

## **Abstract**

**Background:** Substance use among people committing crime has been an important issue for a long time. Since 2016, the Czech Prison Service (VSČR) has established the position of an addictionologist to provide expert addiction care in prisons using the same interventions and procedures that are used in civilian facilities. The position is classified under health services, but is expected to work closely with correctional and detention services. The conditions of work depend on each prison specifics.

**Aims:** The research describes actual situation of addictionologists employed in the Prison Service of the Czech Republic. Using sub-objectives, the author tried to find out the characteristics of people working as addictionologists in the Prison Service, to describe their activities in the Prison Service system and to find out the addictionologist's view on the perceived possibilities and limits of this position.

**Methods:** The base file was selected using the total selection method. All the 10 employees who were employed in the Prison Service at the time of the research as addictionologists were contacted. The research sample consisted of 8 workers who were interested in research participation. A qualitative method of semi-structured interviews was used in order to collect data via online communication tools or by telephone. The data were processed using the open coding method and analyzed by simple enumeration and cluster method.

**Results:** There are 5 women and 3 men working as addictionologists, with an age range of 29 to 65 years. 7 respondents have completed a master's degree or higher level of education, and 1 respondent has completed a bachelor's degree. 5 respondents have at least initiated psychotherapeutic training. The length of previous experience in the field varies from 0 to 24 years. Addictionologists are providing interventions similar to those in civilian settings. The specifics are determined by the character of detention and execution of sentences and the internal rules of prisons. Limitations of working in this type of service were found in the limited use of some therapeutic interventions and approaches, other limitations were the unsystematic continuity of care and limited opportunities for professional development of workers. Opportunities were identified as the conditions set by the employer (financial evaluation, working hours, length of leave) and also a certain attractiveness of the prison environment and working with specific clientele.

**Conclusion:** For better consolidation of the position, further steps have been recommended, mainly unification documents for the position of addictionologist in prisons, the expansion of opportunities for professional development of staff and the development dialogue with other entities involved in the care of addiction patients.

## **Keywords**

addictionologist - prisons - addictions - drug users - penitentiary care