



Features of Meaningfulness of Life of Convicts Serving Long-Term Sentences

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Abstract

Introduction: the article describes features of meaningfulness of life of convicts serving long-term sentences in places of deprivation of liberty. An attitude to life should be considered as a universal subjective formation that ensures self-organization of human activity in the process of their life. *Purpose:* to determine features of meaningfulness of life of convicts serving long-term sentences, give recommendations on correctional and educational work with this category of offenders. *Methods:* theoretical analysis of literature; methods of synthesis and generalization; life orientations test by D.A. Leont'ev. *Results:* convicts who have been in social isolation for more than 10 years demonstrate a lower interest in life and less emotional intensity and lack life aspirations and goals; the time perspective is not indicated. They perceive life as uninteresting and insufficiently filled with meaning. At the same time, the time passed is not fully comprehended, they cannot realize themselves, they are dissatisfied with their life and do not feel that they can manage it. The revealed features of meaningfulness of life of convicts serving long-term sentences supplement characteristics of persons in this category and this should be taken into account when organizing correctional and educational work with them in places of deprivation of liberty. *Conclusions:* when determining the direction of correctional and educational work with convicts of this category, it is important to take into account the specifics of their attitude to life and direct them to correction, preventing aggression in their behavior. At the same time, it is important for convicts to realize their guilt, focus on their own spiritual and moral problems, and develop a desire to compensate for the harm they have caused. To do this, it is necessary to establish cooperation with convicts based on the in-depth study of life, personality and needs.

Key words: places of deprivation of liberty; correctional process; convicts; long-term sentences; sense of purpose; correctional and educational work.

5.8.1. General pedagogy, history of pedagogy and education.

5.3.9. Legal psychology and security psychology.

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Introduction

The Concept for the development of the penal system up to 2030 is aimed at further improvement of correctional and educational work with convicts. It should be differentiated with regard to characteristics of different categories of persons serving sentences and types of penitentiary institutions. There is a need to search for effective means, forms and methods of correctional and educational influence, new approaches to the use of existing capacities, capabilities and forces, attracting various services and departments (pedagogical, psychological, medical, social, etc.) of a correctional institution.

As of December 1, 2021, 469,283 people were held in penal institutions, including 357,649 people – in 647 correctional facilities, 1,947 people – in 6 correctional colonies for those sentenced to life imprisonment and persons for whom the death penalty was replaced by imprisonment by way of pardon freedom, 1,345 people – in 8 prisons [8]. Persons serving long-term sentences and those serving sentences in strict and special regimes for committing grave and especially grave crimes require special attention. It is worth mentioning that criminals are aggressive, violent, and cynic towards citizens, their actions are cruel [12].

Long social isolation can lead to disruption of socially useful connections, loss of socially useful skills, etc., which in the future may complicate the process of resocialization of the convict's personality. Correctional facility employees face important tasks to ensure their correction in order to return to society after their release, as well as to prevent destructive forms of behavior of those deprived of liberty while serving their sentence.

Convicts' attitude to life can act as a kind of indicator of the meaningfulness of the life lived and the desire to improve its quality through self-acceptance and acceptance of responsibility for the changes taking place. Different views on life and its values determine convicts' behavioral patterns in correctional facilities and the degree of their readiness for release.

Works of S.A. Abdulgalimova, I.S. Artyukhova, M.I. Bobneva, A.G. Zdravomys-

lov, I.S. Ilyina, I.S. Kon, A.V. Mudrik and many other researchers are devoted to the study of value orientations of personality. Still the system of life-meaning orientations and ideas about life in terms of the content of existential representations of persons deprived of liberty is neglected. The attitude to life is considered by scientists as an attitude to the life activity that influences people's behavior in all spheres of their activity, is expressed in acceptance (non-acceptance) of life and responsibility for oneself and one's life and striving (lack of striving) for personal growth and is determined by the value world of the individual [1]. At the same time, this subjective category includes an attitude to the present, past, and future, is formed under the influence of death perception, and includes the meaning of life as an obligatory component [4].

The attitude to life in psychology was considered in many aspects. Thus, in foreign psychology, A. Adler drew attention to the relationship between behavior and life meaning of a person, presenting a sufficiently detailed understanding of behavioral meanings of life, which he associated with a lifestyle, life plan [3]. C.G. Jung considered orientation of a human personality to search for life meaning as a separate task. A person faces the task of discovering life meaning, thanks to this he/she can live, since the meaning of life is interconnected in case of spiritual and cultural goals presence. In their pursuit a person goes beyond the ordinary. According to the researcher, finding the meaning of life is a specific need and task; "archetypes" and symbols are the sources (forms) of meaning [15].

According to V. Frankl, the meaning of life is the pursuit of universal values, and the search for the meaning of life is inherent in a person in the form of a tendency. Experiencing the meaning of life is the highest value of the relationship; the individual's responsibility for his/her own life is an important question [14].

The desire to preserve life is innate, a person is vitally oriented and chooses life by virtue of the fact of his/her existence as opposed to death, adhering to one or another life con-

cept. Hence, life is of the highest value status. Defining human nature as a set of five basic needs (need for life, social security, community or belonging, esteem, self-actualization), A. Maslow notes that the need for life is initial [10].

In Russian psychological science, this problem was studied within the activity approach. S.L. Rubinstein identifies two main ways of human existence and defines two attitudes to life. The first one presents a certain attitude to individual phenomena, but not to life as a whole, the second – reflection and philosophical understanding of life. Semantic analysis of human behavior is interpreted as a way of a person's spiritual life and attitude to everything that surrounds a person. Forming a general and generalized attitude to life reflects the connection of past, present and future events of his/her life. This attitude makes it possible to realize the meaning of life and improve it [13].

K.A. Abul'khanova-Slavskaya emphasizes the importance of a person's single life line in understanding the attitude to life: the whole life dynamics ceases to be randomly alternating events, but depends on the activity of the individual, his/her ability to direct life events [2]. V.N. Myasishchev discusses a person's attitude to life activity, considering person's attitudes as the most important category associated with the development and formation of a personality. The attitude to life activity is a complex structural formation that contains an attitude to oneself, activity and other people [11]. According to V.A. Zobkov, people's attitude to their life and themselves contribute to the emergence and development of meaningful characteristics [7].

Thus, the attitude to life should be considered as a universal subjective formation that ensures self-organization of human activity in the process of their life. In order to specify the attitude to life of convicts with different terms of imprisonment, we conducted an empirical study in several stages. At the first stage convicts' personal files were studied to identify subjects and create experimental (EG) and control (CG) groups. The purpose of the second stage was to determine features of

life meaningfulness of convicts serving long-term sentences (EG – 30 men aged 34–50, socially isolated for more than 10 years). At the third stage, the second stage results were compared with those of the group of convicts serving short sentences (CG – 30 men aged 34–50 years, socially isolated for up to 5 years), and recommendations were proposed. We constructed the following hypothesis: a long term of serving a sentence leads to significant personal changes of a negative orientation, in connection with which the attitude to life of convicts serving long-term sentences is characterized by a less pronounced acceptance and a more vivid rejection than those of convicts with short terms of serving a sentence.

The empirical study was conducted in the correctional facility No. 17 of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia in the Vologda Oblast (November–December, 2021). This is a strict regime correctional facility for male (capacity limit: 1,565 people [8]).

Test of life-meaning orientations (the LMO method) by D.A. Leont'ev was used to determine subject's life-meaning orientations. It attracted our attention because it allows us to assess the "source" of the meaning of life, which can be found by a person either in the future (goals), or in the present (process) or the past (result), or in all three components of life. This method is an adapted version of the Purpose-in-Life test (PIL) by J. Crumbaugh and L. Maholick [9].

The test contains both a general indicator of life meaningfulness, and five subscales indicating three specific life orientations (goals in life, life intensity and satisfaction with self-realization), as well as two aspects of the locus of control (Me and Life). Based on the factor analysis of the version of this method adapted by D.A. Leont'ev, domestic researchers (D.A. Leont'ev, M.O. Kalashnikov, O.E. Kalashnikova) worked out the LMO method, which includes 20 pairs of opposite statements reflecting the idea of life meaningfulness factors.

The analysis of data obtained with the help of the life-meaning orientations test (the LMO method) by D. A. Leont'ev showed the following results.

The experimental group (convicts are socially isolated for more than 10 years) is characteristic of low rates of meaningfulness of life on the scales, such as goals in life, a process, and a locus of control "Life", average rates on the scales, such as a locus of control "Me" and a general indicator of meaningfulness of life (ML). In the group of people sentenced to short-term imprisonment, average rates of meaningfulness of life are observed on the scales, such as a result, a locus of control "Life", as well as low rates on the scales, such as goals in life, a process, a locus of control "Me", and an indicator of meaningfulness of life (ML).

Comparative indicators of life meaningfulness of convicts in the EG (group 1) and CG (group 2) are shown in Figure.

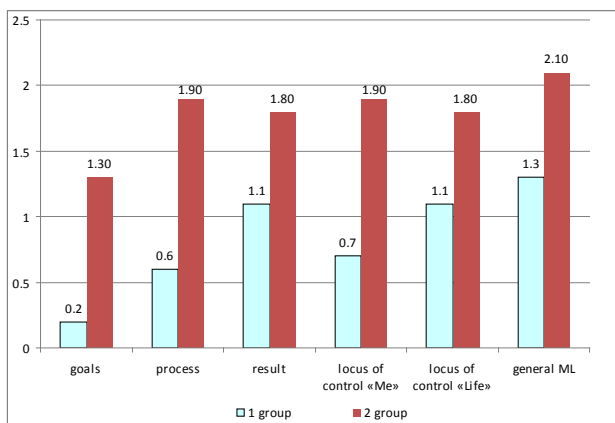


Figure. Comparative indicators of meaningfulness of life of convicts in the EG (group 1) and CG (group 2)

Convicts serving long-term sentences in places of deprivation of liberty have lower rates of a general level of meaningfulness of life (1.3), its purpose (0.2), a life process itself (0.6) and its effectiveness (1.1), as well as a locus of control "Me" (0.7), and a locus of control "Life" (1.1), than those of the control group convicts.

Convicts in the EG demonstrate a lower interest in life, lower emotional intensity, do not set life goals and objectives of the future; the time perspective is not indicated. They perceive life as insufficiently interesting, and unfilled with meaning. At the same time, the period of life already lived by the subjects is not fully understood, they are dissatisfied with the life they have lived and do not think they can manage their life.

The convicts of the control group are characterized by higher rates of general levels of meaningfulness of life (2.1), its purpose (1.3), a life process itself (1.9) and its effectiveness (1.8), as well as a locus of control "Me" (1.9), and a locus of control "Life" (1.8). The convicts in this group show an interest in life, a certain emotional intensity of life, they have certain life goals and objectives of the future, time limits are determined. They feel the strength and capabilities to manage their own lives.

Results

Thus, we confirmed a hypothesis that the attitude to life of convicts serving long-term sentences is characterized by a less pronounced acceptance and a more vivid rejection than that of convicts serving short-term sentences. In this regard, penitentiary psychologists and squad leaders need to organize special work to correct convicts' behavior, especially those who are serving long-term imprisonment, which will contribute to more harmonious relations in the convicts' environment, reduce stress and conflict, etc. in order to solve the main task – to correct the personality of an offender.

At the same time, there is some experience in practical work with this category of convicts: individual conversations are held, social ties are maintained and developed, the positive impact of convicts on each other is used, relatives, the public, representatives of religious denominations, etc. are involved [16]. In order to optimize the socio-psychological situation in the squad of convicts with long-term sentences, it is necessary to organize special work to correct the personality of a convict, take measures to change their attitude to life [19, pp. 48–54]. At the same time, it is important to develop measures to prevent and regulate destructive trends, as well as to conduct work on correcting relationships in groups of convicts.

Personnel of the educational department of a correctional facility should provide timely socio-psychological support to people who find themselves in a difficult life situation, while contributing to the creation of conditions that provide opportunities for implementing useful initiatives, developing person-

al potential, psychological competence and skills of adaptive behavior of the convicted with rational use of their free time. It is crucial to promote optimization of self-esteem, stabilization of the emotional and psychosocial state of the educated, reduction in conflict, alienation and overcoming barriers in communication by conducting group and individual psychological prophylactic and psychological corrective measures [5]. Formation of "healthy" lifestyle models, socially useful initiatives, work skills and law-abiding behavior in convicts will promote more successful social rehabilitation and adaptation after release from places of isolation from society.

At the same time, an important area of work is to realize social measures for convicts with long-term sentences [6], and organize permanent monitoring for identifying barriers to adequate life activities of persons of this category.

Conclusion

This study describes features of meaningfulness of life of convicts serving long-term sentences. The subjective category, such as an attitude to life, includes a person's attitude to the past, present and future, is an obligatory component of the meaning of life. Experiencing the meaning of life is the highest value of the relationship and the indicator of persons' responsibility for their own life [18].

The following features of meaningfulness of life were identified in persons who have been in conditions of social isolation for more

than 10 years: a low interest in life, its weak emotional intensity, insufficient number of life goals, lack of a goal for the future, temporary perspective, alienation from life, detachment in communication with the prison administration and other convicts. A lack of prospects associated with release, solitary confinement, various severe restrictions aimed at regulating the order of serving a sentence and excluding the possibility of building their relationships in society on the principles of cooperation, are the reason for this attitude to life [20]. Convicts serving long-term imprisonment often show a lack of desire and internal readiness for social rehabilitation. Such a way of thinking and inability to socialize can become key factors determining social danger of persons who have violated the law.

Correctional and pedagogical work should encourage convicts serving long-term sentences to change their personality, prevent violence and aggression against representatives of the administration, other convicts and themselves, realize their guilt and repent on this basis, focus on their own spiritual and moral problems, develop a desire to compensate for the harm caused by their crime [17].

The conducted research will contribute to the development of general recommendations on psychological correction of convicts' attitude to life and formation of their moral value orientations as preventive measures to combat suicide in correctional facilities and their readiness for social rehabilitation.

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