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Practice of silence to promote coping, emotion regulation, and future planning of imprisoned individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative study

Patrizio Paoletti^a, Giulia Perasso^a, Carmela Lillo^a, Grazia Serantoni^a,
Alessandro Maculan^b, Francesca Vianello^b, and Tania Di Giuseppe^a

^aResearch Institute for Neuroscience, Education and Didactics, Fondazione Patrizio Paoletti, Assisi, Italy; ^bDepartment of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology, University of Padua, Padua, Italy

ABSTRACT

Recent studies have emphasized that silence is a fundamental element in meditative practices for stress relief, well-being, and stimulating faith in the future. This study describes the educational experience of implementing the *Practice of Silence Device* in a prison setting during the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic (May–July, 2021). Interviews with 23 adult male imprisoned individuals (average age = 48.79; 65% Italians) were analyzed through a qualitative-phenomenological method. The results revealed this technique's positive impact on rehabilitating imprisoned individuals across 3 dimensions: coping, emotion management, and ability to plan the future. Future studies should investigate specific silence-based techniques to support imprisoned individuals' rehabilitation.

KEYWORDS

silence; meditation;
imprisoned individuals;
inmates; prison; resilience;
emotional regulation;
sphere model of
consciousness

Introduction

An in-depth investigation of the scientific literature related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental and physical well-being of imprisoned individuals revealed an increase of self-injurious and suicidal behaviors, and hetero-directed aggression episodes (Hewson et al., 2020). Furthermore, pandemic-related experiences, especially in the most fragile and marginalized populations, have exacerbated the sense of an uncertain future (Freeman & Seymour, 2010) and the perception of social isolation (Johnson et al., 2021).

CONTACT Grazia Serantoni  grazia.serantoni@gmail.com  Research Institute for Neuroscience, Education and Didactics, Fondazione Patrizio Paoletti, Assisi, Italy.

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At the end of March 2022, Italian prisons were in a state of chronic overcrowding, with 54,609 incarcerated individuals in nearly 200 institutions across the country, when compared to a regulatory capacity of 50,853 (Dipartimento dell'Amministrazione penitenziaria [*Department of Prison Administration*], 2022; Associazione Antigone, 2022). Article 27 of the Italian Constitution stipulates that sentences should aim at reeducating the convicted individual; however, intramural treatment activities that can contribute to this goal (e.g., work, school, cultural activities, etc.) are scarce and diversely implemented between institutions. This is caused by the limited numbers of educators, approximately 700 (an average of one educator for every 74 imprisoned individuals), in Italy. Conversely, the presence of prison police is much higher at approximately 31,000 officers. This disproportion depicts the penitentiary as a place of deprivation of freedom that leads to non-progressive pathways for the social reintegration of imprisoned individuals (Maculan, 2019). However, researchers who investigated the functioning of alternative rehabilitative activities in penitentiaries with incarceration rates higher than Italy's (Derlic, 2020), reported that employing resources in complementary activities increases imprisoned individuals' well-being and decreases total management costs (Bilderbeck et al., 2013; Crichlow & Joseph, 2015; Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2012).

A recent systematic review (Derlic, 2020) highlighted the use of alternative rehabilitation methods, including yoga, meditation, and mindfulness, integrated into structured programs and carried out regularly in complex and difficult contexts, such as prisons, to protect and promote psychophysical well-being and gain a better perception of life in prison; moreover, these methods strengthen *life skills*, which influence the complex process of societal reintegration (Lorenzon, 2020) in the long-term. Yoga helps the mind to "listen" to the "breath" by silencing thoughts and allowing the body to release tensions. It fosters greater self-awareness and self-healing and reduces anxiety and depressive symptoms. Additionally, it results in a perception of general well-being and improved physical pain control in the imprisoned individuals (Bilderbeck et al., 2013; Crichlow & Joseph, 2015). Meditative practices appear to elicit the incarcerated individuals' awareness of self and body, relaxation, attention and focus skills, feelings of self-actualization, self-efficacy, empathy, and forgiveness (Derlic, 2020; Moore et al., 2018). In the prison context, mindfulness techniques can increase imprisoned individuals' awareness of their cognitive decision-making processes by anchoring them in the present through reinforcement of their internal experience (that occurs during the practice of silence) (Crichlow & Joseph, 2015) and improving their prosociality with a concomitant decrease in stress and aggressive behaviors (Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2012).

Practicing meditation during incarceration may both improve individual emotional intelligence (Combs et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2018; Perelman et al., 2012), control aggression and decrease sleep disturbances and the sense of guilt (Sumter et al., 2009). Psychotherapeutic approaches for imprisoned individuals, including cognitive-behavioral therapy and integrated principles of Buddhist meditation, lead to a significant decrease in anger and reactivity (Moore et al., 2018; Vannoy & Hoyt, 2004). Similarly, holistic therapies may support imprisoned individuals in recognizing and accepting their self-image, provide a meaningful experience and offer a flexible tool to adapt to prison settings (Griera & Clot-Garrell, 2005; Derlic, 2020).

Among the different techniques, silence (an element of meditation, guided meditation, and mindfulness) can specifically impact stress and anxiety management. Silence activates adaptive coping strategies in fragile and exposed individuals, such as incarcerated individuals (irrespective of whether they have overt psychiatric illnesses) (Combs et al., 2019; Hölzel et al., 2011; Leidenfrost et al., 2016). Silence-based meditative practices can increase mental clarity, focused attention, de-automatize the cognitive responses, and decrease rumination (Hanley & Garland, 2019; Shonin & Van Gordon, 2016).

In Italy, only Garofalo et al. (2020) investigated mindfulness among imprisoned individuals, where they highlighted a negative association between this construct and aggressiveness. However, up to date qualitative research on the effects of silence-based meditation among incarcerated individuals is still lacking. Thus, the present study wants to deepen a still unexplored field, both theoretically and empirically.

Practice of Silence Device (PSD)

Among the different guided meditation and mindfulness techniques, the *Practice of Silence Device (PSD)* was applied within the *Envisioning the Future (EF) training program* in the prison context (Di Giuseppe, Perasso, Mazzeo, et al., 2022; Di Giuseppe, Perasso, Maculan, et al., 2022; Paoletti, Di Giuseppe, et al., 2023). The PSD is a short 3-min meditation technique inspired by the *O.M.M. (One Minute Meditation)* method (Paoletti, 2018), which is based on the theoretical framework of the *Sphere Model of Consciousness* (Paoletti & Ben-Soussan, 2019, 2020; Pintimalli et al., 2020). The nodal and integral parts of *EF training program* mainly focus on fostering resilience. Furthermore, PSD can be used in a variety of challenging contexts (educational, rehabilitation, emergency, etc.). The *EF training program* aims to support well-being and the prefiguration of the future (Di Giuseppe et al., 2023; Paoletti, Perasso, et al., 2023), emotional self-regulation, and the ability to proactively resignify individual

Table 1. 10 Keys to resilience (mod. Paoletti, Di Giuseppe, Lillo, Ben-Soussan, et al., 2022).

Key	Neuropsychopedagogical Principle	Strategy
1. Focus on what you can control and make small decisions	<i>Observation and Self-observation</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2011a)	Bringing attention to the here and now, and making small decisions to overcome uncertainty
2. Identify an attainable, exciting, measurable goal	<i>Observation and Self-observation</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2011a)	Setting goals, foreseeing obstacles, and cultivating positive beliefs
3. Several times a day become aware of your posture	<i>Observation and Self-observation</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2011a)	Setting body posture for physical activation, raising attention, and self-confidence
4. Be inspired by stories	<i>Mediation</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2011b)	Following resilience role-models
5. Ask yourself what is really important	<i>Mediation</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2011b)	Training in self-motivation, listening to your most intimate preferences
6. Cultivate gratitude	<i>Mediation</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2011b)	Learning to cultivate positive emotions (e.g., gratitude) and to manage negative emotions
7. Appreciate the other as a resource, cultivate and expand your social network	<i>Translation</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2012)	Listening, sharing experiences, and enhancing social and interpersonal resources
8. Cultivate curiosity	<i>Translation</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2012)	Learning from everything and every experience
9. Practice a few minutes of silence	<i>Normalization</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2013)	Practicing intentional silence multiple times a day, envisioning the best version of yourself
10. Embrace and transform: before bedtime, generate your tomorrow today	<i>Normalization</i> (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2013)	Self-programming and foreshadowing of the future through proactive storytelling of daily life

Note. The 10 Keys to Resilience are theoretical-practical directions that (i) describe the processes of resilient brain functioning and (ii) support the process of mindfulness through the proactive cognitive re-signification of experience, enhancing emotion regulation processes, and the individual's physical well-being. In conjunction, these 10 dimensions create an expanded conceptualization of resilience, in which individuals train themselves to overcome adversity in order to transform difficulties into an opportunity for personal and collective growth (Paoletti, Di Giuseppe, Lillo, Anella, et al., 2022).

experiences (Di Giuseppe, et al., [in press](#); Maculan et al., 2022; Paoletti, Di Giuseppe, Lillo, Serantoni, et al., 2022).

EF training program integrates the *10 keys for resilience* (Di Giuseppe, 2022; Paoletti, Di Giuseppe, Lillo, Anella, et al., 2022); specifically, *key 9* proposes the *PSD* (Table 1). According to this theoretical and practical framework, *PSD* splits the individual's attention between breath and body and requires them to focus on images of a better version of themselves. Several studies have reported that individual cognitive processes are stimulated by the experience of silence, which can strengthen an individual's internal and relational resources. Silence leads to a present characterized by the absence of stimuli that usually trigger negative emotions (Crichlow & Joseph, 2015; Pintimalli et al., 2020; Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2012). The *PSD* has three main goals: (i) increase the ability to self-observe automatic and maladaptive dynamics of thinking and behavior; (ii) develop emotional management skills by encouraging neutral and positive purpose-directed emotions; and (iii) improve the proactive intentional resignification of experiences, resulting in an awakening

of future planning skills. The *PSD* was taught to incarcerated individuals according to its five phases: (1) a meditation preparatory phase of simple and brief instructions that prepares participants for the subsequent phases of actual meditation; (2) division of participants' attention both on breath and body relaxation, through an enhanced attention to the *here and now*; (3) connection to silence as a psychophysical state related to both emotional and mental predisposition and to self-acceptance, neutrality, and nonjudgment. During this stage, participants are invited to welcome and neutralize their emotions, whether positive or negative, and to assume a nonjudgmental position; (4) construction of a better mental self-image involving awareness of the body, emotions, and thoughts. During this stage, participants are invited to be conscious of their posture, physical energy, and emotional and mental states. Through this process, participants aim for a better version of themselves, fostering the expression of their future desires; and (5) identification of the small daily acts that can enable participants to achieve the desired change.

Objectives and hypotheses

This qualitative study aims at analyzing the influence of *PSD* on the coping skills of imprisoned individuals who participated in *EF*. We hypothesize that the program could ameliorate imprisoned individuals' coping skills, emotional regulation, and the ability to plan their future.

Materials and methods

The *EF training program* proposed at the Padua Prison, originally conceived by the interdisciplinary team of the *Patrizio Paoletti Foundation* in 2017, was remodeled based on the specific needs arising from both the COVID-19 pandemic situation and prison context. It was remotely implemented through collaboration among the *Patrizio Paoletti Foundation*, the University of Padua, and Padua Prison. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee (*EC*) of the University of Padua (dossier no. 2020-III/13.41.4). The program included 9 sessions of 60 min, conducted weekly over a three-month period, led by trainers with expertise in the *Pedagogy for the Third Millennium* method (*PTM*) (Paoletti, 2008). The sessions explored the *10 keys to resilience* (Table 1), based on interdisciplinary studies (Paoletti, Di Giuseppe, Lillo, Anella, et al., 2022), and special attention was given to *key 9* (i.e., "Practice a few minutes of silence"). Trainers prescribed participants to also practice the *PSD* in the intervals between lessons. To evaluate the experience of participation in the training, an *ad hoc* semi-structured interview was created for investigating

with three open questions: (a) main aspects of participation in the program; (b) usefulness of the proposed techniques, in particular the *PSD*, in the management of daily life in prison; and (c) anecdotes and insights (See [Appendix A](#)). The interviews were conducted in person, 8-weeks after the end of the training, due to institutional and organizational issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were administered by two qualified researchers from the University of Padua. The mean time-length of the interviews was 1.5 hours.

Participants

The project involved $N=36$ male imprisoned individuals of Padua prison who participated in the training. Among them, a group of imprisoned individuals ($N=23$) (average age = 48.79 years; 65% were of Italian nationality) voluntarily participated in the research (i.e., convenience sampling), responding to semi-structured interviews after the end of the training. All participants understand and speak Italian. The participants had been sentenced to >5 years of imprisonment as “medium-security level” incarcerated individuals, according to Italian law (D.A.P. Circular No. 3359/5890, dated April 21, 1993). The interviews were conducted by trained operators at the Padua prison, with adequate privacy. Each participant completed an informed consent form for participation and audio recording of the interviews.

Data analysis

Data analysis aimed at the exploration of the explicit and implicit meanings of the testimonies (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sbraccia & Vianello, 2016). The data was thematically analyzed in a bottom-up, inductive, and recursive sense in the framework of the Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Subsequently, a Content Analysis identified the emerging themes and categories from the transcribed texts, as shown in [Figure 1](#).

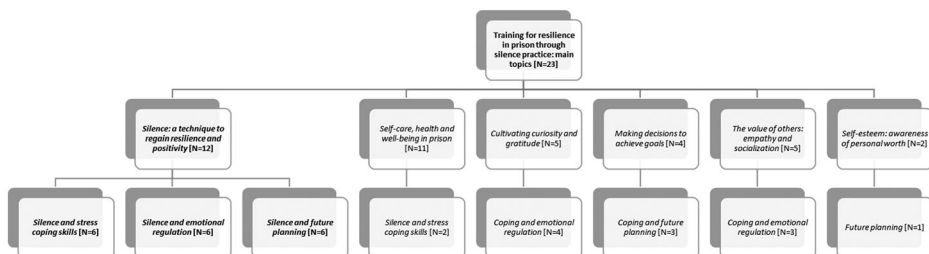


Figure 1. Coding tree of the categories identified through content analysis, tagging and thematic analysis of the full text interviews with 23 imprisoned individuals participating in the research [N = number of interviews/recurrence of the topic].

Table 2. Self-report excerpts selected for the ‘silence and coping’ category identified by text analysis.

Category	Self-report excerpts
Silence and coping	INT003a: ... <i>every now and then, maybe a moment of despair takes me, a moment of anger takes me, (when this happens) I go to reread, I think about what was said at that particular moment (during the lessons) and I say ‘wait, I’ll try again.’ I take note of the knowledge and just relax ...</i>
	INT004b: <i>The technique of silence is a bit difficult to apply here, because, as we said during the course, there is a lot of noise here; therefore, it is a bit difficult to find a quiet place ... but by now I am a little used to the noise ... it was interesting to relax a bit without having thoughts ... I think it is something to be explored ... they said: ‘... try to be silent for a minute or two ...’ but if you do it the first time it is one thing, if you do it every day, together with other techniques, then you can see the difference.</i>
	INT005a: <i>We have learned so many things ... how to overcome problems, that you don’t have to be anxious, that you can take minutes of silence, that you have to breathe, that you can take a deep breath ... that’s it ...</i>
	INT006a: <i>In the silence I started to try to deal with things in a positive way and also how you have to react ... not going for drugs like I did in the past.</i>
	INT008a: <i>I take the key to silence as meditation, meditation plus relaxation ... as in yoga ... it helps you to relax, not to think about (negative things) ... but, let’s say, think about positive things. It gives you good energy.</i>
INT013a: <i>When I find problems, even if it’s personal, meditating alone and deep breathing help me to come back to who I was. Now I start doing that, I’m in single cell, you can really see, if I have a problem, I can’t solve it. I do deep breathing – it makes me feel that I’m free – I can even manage to talk to others ...</i>	

To control the biases related to qualitative text analysis, two independent evaluators attributed scores on interval (relevance from “1 to 10”) and ordinal (relevance from “insufficient” to “excellent”) scales. This step aided in proceeding with the calculation of two specific indices of interrater agreement (Banerjee et al., 1999), namely, Pearson’s r and Cohen’s k for *interrater consistency analysis*.

Results

The emerging categories, in line with the aims of this study, were identified from the qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts: (i) Silence and stress coping skills (Table 2); (ii) Silence and emotion regulation (Table 3); (iii) Silence and future planning (Table 4).

The narratives collected among the imprisoned individuals, while different and containing specific details about their personal experiences during the *EF training program*, had common themes related to the training experience. The chosen excerpts are representative of most of the interview responses. The inter-rater agreement scores were positively correlated ($r = .83$; $p < .001$) and demonstrated high agreement (Cohen’s $k = .89$).

Table 3. Self-report excerpts selected for the ‘silence and emotion regulation’ category identified by text analysis.

Category	Self-report excerpts
Silence and emotional regulation	<p>INT003a: <i>‘there is no meditation without silence’ and I just wrote this here, just ... underlined ... (...) it increases the possibility of self-isolation, [so] you would be able to escape in your head for a moment, to be with yourself, otherwise ... anyway, this experience, I tell you: first of all it is a pity that it is over (...) because you dissociate yourself from this environment, it is like being in a group outside, outside, just an external meeting ... it is a surreal experience, (...) especially as regards oneself with others ... many things of what she (the psychologist) said I already did previously in here, due to the character that I ... I tried so much to talk to others to make them understand, maybe when they were in difficulty, to give comfort, to seek comfort in certain moments, but it is difficult, because everyone has his own vision of the environment ... so many are available, many say, as I said before, ‘now I’m here’ and surrender to themselves ...</i></p> <p>INT005a: <i>Very good experience, I learned a lot about how to relax ... Now I can take that breath again and start thinking positive ... When something comes to stress me, I’m thinking positive, it helped me a lot the course.</i></p> <p>INT010a: <i>Something happened that made me feel bad. I get ‘this thing’ and I got huffy ... I was in an indescribable agitation. I go to the cell and the only thing I get to do is the minute of silence. I was charged, charged with nervousness. All of a sudden, I get a rush of energy ... then I opened my eyes and felt peaceful and calm.</i></p> <p>INT011a: <i>I practiced 5 minutes of silence once, 5 another time, then 10 minutes ... I didn’t remember things anymore ... processes ... I got into my bunk and went to sleep and so it was helpful. For me it was useful for an inner tranquility.</i></p> <p>INT012a: <i>We have to do what we can with what we have ... In my opinion this wins here ... There are therefore some ideas that have revitalized, maybe that part of me that could break down ...</i></p> <p>INT014b <i>... in my opinion there should be a minute of silence and a minute to let off steam ... because that minute of silence, well ... during the course it was nice because the psychologists talked, everyone said their feeling ... doing it alone has no sense in my opinion, even if it can help you free yourself a little. But the pain you have always remains inside, so ... it would take more staff who give a hand to the inmates in addition to this minute of silence but also to vent the problems that one can accumulate ...</i></p>

Discussion

Silence and coping

Coping is defined as the individual’s ability to deal with stressful events (Sica et al., 2008) by using different strategies aimed at reducing the potentially harmful consequences of the exposure to stressors and to contain the negative emotions triggered (Cramer, 1998). Coping, as a relatively stable and adaptive personality trait, works primarily on two aspects: both on containing the damage that might result from a stressful event (*problem-focused coping*) and negative emotion reactions (*emotion-focused coping*) (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007). According to the literature, coping is related to resilience (Leipold & Greve, 2009) in a biunivocal relationship (Kang & Suh, 2015; Liang et al., 2020). Coping strategies such as problem-focused strategies (De la Fuente et al., 2017) and positive attitude (Tugade &

Table 4. Self-report excerpts selected for the ‘silence and future planning’ category identified by the text analysis.

Category	Self-report excerpts
Silence and future planning	INTt007a: <i>Setting yourself a goal ... before setting something concrete you must accept your current situation and accepting the current situation in prison means accepting what you did before ...</i>
	INT007b: <i>‘yes I’m in jail, but when I go out what do I do?’ ... we realized we could have skills, maybe we didn’t know we had ... the course helps you to become like this, let’s say (proactive), it helps you to learn these things, but then it’s you who must learn in life ...</i>
	INT008a: <i>... (this course) gives you good energies. See things more positively than negatively, right? The course is very, very intense you know ... It is very, very thorough, let’s say, in seeing positive things ... it makes you reflect, look at things better, try to have, to see a light on the future.</i>
	INT009a: <i>... (this course) is better than learning from a piece of paper. Because reading on a piece of paper you understand it relatively but when another person makes you see it and understand it ... when (the teacher) said to take a minute of silence and we performed it ... and did we do it because she told us to? No, because we also wanted to ... She made us understand how to do it and we put it into practice. That made me understand the different point of view – when I get out of here that I will not stop taking this time to relax, to understand, to be with myself ...</i>
	INT011b: <i>It has been very useful to me, in this very moment I can say it, but more than anything I can say it will be very useful to me in the future, this is a very important aspect. That minute of silence where you empty your mind and think back to what you went through during the day are techniques that you find yourself doing even afterwards and you do them unconsciously and they were a very important aspect of this project.</i>
	INT013b: <i>Envisioning the future made me understand many things. That a person can have a chance ... who has attended this course ... (did it) even for his maturation right? It made me realize ... to find yourself and something about yourself ...</i>

Fredrickson, 2004) can increase individual resilience in the face of adverse events and contexts.

In the specific context of prison, scientific literature has shown that coping is one of the most important variables in predicting imprisoned individuals’ well-being (Gullone et al., 2000), through different coping strategies such as: optimism (Segovia et al., 2012), sharing negative emotions (Van Harreveld et al., 2007), sought-after friends and family social support (Agbakwuru & Awujo, 2016), reevaluation of individual’s past (Skowroński & Talik, 2018), spirituality and the search for meaning (Agbakwuru & Awujo, 2016; Vanhooren et al., 2018; Skowroński & Talik, 2018). The last two, in particular, predict post-traumatic growth, which is fundamental to the individual’s present and future (Vanhooren et al., 2018). In addition, prison is a context where coping can determine the response to environmental stimuli by modulating the individual’s cognitive, physical and behavioral responses (Leban et al., 2015).

As emerges from the testimonies of imprisoned individuals and on the basis of scientific evidence, the *EF training*, implemented in a multidimensional way

through the *PSD*, underlines how silence can be an adaptive coping strategy (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). In the *EF training*, *PSD* is taught through observation, which elicits an imitation response at the neurophysiological level (Van Gog et al., 2009). Extracts from the incarcerated individuals' interviews show how the *PSD* has become part of their daily routine, representing a peculiar and multidimensional coping response, at the physical, emotional, and behavioral levels simultaneously. To this target population, the practice of silence seems to represent a useful instrument in promoting improvement in terms of an increased positive attitude (Paoletti, Di Giuseppe, Lillo, Serantoni, et al., 2022) and improved communication skills and social support seeking (Seema & Ajithkumar, 2019). In some cases, *PSD* also represented a positive coping strategy, useful in discouraging incarcerated individuals from negative and harmful ways of dealing with stress, like avoidance (Luke et al., 2021) and substance use (van de Baan et al., 2022).

Silence and emotional regulation

Emotional regulation involves monitoring and modulating the frequency and intensity of both experienced emotions and related psychophysical states (Gross, 2002). Emotions can be regulated through the following strategies (Goldin et al., 2008; McRae et al., 2010): (i) reappraisal (reinterpreting the cause of the emotion); (ii) distraction (directing attentional focus away from the emotional stimulus); and (iii) suppression (inhibiting spontaneous emotional responses, such as facial expressions).

In difficult contexts, including prisons, emotional modulation implies effective control over anger, irritation, and discouragement, and actively protecting individual's mental and physical well-being (Caprara et al., 2008). Moreover, these emotions are common among incarcerated individuals due to multiple factors, such as clashes with other incarcerated individuals resulting from promiscuity and forced cohabitation, conflicting relationships with prison staff (often due to the existing asymmetry of power), the sense of uncertainty, and the indeterminacy of their sentences (Crewe, 2011).

Interview excerpts revealed that the *PSD* may be an emotional regulation instrument for incarcerated individuals. They reported on *PSD*-related experiences and reflections, such as perceiving an increased state of calm and tranquility. These results may be useful in blocking the negative emotional responses of anger, increased arousal, and anxiety, while increasing decision-making and reasoning on the moral and ethical nature of their actions (Shapiro et al., 2012; Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010). Meditation can be considered an emotional regulation strategy, as it can promote both attentional refocusing through the interruption of rumination and dysfunctional thoughts, and a reinterpretation of exogenous and endogenous stimuli

(Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). In addition, it focuses attention on a conscious process of alteration of the states of relaxation and alertness (Lutz et al., 2007). Several studies have reported that the practice of silent meditation for a few minutes for at least 3–8 weeks (Menezes et al., 2012) can significantly improve the regulation of negative emotions and internal states (Schroevers & Brandsma, 2010), such as anxiety (Goldin & Gross, 2010), sadness (Farb et al., 2010), and stress (Fang et al., 2010), by increasing these abilities and inducing a state of relaxation and attentional control (Menezes et al., 2012; Venditti et al., 2020).

Silence and future planning

The results demonstrate that *PSD* can awaken the capacity to set goals and plan the future among imprisoned individuals. The testimonies of the imprisoned individuals suggest that the *PSD* allowed them to accept their past to project themselves into the future, discover new personal skills, and choose a positive perspective. Nevertheless, the scientific literature reports that the imprisoned individuals' concept of the future is influenced by several factors, such as (i) length of sentence, (ii) socio-anagraphical variables (e.g., age, marital status), (iii) perceived social support and (iv) being engaged in organized activities that facilitate social reintegration (Vuk & Applegate, 2021). Meditative practices in prison may have a virtuous influence because they offer immense social and cognitive stimuli that promote future planning in an environment that is normally does not stimulate this specific aspect (Lorenzon, 2020). Similar to other activities that imprisoned individuals can perform when there is an opportunity (work, training, etc.), alternative rehabilitative practices influence the possibility and ability to think ahead (Carvalho et al., 2018). Time spent in prison need not be a time of suspension and waiting; it can be a time for the promotion of new methods of learning, including techniques for self-care, such as the *PSD*, as experienced by the participants.

Several studies on increased optimism and positive attitudes in incarcerated individuals have reported that these variables are correlated with a change in the concept of the future in terms of employment, social relationships, attainment of educational qualifications, involvement in child-care, financial and domestic stabilization (Giordano et al., 2007), and decreased recidivism (Maruna, 2001).

Limitations

Qualitative research is often dependent on the researchers' interpretation (Lieblich et al., 1998). Therefore, to counteract potential biases, rating grids

were established for two independent evaluators. Subsequently, the quantitative and qualitative responses correspondence was analyzed to measure the categorization effectiveness of the interview excerpts.

Social desirability (Edwards, 1957), a potential bias by the respondent to a questionnaire or interview to ensure that he or she is perceived as trustworthy, is another limitation. This construct is widespread, especially among imprisoned individuals (Mielitz & MacDonald, 2020; Stuckless et al., 1995). This aspect intercepts a deep need to be seen as individuals beyond the stigma of incarceration (LeBel, 2012; Chui & Cheng, 2013). Imprisoned individuals respond by endeavoring to interpret and meet the expectations of others, including the prison staff and the society.

A final consideration needs to be made as regards the difficulties in applying the *DPS*. The imprisoned individuals' excerpts highlight that practicing such techniques within prisons require the capacity to isolate the self, in a place where an individual's privacy is often threatened by forced coexistence with other people and the overcrowdedness of penitentiaries (Goffman, 1968). Recent literature has reported that the continuous noise generated by imprisoned individuals' conversations, the shouts of the staff summoning someone, and the clanging of the keys to the gates are peculiar characteristics of detention, which negatively impact the conditions of prison life (Elger, 2009; Rice, 2016) and, consequently, on the possibility to practice the *DPS*.

Conclusion

The outcomes of the present study emphasize that the practice of silence can be an invaluable instrument in strengthening the coping skills required to deal with the adversities of daily life in prison. Concurrently, *PSD* may increase emotional regulation skills and reinforce internal responsiveness that enable better coping with difficulties and promote a generalized state of well-being. *PSD* is an easily transferable and applicable device, even in settings with limited personal space. The daily practice of meditation and silence enabled the imprisoned individuals to experience a state of calm and balance that allowed them to proactively reconsider the narrative of themselves and their future. Additionally, the imprisoned individuals' responses suggest their willingness to practice silence-based meditation in the long term, even after they leave prison, and indicates their desire to project themselves confidently into the future. The challenges they may face during the complex process of reentering society are perceived as less threatening due to their enhanced self-determination and personal empowerment. Therefore, the present study is a pioneering investigation into the effects of *PSD*.

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Appendix A. Semi-structured interview for Padua C.R. (Maculan et al., 2022)**INTERVISTA SEMI-STRUTTURATA***SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW*

- A. Mi racconterebbe l'esperienza che ha fatto nel programma "Prefigurare il Futuro"?
 [*Could you tell me about your experience in the "Envisioning the Future" program?*]
- B. Mi racconterebbe degli aspetti che ha trovato meno interessanti e di quelli, invece, che ha trovato più interessanti?
Attraverso questa domanda si vogliono esplorare gli aspetti considerati maggiormente utili, interessanti, stimolanti e quelli che al contrario hanno colpito in maniera minore.
Per esplorare come l'esperienza formativa può influire nella gestione delle problematiche e le difficoltà detentive che i detenuti esperiscono quotidianamente, l'intervistatore può chiedere:
 - *Durante il corso sono stati fatti degli esercizi e svolte delle pratiche (come la Pratica del Silenzio), delle tecniche di rilassamento e di focalizzazione mentale. Ci può raccontare la sua esperienza relativamente a queste attività?*
 [*Could you tell me both about the aspects that you found less interesting and about those that you found most interesting?*
Through this question we want to explore the aspects considered most useful, interesting, stimulating and those that, on the other hand, have had a minor impact in terms of interest.
To explore how the training program can impact on managing the problems and difficulties that inmates experience on a daily basis in the prison setting, the interviewer can ask:
 - *"During the course there were exercises, practices (such as the "Practice of Silence") and techniques of relaxation and mental focus: can you tell me about your experience after these activities?"*]
- C. Mi racconterebbe di un episodio nel quale, nel corso della sua esperienza detentiva, le sono venute in mente alcune suggestioni emerse durante il programma "Prefigurare il Futuro"?
 [*Could you tell me about an episode in which, during your daily life in prison, some suggestions that emerged during the "Envisioning the Future" program came to your mind?*]
- D. C'è qualcos'altro che desidera aggiungere, qualcosa che desidera raccontare e che magari le è venuto in mente successivamente?
 [*Would you like to add something else? Is there something that came to your mind later that you want to tell me?*]