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*Environment of Prison Staff as a Source of Threats –  
Selected Aspects*

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Środowisko służby personelu więziennego jako źródło zagrożeń – wybrane aspekty

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ABSTRACT

Prison Service is a specific paramilitary dispositional group. The special nature of the service results from its subjectivity, which is the community of people forcibly isolated from the rest of society, due to acts committed in social space. Therefore, prison staff is exposed to a wide variety of occupational hazards. The purpose of the article is to present the specificity of the prison service and work environment, taking into account those selected factors that can negatively affect the quality and effectiveness of work performed, as well as pose a threat to both staff and prisoners. The first part of the article characterises Prison Service as a specific dispositional group. Then, professional and ethical requirements imposed on prison staff are presented. The main part of the article characterises selected occupational hazards related to the work environment, such as biological, physical and ergonomic hazards, psychosocial risks and threats resulting from the organisation and culture of the service. It is followed by a summary as well as conclusions and recommendations. The article is theoretical and the basis for its development was the available literature on the subject of prison service in both theoretical and practical dimensions.

**Key words:** Prison Service; dispositional group; threats; service environment

INTRODUCTION

Prison Service, as one of the groups at the disposal of the state, while fulfilling its statutory duties, conducts, among others, penitentiary activities and social rehabilitation, protects society against perpetrators of crimes and ensures security and order in detention centres and prisons. Due to the place of performance

of duties and their specificity resulting primarily from the nature of people staying in the abovementioned institutions, officers and employees are in the group of “increased risk”, experiencing long-lasting, strong and negative emotional states (Urlińska, Urlińska, 2015), which, in combination with other objective factors, translates into the emergence of serious problems, requiring both immediate intervention and long-term preventive actions.

### PRISON SERVICE AS A DISPOSITIONAL GROUP

Prison Service is included in the disposition-uniformed groups, which sociologists have distinguished from the social layers, using the criterion of members of the group remaining in a specific (defined by legal norm) social relationship and the role played by these communities in society. These groups include all individuals whose basis of existence is belonging to an organised group of a special nature (Poklek, 2013). The very notion of “dispositional group” exists not only in sociology but has also grown into the terminology of security sciences and is the object and subject of research of various scientific environments, including political science, pedagogy and security. No wonder as it is a very extensive area of research, just like the entire milieu of uniformed formations. Hence, although they are understood and interpreted differently in literature, they share a common goal of action, which is direct, immediate protection and defence of society against all threats, regardless of whether they are military, paramilitary, civil or voluntary groups (Bogdalski, Bukowiecka, Cześcik, Zdrodowski, 2014). When it comes to the very concept of a dispositional group, it is worth referring to Maciejewski’s definition. The scholar is considered to be one of the precursors of research on dispositional groups. In his opinion, dispositional groups are “such social structures, whose availability we can speak in a narrow sense due to their specialised and specific nature of activities in a relatively limited scope” (Maciejewski, 2012, p. 40). What does disposition mean? Well, it’s about the general and specific ability of the abovementioned groups to carry out team activities performed in a planned and determined manner, in accordance with the tasks assigned to a given dispositional group (Maciejewski, 2012).

Morawski looks at dispositional groups differently. Namely, he defines this term as “a special kind of group having a state-shaped structure and hierarchy, in which smaller groups make up larger ones. They are entirely subordinated to the administrator” (Morawski, 2005, p. 22). This definition corresponds to Zagórski’s view, who, when defining the purpose of the groups’ activities, believes that “they are intended to stabilise the system of state power and protect it against internal, external threats and catastrophes of various nature” (Zagórski, 2000, p. 25). It can, therefore, be generalised that the dispositional group is a special social group characterised by specific readiness to act, the so-called disposition, operat-

ing in a planned and organised manner, having a specific structure within which its members function in a hierarchical manner, and the purpose of its activities are areas related to the protection of citizens' life and health, stable functioning of the state and protection of property and the environment.

Why is there a need to separate dispositional groups from many other social groups? It arises from two basic issues. The first one is related to the specific characteristics of members of these groups, who are usually distinguished by dedication and commitment to the implementation of tasks in difficult situations that require courage, dedication and disposition. Due to the difficult operating conditions, they require specific procedures, staff selection and preparation methods (Bogdalski, et al., 2014). Members of dispositional groups must have high professional qualifications and the ability to act efficiently in various situations and conditions, but it is worth adding high social competences, i.e. specific psychophysical features and social skills, focusing on human behaviour, attitudes, way of living, working in team and under time pressure, motivation, or communication and interpersonal skills. This is just a combination of these so-called hard and soft competence that determines the professional and social value of dispositional groups.

The second issue, according to Bsoul-Kopowska, results from “functioning in larger structures, e.g. military or paramilitary organisational units, in which there is a specific attitude to work referred to as ‘service’ and a militarised organisation and command-based order applies” (2017, p. 52).

Bearing in mind the types of dispositional groups, quoting Maciejewski (2012), they were divided into military, paramilitary, civil and voluntary ones. Military one includes all those entities that operate in a military social system whose main purpose is to defend the sovereignty of the state. The second group, paramilitary, as its name states, includes all those formations that are organised on a military pattern, including the Police, the State Fire Service, the Border Guard, the State Protection Service, the Foreign Intelligence Agency, the Internal Security Agency, and the Prison Service. Civilian dispositional groups are represented by institutions functioning both in the structures of government and self-government administration as well as totally private entities. And although they have one goal in common, which is ensuring broadly understood security, they can do it both as part of public and private funds. Such entities include medical, water, energy, technical, maritime and many other specialised rescue units in individual fields of rescue. Among the voluntary dispositional groups, i.e. those whose members generally operate on a voluntary basis, it is worth mentioning Mountain Volunteer Rescue Service, The Tatra Volunteer Rescue Service, Volunteer Water Rescue Service and many other organisational and legal types, including volunteer fire brigades.

It is worth adding that democratic societies expect members of the dispositional groups to have special predispositions not only psychophysical, but also

ethical and moral ones. Dispositional groups have the chance to act efficiently only when they receive a kind of trust from the society they serve, substantiating the need for their existence through the prism of social acceptance. For this to happen, communities and the media, especially at local level, are closely monitoring the actions of members of these formations, loudly condemning any deviations from legal norms and customary standards. It is no different in Prison Service, whose general specifics of service and work are regulated by the Act of 9<sup>th</sup> April 2010 on the Prison Service (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 848) and internal documents regulating individual areas of this formation.

### PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS OF PRISON STAFF

Although the Act on the Prison Service does not use the concept of prison staff, in the literature on the subject one can find this term, covering both officers and employees of Prison Service (Fuchs, Kołodziejczyk, 2016). Looking from the perspective of the organisational structure, whether it is a detention centre or a prison, staff can be divided into security personnel, i.e. those whose duty is to maintain security; resocialisation staff, including educators, psychologists, therapists; service staff responsible for admission and dismissal and ensuring adequate sanitary and medical conditions; as well as administrative staff, both senior management level (CEO), and lower (director of detention), dealing with the management of prison and executive facilities. Considering the frequency of contacts with prisoners, it can be said that the groups who have continuous contact with prisoners are officers and employees from the first and second groups, while among the other two groups there are only occasional contacts with prisoners (Fuchs, Kołodziejczyk, 2016).

It is possible to draw the conclusion that the service and work of prison staff is conditioned by many factors, among which contact with prisoners should be mentioned in the first place, implying such significant threats as fear of personal security and even relatives and families, activities of prison subcultures, often of criminal nature, overcrowding, staff deficit, work overload, lack of understanding on the part of superiors and family. Hence, to meet the hardships of the service, the officers and employees have many statutory requirements that they must meet in order for them to perform their tasks effectively and lawfully. These requirements, both of a professional and ethical nature are included in the Act on Prison Service, which specifies in Art. 27, that officers and employees should show adequate general and professional preparation and a high moral level, systematically improve their qualifications and improve their professional qualifications. In proceedings against persons deprived of their liberty, they are obliged in particular to: 1) be guided by the rule of law, impartiality and humanity; 2) respect their rights and dignity; 3) influence positively their own example. In addition, prison staff may

not participate in activities that undermine the authority of the Prison Service or in which official information is used for non-business purposes and for maintaining contacts other than those arising from official duties with persons deprived of liberty and providing unauthorised persons with information about persons deprived of liberty, also after their release.

By law stated in the Act on Prison Service, the Director General of the Prison Service issued regulations of 18<sup>th</sup> October 2010 on the principles of professional ethics of officers and employees of the Prison Service, in which we read that prison staff both in and outside the service should keep lawfully, with the dignity of a public official, and avoid behaviours and situations that harm the good name of the formation. In relation to prisoners, a Prison Service officer and employee should be guided by the principle of humanitarianism, maintaining appropriate distance and prudence, as well as setting requirements appropriate to the possibilities. However, in friendly relations, prison staff are subject to personal culture, mutual loyalty and kindness, respect, tact and kindness. The supervisor should set the subordinates an example of impeccable behaviour, not abuse the position, function and degree, take care of a good atmosphere and good interpersonal relations, including anti-bullying.

In order to prepare prison staff for the proper performance of their official duties, the employer should also ensure their participation in initial, professional and specialist training as well as professional development, which are aimed at shaping the competences of officers and employees in particular in the field of: 1) coping with difficult and extreme situations; 2) assertive behaviour and empathy; 3) discipline and cooperation; 4) creative problem solving; 5) ethical behaviour; 6) proceedings based on and within the limits of the law. All these projects are aimed at proper preparation for the proper performance of official tasks.

While researching the social patterns of members of individual dispositional groups, Maciejewski (2012) points out that the social model of prison officers includes a physical, cultural and moral pattern. Referring to the latter, he emphasises such moral values as: honesty, courage, reliability, impartiality, loyalty, kindness, prudence, helpfulness, justice, objectivity.

Extremely interesting results on the above issue are seen in the research carried out by scientists of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń on a group of retired officers of the detention centre in this city. Based on the respondents' statements, it was possible to create a map of features that should characterise a good prison officer. These include: "professionalism, responsibility, sense of duty, honesty, reliability and discipline. The ability to interpret psychosocial phenomena, accompanying work under pressure, stress resistance as well as group management skills and good organisation of work are also invaluable. The officer's personality is very important, not only his approach to official duties, but above all an appropriate attitude towards another person. Optimism and a sense of humour,

combined with patience, tact, empathy and tolerance, allowed officers to relieve tension, gain the trust and respect of prisoners. They helped resolve difficult situations or conflicts before they escalated. Mindfulness, self-control, determination, assertiveness along with consistency and logical thinking were the guarantee of the effectiveness of performed actions. Self-help, self-esteem, awareness of the importance of service and a high sense of justice were helpful in the service” (Urlińska, Urlińska, 2015, p. 137)

In conclusion, it is also worth mentioning the recommendations of the occupational medicine service of the Prison Service, which pays special attention to the promotion and propagation of assertive behaviour, which requires observance of five basic human rights by one of the theoreticians of the assertiveness, Herbert Fensterheiman, which reads as follows: “1) You have the right to do what you want – up to the point where it doesn’t hurt someone else; 2) You have the right to preserve your dignity through assertive behaviour – even if it hurts someone else – provided your intentions were not aggressive; 3) You have the right to make your requests if you consider that the other person can refuse you; 4) There are interpersonal situations in which rights are not obvious. You then have the right to discuss this matter with the other person and explain it; 5) You have the right to exercise your rights” (Guide, 2019, pp. 4–5). The presented legal acts and the requirements contained therein for the professional and ethical preparation of prison staff are aimed at the reliable performance of official duties, however, their implementation is influenced by many factors, both objective and subjective, which can significantly affect the quality and degree of performance of official tasks and level of personal life and family.

## SELECTED THREATS IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT OF PRISON STAFF

The Prison Service is a specific dispositional group. Its basic specificity results from the type of tasks performed by officers and employees, the place where they are carried out and the entity to which they are addressed. Unlike in any other uniformed service, this last factor may determine the quality and effectiveness of tasks performed and the security of both prison staff and prisoners. Thus, the security of the penitentiary unit directly depends on the safe conditions of service and the state of health of officers and employees. Healthy people with high moral, intellectual and physical qualities should perform service and work in the ranks of the Prison Service. But the conditions of service depend not only on the personnel, but also on the environment of the service, including the conditions in which it is performed. The cited Act on the Prison Service clearly indicates in art. 117.1. that supervisors are obliged to provide officers with safe and hygienic conditions of service. Despite this, in practice, the performance of official duties may involve various types of accidents. According to art. 118.2. they are understood to be “an



emergency caused by an external cause, causing injury or death, which occurred during or in connection with: 1) performing official duties or superiors' orders; 2) performing activities in the interest of the service, even without instructions from superiors; 3) participation in compulsory classes related to improving the professional qualifications and physical fitness of officers; 4) performing functions or tasks commissioned by officers' trade union operating in the Prison Service or professional or social organisations; 5) saving people or their property from imminent danger or saving property of the Treasury from destruction or seizure; 6) providing assistance to a representative of a state body in the performance of official duties; 7) making a direct route to the place and from the place of performing the activities specified in items 1–6”.

As it results from the above formulations, the legislator has foreseen a wide range of activities and events, the performance of which or participation in them may result in an accident. Should it occur, the injured party receives one-time compensation. They are not entitled to it: “in the event of an accident or illness, the sole cause of which was the intentional or grossly negligent act or omission of an officer by the organisational unit, in violation of applicable law or orders, if his supervisors ensured conditions corresponding to these provisions and properly supervised their observance, and the officer had the necessary skills to perform specific activities and was properly trained in these provisions; in the event of an accident solely caused by the officer's behaviour caused by the use of alcohol or drugs; if the bodily injury or death of the officer was caused by his wilful misconduct” (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 848). That is why the work environment in which business activities are performed is so important, both in facilities and places owned by the Prison Service, as well as beyond them, but resulting from the type of official tasks performed (e.g. escorting an inmate).

We will understand the working environment of prison staff as both the workplace and the working conditions prevailing at the place of performance of professional duties, the presence of hazards at the workplace that contribute to the increased risk of undesirable events that may lead to injury to the employee's health and life. In turn, the workplace is a specific place of work that is part of the organisational structure of a given entity. It is related to the performance of defined tasks and activities. In this position, the employee constantly or periodically performs his professional activities (CSO, 2014).

Wojsznis defines a workplace as a workspace in which an employed person or employee team performs permanent or periodic professional activities. It also includes equipment and means of work (Wojsznis, 2018). There are specific working conditions at the workplace that are shaped by a set of factors. They are the result of the work process and are related to the process of performing professional tasks. Therefore, these factors are present in the work environment, i.e. at the workplace and in the workplace, which affects the efficiency and quality of work.

An employee may experience workload, i.e. the overall “stimulation of the work environment per employee, individual and subjectively felt mental effort (mental stress) and physical effort (physical stress)” (Krauze, Profalska, 2012, p. 102). This load “includes external conditions and requirements for the performance of work (external load) and the effects of the impact of workload on the psychophysical state of the employee (internal load)” (Krauze, Profalska, 2012, p. 102). To sum up, it can be stated that the working environment is shaped by physical, chemical and biological factors that occur at the workplace and in the area surrounding the workplace. However, working conditions include material, physical, chemical and biological conditions (Wróblewska, 2004).

There may be hazards in the work environment, i.e. harmful conditions that adversely affect employees, including their work efficiency, health and life status. These negative phenomena are observed when the concentration or intensity of these harmful factors exceeds acceptable norms. Therefore, hazards in the workplace can be divided into those that are associated with arduousness of work, as well as mechanical, psychosocial and organisational factors. Their impact is a potential source of accidents at work or an increased risk of occupational disease, damage to employees' health or their death.

#### BIOLOGICAL, PHYSICAL AND ERGONOMIC HAZARDS

Prison Service officers may be in contact with biological agents that are potentially hazardous to their health and life during their professional activities. They are exposed to their impact during contacts with prisoners, as well as when they inspect and search the personal belongings of prisoners and cells (Pomiankiewicz, 2011). These may be biological factors, such as cellular microorganisms, cell-free units, or internal parasites that cause infection, poisoning and allergies. Their path of transport is both air and blood and other body fluids, direct contact with another person or food. The result is a high risk of contracting such diseases as infectious diseases (measles, smallpox, tuberculosis, influenza), hepatitis B and C, AIDS, herpes, infection with *Salmonella* or hepatitis A.

Prison staff are also exposed to the effects of physical factors, which can generally be divided into objective and subjective. The former include temperature, noise, precipitation, smell and other occurring regardless of the will of officers. Subjective physical factors are related to the nature of the occupation, primarily to the difficult social environment. It is a high risk of physical contact with prisoners, and in particular any manifestation of aggression, including non-verbal, directed at people representing the justice system. Attempting physical contact, threatening the life and health of prison staff, is a kind of attempt to unload frustration, rebellion, and even deliberate action to cause pain and inability to serve. Therefore, prison staff experience numerous conflicts and even a sense of threat



to personal security. In many cases, there is a high risk of beating or mutilation. A threat to Prison Service officers are the activities of informal criminal structures active in prisons, as well as housing conditions and overcrowding in these facilities. Only these last two factors cause that the violence in prisons is multiplying (Fuchs, Kołodziejczyk, 2016).

Ergonomic factors, which often coexist with physical factors, are also important for the work of prison staff. They include the technical, infrastructural and housing condition of prison infrastructure, especially penitentiaries. Many of them are located in historic buildings that are at least 100 years old. Despite the modernisation and renovation actions taken, it is impossible to fundamentally change their cubature, organisation of space or the prevailing conditions in cells. Hence, prison service officers do their jobs in difficult housing conditions. They may have problems with proper control of the behaviour of prisoners in residential wards, with optimal organisation of their movement, carrying out a thorough check of the cells, cursory and personal checks on prisoners as well as their belongings and packages received. Architectural limitations also generate problems related to the limitation of illegal contacts and behaviours, which are a manifestation of violation of order and security in prisons.

### PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS

Analysing occupational stressors occurring in the work environment, it can be concluded that literally every element of work and service is a kind of occupational hazard, moreover, many of them are perceived subjectively. Therefore, by categorising them, the following division proposed by the authors of the report: Psychosocial risk management – a European framework approach. Indications for employers and employers' representatives can be adopted. They generated 10 types of psychosocial occupational hazards such as: 1) Work content (tasks); 2) Workload and work pace; 3) Work time frame (schedule); 4) Control over the work performed; 5) Work environment and equipment; 6) Culture and organisation functions; 7) Relationships; 8) Role in the organisation; 9) Career development; 10) Work-home relation (Central Institute for Labor Protection – National Research Institute, 2008). That is why prison staff are in the group of “increased risk”, experiencing long-lasting, strong and negative emotional states, which in combination with other objective factors translate into the appearance of serious health problems (Urlińska, Urlińska, 2015).

Psychosocial threats are determined primarily by mental stress, and their source are mainly factors such as: features of the work environment, employee demographic and social properties (age, gender, health, motivation, talents, emotions, intellect) and others (Nowacka, 2013). Observing the psychological burden on Prison Service personnel, which is the sum of all stages of work, it can be stat-

ed that it is caused by: monotype (repeatability of activities), monotonicity (inflow of the same data), wakefulness, frequent necessity of making difficult decisions, performing precise motor activities (Krauze, Profalska, 2012). The intensity of the psychological burden in Prison Service officers depends on the combination of various factors with the stage of the work process.

Personnel experience this burden because they must make decisions of various significance also when there is no clear assignment between signal and reaction. The complexity of the performed activity and its degree of identification can involve the nervous system, although executive processes depend essentially on the size of physical effort. It is also worth noting that the reason for psychological burdens for Prison Service officers may also be technical progress related to the increasing use of control devices (including e.g. eyeshot, range of hands, ranges of motion) and signalling (visual, sound, tactile signalling), which causes a sense of being constantly observed and strongly focused on external stimuli. This can cause mental fatigue, leading to a decrease in concentration, slowing down and weakening of perception and difficulty in thinking. Therefore, there is an increase in reaction time and frequency of errors, which in turn may rise the risk to the safety of employees and prisoners. Mental overload of Prison Service officers is a source of decrease in work motivation, emotional disorders (e.g. apathy, irritability), weakening of physical form and organisational energy, tendency of the nervous system to rest (yawning, drowsiness) and an increase in morbidity.

While dealing with the most dangerous criminals, many officers, especially from the security department, can observe disorders in self-esteem, an increase in excessive self-criticism, experiencing depression and disregarding social norms (so-called "personality hardening"), a strange way of thinking and behaviour, as well as manifestations of hyperactivity in thinking and acting (Ambrozik, Machel, Stępnia, 2008). To sum up, it can be assumed that service and work in such a dispositional group as Prison Service, is definitely stressogenic, and although stress is part of everyone's life, due to the nature of the activities performed by prison staff, it should be controlled and reduced.

#### THREATS ARISING FROM THE ORGANISATION AND CULTURE OF SERVICE

Paramilitary character of the Prison Service, based on the authoritarian style of management, hierarchical organisational structure, ordering, regulations and internal ordinances, and availability means that conflicts may arise both as a result of the organisation of the service as well as the management culture prevailing in the facility. This attitude towards prison staff is a potential source of such treatment for prisoners by officers and employees, which negatively affects the climate prevailing in this entity. As stated by Piotrowski, professional stress ob-

served among officers of the Prison Service is generated by order for immediate and absolute execution of official commands, a continuous order for availability, official relations shaped according to a military model, numerous and rigid regulations and ordinances that do not allow for different (any) performing a given task (Piotrowski, 2010). Its source can also be multi-shift and overtime, which in turn affects the organisation of family and personal life.

It is also worth paying attention to the prestige of the service, which is considered one of the heaviest, with low wages (an officer admitted to the service receives 2,782 zloty net), inadequate recruitment requirements and professional expectations. Hence, in the Prison Service there is an increasing number of vacancies that make it necessary to reorganise work in many penitentiary units. This is confirmed by data on the number of resignations: in 2018, 1,455 officers quit the job, and 1,143 were admitted, which represents a decrease of over 300 people per year (Ceglarsz, 2019). A kind of problem is also the requirement of constant professional development, resulting in an excessive number of trainings, sometimes of questionable value.

The Prison Service is also one of the most feminised formations, as 5,149 women officers and 1,146 female employees serve there, occupying the positions of psychologists, educators, therapists, as well as working in medical security and administration (Prison Service, 2019). It should be added that more and more women are staffed in security departments, also in managerial positions, which implies not always acceptable reactions and behaviours on the part of colleagues and subordinates as well as of prisoners. Meanwhile, social research on the role of women in prison, conducted several dozen years ago, indicates that their presence in penitentiary units reduces the level of prisoners' aggression and has a positive effect on the way of communication. In addition, women among prison staff display specific female fields of interest, skills, and sensitivity, and, therefore, prisons are seen as more approachable places.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summarising the considerations included in the article, it can be stated that:

1. The Prison Service is a paramilitary dispositional group, characterised by a unique specificity, consisting in the coexistence of two social groups – prison staff and prisoners. Each of them is guided by different rules of functioning, which can lead to conflicts and disorders in the proper functioning of penitentiary units.
2. The high recruitment requirements and the hardships of the service mean that there is a staff deficit in the Prison Service, which causes an above-average workload, including official tasks, the number of hours worked and the availability of prison staff remaining in the employment relationship.

3. The service and work of prison staff brings many adverse phenomena, both in the area of mental and physical health. Occupational stressors occurring particularly in organisational units having direct contact with prisoners cause disorders in the proper performance of official duties and have a negative impact on the personal and family life of officers and employees.
4. Prison infrastructure as well as equipment significantly affect the quality of official duties. These factors also condition the discomfort of serving prisoners, which may lead to verbal and non-verbal aggression, also addressed at prison staff.
5. There are many activities carried out in the Prison Service in order to ensure optimal service and work conditions, it is worth paying attention to their substantive quality and adaptation to the needs and expectations of recipients.
6. The Prison Service as a total institution of a closed nature, organised in a military manner should place great emphasis on the promotion of its formation among the public, so as to build a positive image and public perception.

Hence, it is worth proposing the following recommendations aimed at improving the material conditions and comfort of service:

- officers should be met with high professional and psychosocial requirements on admission to the law and during its fulfilment, however, it should be supported by the high social prestige of this formation;
- work with another person is a strong stress factor, therefore, prison staff should regularly and cyclically undergo training in the field of their professional duties, adapted to the type of tasks and the position held;
- due to the nature of the work of prison staff, requiring availability, shifting and resistance to stress in its various forms, it should be highly rewarded, which will contribute, *inter alia*, to reducing the staff deficit.

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## STRESZCZENIE

Służba Więzienna jest specyficzną grupą dyspozycyjną o charakterze paramilitarnym. Szczególny charakter wynika z jej podmiotowości, którą jest społeczność osób przymusowo odizolowanych od reszty społeczeństwa ze względu na czyny popełnione w przestrzeni społecznej. Stąd też personel więzienny narażony jest na wiele różnorodnych zagrożeń zawodowych. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie specyfiki środowiska służby i pracy personelu więziennego z uwzględnieniem wybranych czynników, które w sposób negatywny mogą wpływać na jakość i efektywność wykonywanej pracy, a także mogą stanowić zagrożenie zarówno dla personelu, jak i dla osadzonych.

W części pierwszej dokonano charakterystyki Służby Więziennej jako specyficznej grupy dyspozycyjnej. Następnie przedstawiono wymogi zawodowe i etyczne, jakie są stawiane personelowi więziennemu. W części zasadniczej opisano wybrane zagrożenia zawodowe związane ze środowiskiem pracy, jak zagrożenia biologiczne, fizyczne i ergonomiczne, zagrożenia psychospołeczne oraz zagrożenia wynikające z organizacji i kultury służby. W podsumowaniu zamieszczono wnioski i rekomendacje. Artykuł ma charakter teoretyczny, a podstawą do jego opracowania była dostępna literatura przedmiotu poruszająca kwestie Służby Więziennej zarówno w wymiarze teoretycznym, jak i praktycznym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Służba Więzienna; grupa dyspozycyjna; zagrożenia; środowisko służby