

# Social Structure and Anomie in Detention Facilities: Ways of Convict's Social Adaptation in Modern Russian Prisons

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**Abstract** — Based on the methodology of R. Merton, which is expounded in his work "Social Structure and Anomie", we have analyzed the main types of convicts' adjustment to detention facilities. The article describes the behavior patterns of convicts, reveals the motivation of behavior of various informal groups existing in prisons, as well as behavioral and group attitudes of convicted and their determinants. The results of a sociological study undertaken in places of deprivation of liberty allowed us to reveal the prevailing types of social adaptation of convicted in prisons.

**Keywords:** penitentiary system, social adaptation, convicted, deviation, prison subculture

## I. INTRODUCTION

Convicts are a special social group functioning in a closed social space on the basis of formal and informal rules that replace the lost statuses of an open social space. In places of deprivation of liberty, a person is formally depersonalized, no matter what social status he had before conviction, informally he gets a completely new status, according to the internal hierarchy among convicts, based on informal norms and rules, through which they perceive all the reality, including social and legal.

The monitoring tasks were to obtain primary information about detention facilities.

We tried to study the modes of individual adaptation through the adaptation of R.K. Merton's approach to the social structure and anomie study and through the category of success and the potential actions that the respondent considers acceptable for achieving the desired result. We believe that a mode of adaptation described by R. Merton as retreatism to a greater extent does not exist in places of deprivation of liberty, although it is not excluded from the general practices of social adaptation.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

The research is based on the materials of a sociological study undertaken in places of deprivation of liberty in 2019, observations, document analysis, structured and unstructured interviewing of convicts in the colony with a strict regime No. 1 of the Republic of Buryatia, Gusinoozersk.

The use of such a combination of empirical methods makes it possible to more fully characterize the object of research and study the posed problem.

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We also aimed to study the regimens of corrective colonies. The object of the study was the whole body of convicts. Along with the observations, interviews with convicts allowed us to enter into direct contact with respondents. Since the convicts are a social group of a closed type, a simple questionnaire survey would have led to a significant distortion of information as a result of special conditions, such as fear of the colony administration, negative perception of interviewers, following the laws and rules of the criminal world, and so on. Interviewing made it possible to expand the data obtained by questionnaire survey. The main advantage of using this method in relation to convicts is the possibility to observe non-verbal reactions of a respondent, and clarify uncertain and contradictory answers. The information obtained in combination with a questionnaire survey allows us to provide insight into the studied object. We carried out interviews both according to a standardized scheme, and according to a semi-standardized scheme based on an unstructured questionnaire and prompt card ("guide") with a list of compulsory questions, usually semi-closed, which not exclude discussions of other problems related to the research topic with the respondent. Obtaining information in this way allowed us to abstract from the control of the colony administration and to acquire more objective information.

An analysis of documents (letters from convicts, internal regulations, instructions of the prison administration on human treatment of prisoners, pat-down search, and so on) revealed the special features of the closed social group of convicts.

During the study, we repeatedly consulted with the officials of correctional institutions. In our opinion, only a complex study, combining all these procedures, makes it possible to obtain objective data. The main result of the study was the interpretation of these sociological data.

We carried out 22 structured and unstructured interviews, which shed light on the formal and informal factors affecting social adaptation in prisons.

The general population of the questionnaire conducted in April 2019 amounted to 600 people in places of deprivation of liberty with a strict regimen of the Republic of Buryatia. A sample of social research amounted to 182 people in colonies of a strict regimen.

### III. INTERPRETATION AND ADAPTATION OF R. MERTON'S CONCEPT

We tried to study the modes of individual adaptation through the category of success and the potential actions that the respondent considers acceptable for achieving the desired result.

TABLE I. R. MERTON'S MODES OF SOCIAL ADAPTATION.

Modes of Adaptation	Community Approved Goals	Socially Approved Means
conformity	+	+
innovation	+	-
ritualism	-	+
retreatism	-	-
rebellion	+-	+-

R. Merton argued that the person focused on attaining desired goals chooses individual means of its achievement, the totality of which is a way of social adaptation [1].

So, answers to the question "What does it mean for you to be successful?" were distributed as presented in Table II.

TABLE II. PERCEPTION OF SUCCESS (AS A PERCENTAGE OF 182 RESPONDENTS)

"What does it mean for you to be successful"?	Number	
	abs.	%
To be in the money	71	39.0
The ability to break the rules for getting what you need	24	13.2
To follow the established rules and achieve your goal	63	34.6
Success is not for me, I'm superfluous in this world	20	11.0
Other	4	8.2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The table above shows that the main criterion for success for most convicted is material well-being. Consequently, the motives of actions, including criminal ones, are dictated by the desire to achieve material wealth and the intensity of this desire.

The answers of our respondents indirectly confirm this conclusion. So, the most popular answer on the question: "What prompted you to commit a crime?" was the following: "I wanted to achieve the goal, and did not have an opportunity

to achieve it in another way." 20.9% of respondents gave such an answer.

To achieve the goal some people are ready to violate the rules of social behavior, and even the rules of law, bypassing which they achieve their goals.

We will consider the way of individual adaptation defined as "innovation" through the person's ability to break the rules and his intrinsic motivation for success, i. e. what a person is ready to do to achieve his goal.

Answers to the question "In your opinion, how can you achieve success?" are presented in Table III.

TABLE III. WAYS TO SUCCEED (AS A PERCENTAGE OF 182 RESPONDENTS):

In your opinion, how can success be achieved?	Number	
	abs.	%
Fit in, follow the rules, as this is the best way to achieve goals, today there are all the opportunities for it	68	37.4
It is impossible to achieve success following the generally accepted social rules and not violating them, even in small things, many successful people broke the rules and even committed crimes	72	39.6
It's easier to do nothing at all, because nothing will come of my capabilities	32	17.6
Other	10	5.4

The data obtained show that the main types of convicts' adjustment to places of deprivation of liberty are the following:

- innovation;
- conformism;
- ritualism;
- rebellion to a lesser extent.

Considering the specific environment of detention facilities, we should note that there prevail the specific rules, which often contradict both social norms and law rules existing outside isolation, in an open social environment. It would be logical to assume that in places of deprivation of liberty quite different ways of adaptation and mechanisms for approval of means for achieving goals are in force. In order to reveal whether this is true, we asked our respondents in places of deprivation of liberty a number of questions (Table IV).

TABLE IV. FACTORS OF SUCCESSFUL ADAPTATION TO THE ENVIRONMENT OF CONVICTS (AS A PERCENTAGE OF 182 RESPONDENTS)

What is first necessary for adaptation to the conditions of a correctional colony?	Number	
	abs.	%
Money	59	33.3
Connections and acquaintances with people who have an influence on the administration of the corrective colony	54	30.5
Ties in thieves' world	30	16.9
Physical force	25	14.1
Other	18	10.2
To live relatively comfortably here we should follow the internal rules and appeal to the colony staff with all the difficulties	52	28.6
Sometimes we violate the colony's internal rules as we have our own ones, that can not be broken	54	29.7
It is necessary to follow the internal rules even if I don't want to do this, only in this way I can adapt and feel relatively comfortable	35	19.2

**TABLE V. CAUSES OF CRIME (AS A PERCENTAGE OF 182 RESPONDENTS)**

<b>What principle of conflict resolution do you most often encounter in everyday life?</b>	<b>Number</b>	
	<b>abs.</b>	<b>%</b>
Where there is power, there is truth	64	35.4
The winner is always right	55	30.4
People tend to negotiate, there are administrative rules to resolve the conflict, so correctional educators will judge who is right and who is wrong	31	17.1
True solutions are not a result of discussion, but they are a result of the power and mind of individuals	29	16.0
First come, first served	19	10.5
Other	13	7.2
Resolution of the conflict on your own	2	1.1
Deep meaningful conversation	3	1.7
Don't know	1	0.6
Just sit down and talk	2	1.1
People will judge in all fairness	4	2.2
No answer	5	2.8
I did not want	1	0.6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### IV. TYPES OF SOCIAL ADAPTATION IN PRISONS

The results of the survey and extended interviews with convicts allowed us to reconstruct the system of successful adaptation in prisons and describe the portraits of social groups by type of adaptation.

Innovators in prisons often belong to the highest caste of the criminal world, they follow laws and regulations only for profit. And the so-called thieves' common code of law is interpreted by them depending on the situation. The pivotal motive of this social group is to achieve the maximal comfort that is possible in their current situation.

As a result of interviewing the so-called blatnye, we identified the following conservative markers that relate this social group of convicted to innovators.

For example, many of convicts serving their sentences for the first time, being isolated from society knowingly violated the rules of law, as that allowed them to achieve the goal as quickly as possible. In prison, they did not realize the wrongfulness of their actions, and moreover established in the faith that a criminal lifestyle is the only possible way to achieve material well-being. In view of the absence of social elevators, the alternative is coming up in the criminal world.

Maksim, convicted under Article 158 of the Criminal Code: "... after the release I will remain blatnoy, it can be different — less of flossing, I'll behave more calmly, just solve serious matters and be at work. Accordingly, will have the money..."

Commitment to force and ties, achievement of the goal regardless of means, since the winners are not judged, is a motto for many convicts.

The need to comply with the rules of internal regulations and at the same time to follow the completely different thieves' common code of law forces this social group to find alternative solutions, again in favor of comfort, and to convince its adherents that this is a natural process and necessity. Innovators often push convicts, who believe firmly in the thieves' code, for offences in prisons to satisfy their mercenary interests.

23% of respondents believe that following the unspoken rules of the places of deprivation of liberty is primary and more important than compliance with the internal rules of the correctional colony, 27% of convicted consider violation of the rules possible if it is necessary to achieve any goal.

**Conformity.** This type of adaptation is difficult to identify in places of deprivation of liberty, since conformity involves the goals approved by society and socially approved means in achieving the goals. Thus the commission of a crime from this perspective is nonsense.

In our opinion, conformists are less prone to commit crimes.[2]

In our study, we tried to understand what caused the crime and asked the respondents the following question: "What prompted you to commit a crime?"

**TABLE VI. CAUSES OF CRIME (AS A PERCENTAGE OF 182 RESPONDENTS)**

<b>What prompted you to commit a crime?</b>	<b>Number</b>	
	<b>abs.</b>	<b>%</b>
I wanted to be authoritative and respected among my friends, only this way I could prove that I am "worth something"	22	12.1
I'm tired that I don't have anything, but someone has everything	37	20.3
It was believed in my environment that I was not doing anything wrong, only now I understand that I committed a crime, everyone did it, but I got caught	39	21.4
I wanted to achieve the goal, and did not have an opportunity to achieve it in another way	38	20.9
It was a protest against the system and prevailing rules of society, they are not fair	24	13.2
Other	27	14.8
Alcohol	7	3.8
No answer	10	5.5
I should think for myself	5	2.7
It turned out so	5	2.7
I should not be here at all	3	1.6
Pathological stealing	1	0.5
A word and a blow	1	0.5
Drugs	2	1.1
Fearlessness	2	1.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The data obtained shown that many convicts considered a crime as common practice: " It was believed in my environment that I was not doing anything wrong, only now I understand that I committed a crime, everyone did it, but I got caught". Analyzing this answer, we come to the conclusion that the person, being in a society of people whose values are focused on nefarious activities, without realizing the consequences behave from the perspective of the approved by this society (social group) goals and means to achieve them. Therefore, the person in this system is a conformist, usually, they are teenagers.

In the process of interviewing, we often recorded the following statements: "... I was young, it was desipience, and everyone behaved like that then and I take the fall. And if I would have behaved differently, they would wipe the floor with me, then I acted as the streets demanded, and I did not think of any other laws ..."

The behavior pattern of this group of convicted is more subject to the logic of conflict-free coexistence with other prisoners. Conformists are seeking for early release, therefore

they allow themselves to cooperate with the administration of the colony, but also try not to violate the basic principles of coexistence with cellmates. This is the second most prevalent type of individual adaptation in places of deprivation of liberty.

**Ritualism.** There is a very fine line between ritualism and conformism. The conformist achieves the desired goals with the help of socially approved goals and means, the ritualist often does not have a goal, he simply imitates any activity. In places of deprivation of liberty such people usually adjoin a group that can provide security in exchange for primitive services that do not endanger the ritualist and do not bother him. In return, the ritualists copy the behavior pattern of the group they consider dominant, usually show zeal in upholding certain ideas. But they don't really hold them important.

Usually, these people are not focused on material success as innovators and an early release is not their primary goal. They can easily adapt to the surrounding reality. The interviewed convicts, who, in our opinion, are ritualists, expressed their attitude to succeed in the following statement: "It's easier to do nothing at all, because nothing will come of my capabilities".

**Rebellion.** Ideological views of a person rarely become the causes of crimes. However, the results of the survey and interviews with the convicts shown that for some offenders the crime was like a protest against the rules, i. e. the motive of the crime was not financial or any other benefit, but an attempt to make society fairer in their vision of fairness.

"It was a protest against the system and prevailing rules of society, they are not fair".

These are the reasons for committing crimes by 13.2% of interviewed convicts.

In places of deprivation of liberty this group to a greater extent personifies the keepers of the thieves' common code of law, which is an alternative to an unjust world without isolation for them

**Retreatism.** We considered this type of convicts' adjustment to detention facilities through real suicidal attempts and denial of social interactions inherent to places of deprivation of liberty in favor of religious practices.

Concerning suicides in prisons, we should mention auto-aggression, which is a kind of protest against the rules of places of deprivation of liberty. Self-mutilation and attempted suicides are to a greater extent a way to exert pressure on the colony's administration and to grab the attention of the general public to the problems existing in the colonies [11].

Consequently, we cannot consider the achievement of goals through injury and often at the cost of life as retreatism, to a greater extent this behavior characterizes another way of social adaptation described by R. Merton — rebellion. Penitentiary practice knows a lot of "show-offy" ways for demonstration of unwillingness to work or comply with the prescribed rules by prisoners. For example, there were cases of swallowing nails and other objects to cause injuries to one's own body. This method of self-harm causes internal hemorrhage, and the person is put in hospital. There are also known cases when convicts nailed their body parts to the boards, thereby demonstrating their unwillingness to comply with internal regulations or inconvenient for their rules.

A deep depression, a rejection of the new social environment of prison, a sense of low self-worth in the system of social relations of the colony lead to suicides or suicidal attempts, which in our view are one of the few forms of retreatism manifestation in prisons.

It should be noted that in 2017–2019 there were no suicidal attempts and completed suicides in the correctional colony No. 1. Suicides are uncharacteristic practice for the penitentiary system of the Republic of Buryatia in general. We believe that such a dramatic way to solve problems in places of deprivation of liberty is not peculiar and does not have a mass character. This is explained by the fact that supervision system in prisons prevent suicides. The results of the interviews with convicted and employees of the penitentiary system point to the fact that a very small proportion of convicts experience the psychological state described above. Psychologists of the penitentiary system note that people held in prisons are even less prone to suicidal feelings than free people who are free: there are no completed suicide attempts in prisons, and the indicator of suicides in free social space is 3:1.

We also should clarify that practical religious conduct is not always a form of retreatism in prisons. There are representatives of orthodox religious views in places of deprivation of liberty, and it is natural enough for people to perform religious rites and put them above the rules existing in prisons. We are more interested in people who were converted in places of deprivation of liberty and found in religion an alternative to the order existing in prisons. There are very few such people among the convicted.

We believe that a mode of adaptation described by R. Merton as retreatism to a greater extent does not exist in places of deprivation of liberty, although it is not excluded from the general practices of social adaptation [12].

Answering the question "Does means of individual adaptation change in confinement?", we cannot say yes with complete confidence. It is necessary to expand the sample of convicts, conduct a social experiment and a long-term observation for such conclusions. Without such an opportunity, we can make only preliminary conclusions.

Making conclusions, we should note a number of interesting details that we found out during the study:

- in places of deprivation of liberty the convicted put more value on material gain, rather than on not freedom as we assumed;
- the codes of the underworld in many respects act as a tool for obtaining material or other benefits.

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