once again placed at a prison where his work is assessed, whereas in-service training takes place throughout the officer's working life.

The initial training is considered inadequate to offer individuals the knowledge and skills that are necessary throughout their professional life (Duncombe and Armour 2004). For this reason, in many countries in-service training is no more complimentary to the professionals' initial training but it has changed into well-organised complete and, many times, compulsory programmes of lifelong occupational development.

The prison guards through their training should acquire skills and develop their abilities so that they can adjust to the prison mentality and environment (King et al. 2008), understand the prisoners' dissimilarity (Austin and Irwin 2001) and cope with issues related to their personality and mental health (Poole and Regoli 1980; Hochschild 1998; Walsh and Freshwater 2009), so as to perform more effectively within the prison framework (Kourakis and Spineli 2001).

Furthermore, in the international bibliography the education of the prison officers has been related to the implementation of international programmes within the prison framework as well as to issues referring to their psychosocial characteristics and their in-service advancement. International research data point out that there are equivocal results related to the influence the educational level of the prison officers has on all the above mentioned issues (Cullen et al. 1989; Paboojian and Teske 1997; Rogers 1991; Robinson et al. 1997).

The prison officers with higher education may have higher ambitions and expectations for their career (Rogers 1991). In fact, according to Jurik and Winn (1987), the prison officers with a high level of education may put emphasis on the moral reward they receive from their profession to a greater degree than the prison officers with a lower level of education. Education offers prison officers the necessary tools in order to meet more effectively the demands of their occupation but it can also lead to forestalling and disappointment when the prison officers can not apply the knowledge they have acquired.

### *Prison guards' Education in Greece*

In Greece for the first time provision was made for the education of the prison officers in the Royal Decree 2.31923 "Concerning the School for the guards of organised prisons". In the Government Gazette of 18-02-1999 (Issue 2, Fascicle no. 125) there is an extensive report on the School of the guarding personnel, its role and content. The courses that the prison officers are taught last four months and are divided in 10 units: Penitentiary Code, Rudiments of Administrative Law, Rudiments of Psychology, Rudiments of Hygienics: Hygiene of the detainees, Operation of the detention establishments, Concerning narcotic substances, Self Defence, Self Protection, Data Processing – Investigations – Cases of people being held hostages. In addition to the above, a precondition for the employees to be delegated by the career panels of managing duties is the attendance of in-service training seminars organised by the Ministry of Justice every two years (Alexiades 2000: 237). In the official Gazette Fascicle 856 / 11-7-2000 is mentioned the Organisation and Realization of Special Educational programmes concerning the introductory training of and the provision of Information briefing to the personnel responsible for the exterior guarding of the detention establishments. It should be noted here that their training is the same as that of the other guards. No other in-service training of any kind for the prison officers is explicitly stated in the statutes of the Greek State, Furthermore, the schools of the prison officers operate whenever it is necessary to train newly – employed officers. What should be mentioned here is that the training of the prison officers is inadequate while the subjects taught do not help the officers deal effectively with all the difficult situations they face within the detention establishments. Gianniris' report (1998) is characteristic. Gianniris in his report mentions that in 1986 the School for the prison officers did not operate and almost all the prison officers lack even rudimentary knowledge. Finally, the officers' educational approach is oriented towards a punishment-based model rather than a model that emphasises the detainees' integration and psychosocial adjustment.

### **The Purpose of the Research**

The present paper aims at studying and exploring the institution of the in-service educational training of the prison officers and how their training is related to the problems and the needs that characterize their profession. Studying the prison guards' training system offers both politicians and public administration the necessary information which enables them to follow more effective strategies in politics as well as to form an improved educational training system, both of which are the main elements on which the reform of penitentiary systems is based (Kauffman 1988). The present paper is part of a broader research concerning the penitentiary system and focuses on the social perception the prison guards have of it.

### **Method**

#### *Sample*

The sample of the present research project consists of 37 guards serving in Greek penitentiary institutions. Of them 34 (91.9%) are male and 3 (8.1%) are female. Their average age is 38.1 (S.D. = 6.85) while the age range is 27 years with the youngest guard being 26 years old and the oldest one being 53 years old. As far as the time of service is concerned, the average time is 12.1 years (S.D. = 6.20) while the time range is 23 years with the youngest employee having two years of service and the oldest one having 25 years of service. The 27 (73%) guards are secondary education graduates while the 10 (27%) guards are university or technological institution graduates.

In conducting this specific research project penitentiary institution guards were chosen to be the target group of the research for the following reasons: a) they are the ones who are mainly interested as far as their training is concerned, b) they consist one of the main intermediaries between society and the penitentiary system and c) being in touch with the prisoners daily spending many hours with them on a weekly basis their understanding of the penitentiary system is more thorough.

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire used in the research was based on international and Greek bibliography referring to the penitentiary systems and their role in the modern societies as well as on the results of the methodology concerning the research on vulnerable population groups. Furthermore, the questions included in the questionnaire were based on the theoretical approaches on confrontation criminology, the theory of symbolic interaction and the labelling theory. The questionnaire consists of thematic units that refer to: the problems the prison guards face in their profession or as individuals being prison officers, the abilities a prison guard should have as a member of the penitentiary system, factors that impede their work, ways of handling any problems that may come up in relation to the operation of the prison as well as to issues of in-service training of the prison officers. In the present paper the issues related to the in-service training of the prison guards are analysed.

### **Findings**

Table 1 (see next page) shows that the guards of the Greek penitentiary institutions have not been trained in new methods or techniques either of dealing with difficult situations or of dealing with the psychological problems of the detainees. In fact, the percentage seems absolute in both cases. At least 80% of the guards have not been trained as to how to cope with either the prisoners' delinquency or the detainees' relatives behaviour. However, the general view regarding this type of training is negative. Moreover, 50% of the guards are not aware whether there is a guide to consult as to how to cope with emergency situations. Regarding the information the guards receive about the changes that refer to their service it seems that the guards in their majority are sufficiently informed. However there is a significant percentage of guards (25%) who are not well – informed. At this point it is worth mentioning that the prison guards co-operate well with the social services of the prison and that supports them effectively in their hard work.

**Table1.** Averages, standard deviations, Medians, Minimum and Maximum values of the questions referring to the training of the guards of the penitentiary institutions.

Questions	Mean	Median	S.D.	Min	Max.	Quartiles		
						25	50	75
Is there an emergency handling guide?	3,09	4	1,19	1	4	2	4	4
Do you believe that the knowledge you have enables you to cope with the incidents that daily happen in prison?	1,92	2	0,65	1	3	1,5	2	2
Are you frequently informed about the changes that may concern your profession?	2,06	2	0,99	1	4	1	2	3
Are you trained in new methods or techniques of coping with difficult situations?	3,87	4	0,49	2	4	4	4	4
Have you been trained to cope with detainees' delinquent behaviour?	3,65	4	0,68	2	4	3,5	4	4
Have you been trained to cope with detainees' delinquent behaviour?	3,22	4	1,06	1	4	2,5	4	4
Have you been trained to handle efficiently the detainees' relatives?	3,68	4	0,63	2	4	3,5	4	4
Would you characterize your co-operation with the social services satisfactory?	1,95	2	0,85	1	4	1	2	2

\*1=Yes ..... 4=No

It is important to note here that most guards, despite the fact that they haven't been trained to handle difficult situations that are common phenomena in the penitentiary institutions (e.g. detainees' psychological problems resulting in delinquent behaviour, interacting with detainees' relatives whose behaviour is unpredictable), nor have they been trained in new methods or techniques of coping with difficult situations, still believe that they do not need training and that they can handle in other ways the daily routine in prisons (table 1). The way they answer the question regarding the ways they use to cope with difficulties they come up against within the penitentiary system is indicative. Most of them answer that they primarily count on their mental fortitude (patience, persistence), secondly they resort to their ability of communication, to their experience, even to improvisation or pure luck. No reference has been made to techniques or methods that should be applied in such situations (tab. 2).

**Table2.** Answers to the open question: "How do you surpass the difficulties you come up against within the penitentiary system?"

Answers	Absolute Frequency	Percent of the answers
Mental Fortitude	22	71%
Communication	17	54.8%
Experience	4	12.9%
Improvisation	3	8.7%
Indifference	1	3.2%

The examination, with the use of the Mann – Whitney Test, of the influence the level of education of the prison guards has on the answers they provide to the questions about their knowledge and service – training statistically showed no significant differences. The above-stated point leads us to the conclusion that the guards' educational level does not diversify the two differential groups of guards (secondary education graduates – university/technological institution graduates), which means that the perceptions and views the two groups have regarding their in-service training coincide and have the above mentioned characteristics (table 3 on next page).

**Table3.** Mean Rank and Mann – Whitney U Test of questions regarding the knowledge and training of the guards of the penitentiary institutions.

QUESTIONS	Education	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z	S.S. *
Is there an emergency handling guide?	Secondary education	18,85	112	-0,38	0,70
	University/technological institute	17,44			
Do you believe that the knowledge you have enables you to cope with the incidents that daily happen in prison?	Secondary education	18,5	121,5	-0,52	0,59
	University/technological institute	20,35			
Are you frequently informed about the changes that may concern your profession?	Secondary education	19,33	126	-0,32	0,74
	University/technological institute	18,1			
Are you trained in new methods or techniques of coping with difficult situations?	Secondary education	19,09	132,5	-0,18	0,85
	University/technological institute	18,75			
Have you been trained as to how to cope with the detainees?	Secondary education	19,33	126	-0,41	0,68



psychological problems?	University/te chnological institute	18,1			
Have you been trained to cope with detainees' delinquent behaviour?	Secondary education	19,24	128,5	-0,24	0,80
	University/te chnological institute	18,35			
Have you been trained to handle efficiently the detainees' relatives?	Secondary education	19,85	112	-1,05	0,29
	University/te chnological institute	16,7			
Would you characterize your co- operation with the social services satisfactory?	Secondary education	19,41	124	-0,41	0,67
	University/te chnological institute	17,9			

\*Statistical significance

With the Kruskal – Wallis Test we examined whether there is statistically any significant difference in the answers the members of the sample gave in relation to the years of service they had. The analysis showed that statistically no significant difference was found in all the questions related to the knowledge and training the guards of penitentiary institutions have. Consequently, we can safely conclude that the years of service the guards, have do not diversity the two differential groups of guards, which means that the perceptions and the views the guards have about their in-service training coincide and have the characteristics we have mentioned above (table 4 on next page)

**Table4.** Mean Rank,  $X^2$  and statistical significance of questions related to the knowledge and training of the penitentiary institution guards.

QUESTIONS	YEARS OF SERVICE	Mean Rank	$\chi^2$ (2)	S.S.*
Is there an emergency handling guide?	1-6 years	19,42	0,219	0,896
	6-15 years	18,76		
	16 years and above	17,28		
Do you believe that the knowledge you have enables you to cope with the incidents that daily happen in prison?	1-6 years	22,5	3,122	0,21
	6-15 years	16,6		
	16 years and above	21,89		
Are you frequently informed about the changes that may concern your profession?	1-6 years	23,21	3,509	0,173
	6-15 years	19,79		
	16 years and above	13,89		
Are you trained in new methods or techniques of coping with difficult situations?	1-6 years	20,5	0,773	0,679
	6-15 years	18,76		
	16 years and above	18,39		
Have you been trained as to how to cope with the detainees' psychological problems?	1-6 years	12,79	5,34	0,069
	6-15 years	19,93		
	16 years and above	21,67		
Have you been trained to cope with detainees' delinquent behaviour?	1-6 years	14	3,17	0,205
	6-15 years	19,07		
	16 years and above	22,72		
Have you been trained to handle efficiently the detainees' relatives?	1-6 years	18,64	0,042	0,979
	6-15 years	19,24		
	16 years and above	18,72		
Would you characterize your co-operation with the social services satisfactory?	1-6 years	19,14	0,02	0,99
	6-15 years	18,81		
	16 years and above	19,33		

\*Statistical significance

## Conclusion

The policy against crime is shaped through a wide range of actions and its main aim is not only to fight against crime effectively but also to take appropriate actions in order to prevent it. Penitentiary policy is part of the anti-crime policy. In addition to the legislative framework which sets the rules, those who play a very important role in the implementation of the penitentiary policy are the prison officers and, more specifically, the prison guards who, in fact, consist the professional team under study. The guards work in an especially complex as well as differential post – innovative framework in which conditions, distinct from one another, prevail, thus, justifying the existence of different, conflicting values and interests in it. Education and training for life are indispensable in coping with the conditions prevailing in the prisons.

It is discernible that the guards in the Greek penitentiary institutions have not been significantly trained in new methods or techniques of efficiently coping either with difficult situations or with the detainees' psychological problems. Furthermore, we can safely note that the views the guards have are independent of their years of service or their level of education, which proves that the perceptions and views they have for their training coincide and have the characteristics we have mentioned above, without them being differentiated as time passes or according to their level of education. The above mentioned points may be explained to some extent by the structure of the curriculum of the initial training the guards receive which consists of general subjects characterized by a minor practical-experiential approach. The employment of scientific personnel with no specialization, only general knowledge on a subject creates difficulties in following an effective penitentiary policy. All the above, combined with the complete lack of the educational programmes and seminars provided by the penitentiary code due to the low national budget, lead to the invalidity of the aims of the penitentiary system as well as to the homogenization of the guards' views regardless of their years of service or educational level. Furthermore, a stand still in the personnel's development (social – professional) is indicated in an indirect way, which, however, is not consistent with what seems to be happening according to the statistics internationally (Jurik and Winn 1987; Rogers 1991) A responsibility transferring from the socio – political level to an administrative – instrumental way of handling things would be a move towards the wrong direction since the structure of the legislative framework and the state administration of the penitentiary system influence a significant part of the content and the structural outline of the ways in which these men of action justify as well as interpret their actions. Not only should the influential groups of people be seriously taken into consideration in a social system of structural inequalities but also the present state of the educational system should be analyzed in the light of such considerations. At the same time, the organisation and operation of the penitentiary system, in our study, specifically, the training of the prison guards, shows clearly not only the semantic significance of the concept of crime for the control-imposing groups but also the way in which anti-crime culture and social control are shaped. The approach can be characterised as interventional-disciplinary rather than social-integrating.

The reports of the people participating in our research are indicative of the above mentioned points. These people state in their reports that they deal with the difficulties they come up against within the penitentiary system based mainly on their mental fortitude (patience, persistence, etc), which can be supplemented, depending on the case, by their ability to communicate, their experience or the ability to improvise. Quite often they rely on luck. Training is nowhere mentioned in their reports. Taking into consideration that: a) according to Foucault (1977) detainees should be seen not as delinquent individuals but as individuals caught in a delinquent situation in which the individuals' behaviour depends not only on the relations individuals form or the context but also on their actions (Robinson 2002) and b) it is mentioned in international bibliography that the prison guards experience feelings of incompetence or depreciation of their work (Bendelow and Williams 1998), while they should express themselves and present their work in a manly manner without demonstrating emotions (sensitivity, understanding, etc) that social stereotypes associate with women

(Crawley 2004). It is made clear that the ways in which prison guards interpret the situation existing in prisons, their personal reaction to it and their views regarding the penitentiary system in general as well as the way in which the detainees should be handled, shape their inner social representations as well as their actions, both of which consist prevailing factors not only in subordinating their subjectivity to the penitentiary system but also in their interactivity with the structural elements of the system. Consequently, appropriate vocational training so that not only such situations can be handled but also occupational fatigue be avoided seems sine qua non. What is consoling is the fact that the prison guards co-operate with the social services of the prison.

What resulted from this research and should be seriously taken into consideration by the Ministry of Justice regarding the wider reorganisation of the prison guards' training is the fact that the prison guards remain "at stand still" as far as their training is concerned relying more on their experience and mental fortitude. The above mentioned point can put at risk the tracing of a correct anti-crime policy. While the identification of those elements of the prison environment which influence in a negative way the situation prevailing there, their separation and classification in categories resulting in their systematic social, political and organisational analysis can not only lead to a real change of the conditions prevailing in the detention establishments, but also contribute to a rational long – term strategy of handling the specific phenomenon.

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