

Original article

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Adaptive Potential and Meaningfulness of Life among First-Time Convicts Differing in Age and Sentence Terms

NADEZHDA A. TSVETKOVA

Research Institute of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, Moscow, Russia,
TsvetkovaNA@yandex.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0967-205X>

Abstract

Introduction: the article presents results of the empirical study of adaptive personal potential and meaningfulness of life covered 127 first-time convicted men serving sentences in the high-security correctional facility. They were divided into 3 age groups: 21–34 years old (57 people); 35–44 years old (40 people); 45 years and over (30 people); 3 groups by sentence terms: up to 5 years; from 6 to 10 years; more than 10 years. The reliability and significance of intergroup differences in ages and terms of punishment were determined at the level of $p < 0.0001$. *Purpose:* to test the hypothesis of the existence of intergroup differences in the indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life of newly convicted men serving sentences in high-security correctional institutions and the relationship of these integrative personality characteristics with age and term of punishment. *Methods:* multilevel personality questionnaire “Adaptability” by A.G. Maklakov and S.V. Chermnyanin; test of life orientations by D.A. Leont’ev; methods of mathematical and statistical data processing: comparative analysis, Kruskal – Wallis test, Spearman’s Rank Correlation Analysis. *Results:* groups of convicts who significantly differ in age are similar in terms of adaptive potential and meaningfulness of life (no significant intergroup differences were found); groups of convicts who significantly differ in terms of sentence are similar in terms of adaptive potential and meaningfulness of life (no significant intergroup differences were found). The indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life of male convicts serving sentences in the high-security correctional facility do not have close links with their age and criminal record, with the exception of matching the term of punishment with the indicator of the locus of control-I at the level of $p \leq 0.05$. There is a directly proportional and close consistency between all indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life. *Conclusion:* although the hypothesis put forward at the beginning of the study was not confirmed, however, a directly proportional and close relationship between all indicators of adaptive potential and the meaningfulness of life was found.

Key words: correctional facilities; male convicts; personal adaptive potential; meaningfulness of life; meaningful life orientations; intergroup comparative analysis; differences related to age; differences related to the term of sentence.

5.3.9. Legal psychology and accident psychology.

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Introduction

The study of adaptive potential and meaningfulness of life among first-time convicts serving sentences in high-security correctional institutions differing in age and the term of sentence is important for the realization of one of the main goals of the Russian penitentiary system – correction of convicts, search for ways to achieve which led to the emergence of a separate scientific field – correctional psychology [1]. One of its developers, A.N. Pastushenya proposed a model of the individual correctional process, including analysis of criminal tendencies and adaptive capabilities of the convict, definition of correctional tasks to form his willingness to lead a law-abiding lifestyle, as well as sequence of their solutions and applicable technologies [2]. Nevertheless, this topic is still relevant and acute [3–5].

Scientific publications [6–8] define *adaptability of convicts serving sentences in places of deprivation of liberty* as a process of adaptation to the new demands of life in conditions of social isolation. A convict first has to comply with requirements of the regime, environment of the correctional institution, rules of organization of life, and then to leave this experience in the past in order to re-socialize in the family, work, social life, and other spheres after release. It is noted that convicts adapt faster to the general regime and much more difficult to conditions of the special regime (strict). Those convicts who effectively use the following adaptation factors adapt to new realities more successfully: awareness of their position in the situation and meaning of restrictions; opportunity to engage in work; correctness in establishing contacts with social environment; understanding the influence of other convicts [8–10].

In correctional facilities, in order to increase the adaptability of persons serving sentences,

several directions of penitentiary rehabilitation are implemented: 1) psychological preparation to ensure that their behavior complies with legal norms; 2) practical training – assistance in mastering any kind of work; 3) establishing social ties so that convict's relatives try to maintain warm relations with him and he develops the ability to mutual support [6; 11]. However, the adaptive potential and the level of meaningfulness of convicts are not always taken into account [7; 11; 12, etc.], although they are significant not only for penitentiary rehabilitation, but also in the post-penitentiary period [5; 9; 12, etc.]. Besides, as E.A. Chigrenets notes, the issues of a multidimensional nature of the term “resocialization” do not allow us to consider this topic exhausted [13].

Connection of an individual's adaptive potential with other personal characteristics [7; 12], values, life orientations, and meaningfulness of life has been studied [12]. In 2022, N.A. Il'nykh published a review of modern research on this problem in domestic penitentiary science [14], indicating D.A. Leont'ev [15] and V.E. Chudnovskii [16] as researchers who initiated the study of life-meaning orientations of personality in Russian psychology. E.L. Suchkova and E.F. Shtefan developed methodological recommendations for psychological correction of the value-semantic sphere of convicts serving their first sentences in the form of imprisonment [17]. Separately, we note publications of Ch.N. Mongush and co-authors on the specifics of semantic formation in men serving sentences in correctional facilities [18] and E.F. Shtefan on semantic orientations of those sentenced to life imprisonment [19].

We should also mention works of V. Frankl on the meaning of life and healing with meaning [20], E. Gendlin on experiencing and the creation of meaning [21], S.R. Maddi on the

search for meaning and resilience [22], F. Fransella on personal meanings and personal constructs [23], M. Carlsen on comprehension as a therapeutic process in adult development [24] and others, which pose questions that stimulate the scientific search for answers [25; 26, etc.].

Thus, concluding a brief digression into the topic of adaptability and meaningfulness of life among first-time convicted men serving sentences in a high-security correctional facility, we emphasize not only its relevance, but also the practical significance of results of its study for the penitentiary system.

Description of the study

Research base and sampling. The empirical material for the analysis was collected in the high-security correctional facility where men who had committed moderate and serious crimes were serving their sentences. The total sample included 127 subjects who were convicted for the first time and committed crimes against life and health – 77 people (60.6%), including for murder – 32 people (25.2%); crimes against property – 31 people (24.4%); against public health and public morality – 19 (15 %). This sample was first differentiated into three age groups: 57 people aged 21–34 years (44.9 % of the total sample); 40 people aged 35–44 years (31.5%); 30 people aged 45–56 years (23.6%); then they were divided into three groups according to the term of punishment: up to 5 years (13 people); from 6 to 10 years (75 people); from 11 to 22 years (39 people). Verification of intergroup differences in age and terms of punishment showed their reliability and significance at the level of $p < 0.0001$. According to the educational level, the total sample consisted of 38 people with secondary education (29.9%); 60 people with secondary specialized education (47.3%); 29 people with higher education (22.8%). As for a marital status, 35 people were single (27.6%); 49 people – married (38.6%), 21 people – divorced (16.5%), and 22 people cohabited (17.3%).

The purpose of the study was to test a hypothesis of the existence of intergroup differences in the indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life of newly convicted men

serving sentences in high-security correctional facilities, and correlation between these integrative personality characteristics and age and terms of punishment.

Research issues. It is studied whether there are differences in the indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life of convicts of different age and terms of sentence. How are adaptability and meaningfulness of life related to the age and term of criminal record of men convicted for the first time? What is the nature of relationship between adaptability and meaningfulness of life of first-time convicts serving sentences in the high-security correctional facility?

Methods of psychological diagnosis: 1) the multilevel personality questionnaire “Adaptability” by A.G. Maklakov and S.V. Chermnyanin (165 questions, the answers to which made it possible to determine personal adaptive potential of the subjects, and in its structure to isolate indicators of neuropsychiatric stability, communicative ability and moral normativity related to one of three levels – high, moderate or low [27]; 2) test of life orientations by D.A. Leont’ev [28], with the help of which an indicator of the general level of meaningfulness of life was determined, as well as indicators of its five structural components – life goals, process of life and interest in it, locus of control-I, locus of control-life, result of life and satisfaction with it.

Methods of mathematical and statistical data processing were used: Statistica programs (version 10.0) and the Automated Workplace of a Penitentiary Psychologist (version 9.1.0); comparative analysis was performed, the Kruskal – Wallis test was used to establish the reliability of intergroup differences; correlation analysis was performed according to Spearman.

The overall adaptability level of convicts in all three groups is moderate; behavioral self-regulation has the highest rates in its structure, while moral normativity – the lowest. There are no significant intergroup differences in adaptability.

Crucial results of the study

1. Results of the analysis of adaptive potential indicators in the age groups of convicts (Table 1).

Table 1

Indicators of adaptive potential of first-time convicted men of three age groups, reliability measure and significance value of intergroup differences

| Structural components of adaptive potential under study | Group I (21–34 years) | Group II (35–44 years) | Group III (45–56 years) | Reliability measure | Significance value |
|---|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| | Stens (10–7 – high level, 6–4 – average, 3–1 – low) | | | H | p |
| Overall adaptability level | 4.7 | 4.9 | 4.5 | 1.182 | 0.554 |
| Behavioral self-regulation | 5.8 | 5.9 | 5.5 | 0.982 | 0.612 |
| Communication potential | 4.7 | 4.8 | 4.3 | 5.535 | 0.063 |
| Moral and ethical normativity | 3.7 | 3.9 | 3.8 | 0.249 | 0.883 |

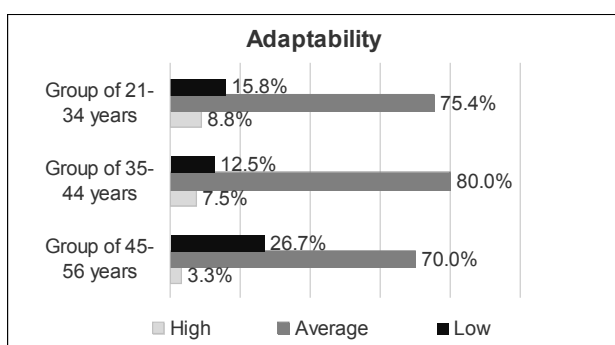


Figure 1. Distribution of convicts of three age groups compared by levels of adaptive personal potential

We note a large percentage of people with a low level of adaptability in the older age group (26.7%), and the percentage distribution of convicts in each of the three groups by levels of adaptive personal potential generally indicates that people with a high level are an exception.

2. Results of the analysis of indicators of the meaningfulness of life in the age groups of convicts (Table 2).

Table 2

Indicators of meaningfulness of life of first-time convicted men of three age groups, reliability measure and significance value of intergroup differences

| Structural components of the meaningfulness of life under study | Group I (21–34 years) | Group II (35–44 years) | Group III (45–56 years) | Reliability measure | Significance value |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| | points | | | H | p |
| Overall level of meaningfulness of life (up to 87 – low, 88–118 – average, 119–140 – high) | 103.7 | 103.8 | 100.6 | 0.898 | 0.638 |
| Goals in life (6–26 – low, 27–39 – average, 40–42 – high) | 33.4 | 35.5 | 31.6 | 4.736 | 0.094 |
| Life process (6–26 – low, 27–35 – average, 36–42 – high) | 29.5 | 28.6 | 27.2 | 3.232 | 0.199 |
| Life performance (5–20 – low, 21–30 – average, 31–35 – high) | 25.6 | 25.6 | 24.4 | 1.163 | 0.559 |
| Locus of control – self (4–16 – low, 17–25 – average, 26–28 – high) | 22.6 | 23.1 | 22.5 | 0.167 | 0.920 |
| Locus of control – life (6–23 – low, 24–36 – average, 37–42 – high) | 28.9 | 27.7 | 29.5 | 1.571 | 0.456 |

The general level of meaningfulness of life of subjects in all three age groups is moderate, and in its structure the component “life pro-

cess” has the lowest indicators; no reliable intergroup differences in indicators of meaningfulness of life are revealed.

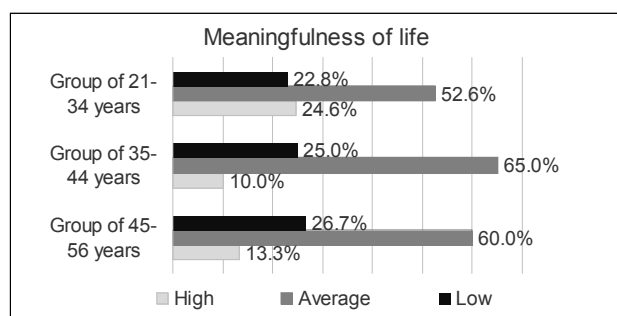


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of convicts from three age groups by levels of meaningfulness of life

The results of analysis of the percentage distribution of men from three age groups by levels of meaningfulness of life are presented in Figure 2.

We highlight the larger share of individuals with a low level of meaningfulness of life in the older age group (26.7%) and the percentage distribution of convicts in each group by its levels indicates that individuals with high indicators are an exception.

3. Results of the analysis of adaptive potential indicators in groups of convicts differing in the term of the sentence length (Table 3).

Table 3
Indicators of adaptive potential of first-time convicted men with different sentence terms, reliability measure and significance value of intergroup differences

| Structural components of adaptive potential under study | Group I (up to 5 years) | Group II (6–10 years) | Group III (more than 10 years) | Reliability measure | Significance value |
|---|---|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | Stens (10–7 – high level, 6–4 – average, 3–1 – low) | | | H | p |
| Overall adaptability level | 5.0 | 4.7 | 4.6 | 1.050 | 0.592 |
| Behavioral self-regulation | 6.2 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 0.991 | 0.609 |
| Communication potential | 4.9 | 4.7 | 4.6 | 0.312 | 0.855 |
| Moral and ethical normativity | 3.9 | 3.9 | 3.7 | 0.223 | 0.895 |

The general level of adaptability of subjects in all three groups of convicts, distinguished by the sentence term, is average; in its structure, behavioral self-regulation has the highest indicators (in the group of men with a sentence of up to 5 years, it tends towards the area of high values), and the lowest – moral normativity; no reliable intergroup differences in adaptability indicators of first-time convicted males with different sentence terms are revealed.

The results of the analysis of percentage distribution of convicts from three groups distinguished by sentence terms by levels of adaptive personal potential are presented in Figure 3.

We note the similarity in the percentage distribution of groups with sentences from 6 to 10 years and over 10 years according to the adaptability indicator. The group of convicts with sentences of up to 5 years differs from them by a higher proportion of individuals (84.6%) with an average adaptive personal potential. However,

this group is small, and therefore the discovered difference requires verification on a larger sample.

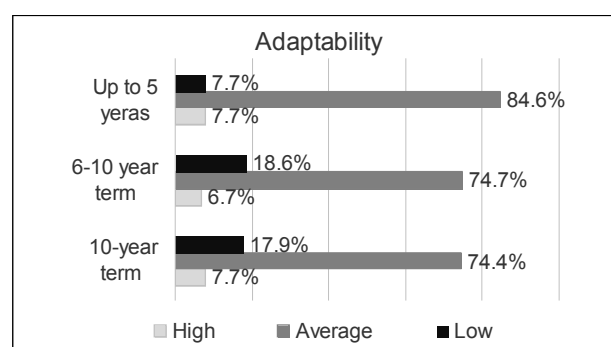


Figure 3. Percentage distribution of first-time convicted men with different sentence terms by levels of adaptive personal potential

4. Results of the analysis of meaningfulness of life indicators in groups of convicts differing in sentence terms (Table 4).

Table 4

Indicators of meaningfulness of life of first-time convicted men with different sentence terms, reliability measure and significance value of intergroup differences

| Structural components of the meaningfulness of life under study | Group I (up to 5 years) | Group II (6–10 years) | Group III (more than 10 years) | Reliability measure | Significance value |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | points | | | H | p |
| Overall level of meaningfulness of life (up to 87 – low, 88–118 – average, 119–140 – high) | 109.2 | 104.4 | 98.3 | 2.890 | 0.236 |
| Goals in life (6–26 – low, 27–39 – average, 40–42 – high) | 36.7 | 38.5 | 32.8 | 2.586 | 0.274 |
| Life process (6–26 – low, 27–35 – average, 36–42 – high) | 30.5 | 28.9 | 27.6 | 1.770 | 0.413 |
| Life performance (5–20 – low, 21–30 – average, 31–35 – high) | 27.2 | 25.3 | 24.6 | 1.852 | 0.396 |
| Locus of control – self (4–16 – low, 17–25 – average, 26–28 – high) | 23.8 | 23.3 | 21.3 | 2.658 | 0.265 |
| Locus of control – life (6–23 – low, 24–36 – average, 37–42 – high) | 28.8 | 29.7 | 26.8 | 3.645 | 0.162 |

We note that the general level of meaningfulness of life in three groups of convicts, differing in sentence terms, is average and similar; reliable intergroup differences in specific indicators of meaningfulness of life are also not noted.

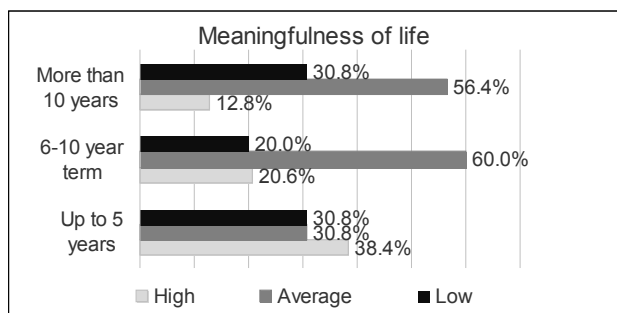


Figure 4. Percentage distribution of convicts with different sentence terms by levels of meaningfulness of life

Results of the analysis of percentage distribution of convicts with different sentence terms by levels of meaningfulness of life are presented in Figure 4.

We highlight the larger percentage share of individuals with a high level of meaningfulness of life in the group of convicts with a sentence of up to 5 years (38.4%), although due to its small size, the obtained result requires verification on a larger sample. We also draw attention to the group of convicts with a sentence of more than 10 years, in which the share of individuals with a low level of meaningfulness of life constitutes almost one-third of it (30.8%).

5. Results of the correlation analysis of adaptability and meaningfulness of life indicators, and their connection with age and sentence terms (Table 5).

Table 5

Results of correlation analysis of the studied indicators (adaptability, meaningfulness of life, age, sentence length)

| What is correlated | What does it correlate with | Correlation coefficient (r) | Significance value p |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Age | Overall level of adaptability | -0.004 | 0.965 |
| | Moral and ethical normativity | 0.137 | 0.126 |
| | Behavioral self-regulation | -0.010 | 0.913 |

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------------------------|---|----------|-------|
| | Communication potential | -0.075 | 0.400 |
| | Overall level of meaningfulness of life | -0.011 | 0.904 |
| | Goals in life | -0.023 | 0.797 |
| | Life process | -0.115 | 0.198 |
| | Life performance | -0.043 | 0.629 |
| | Locus of control – life | 0.038 | 0.672 |
| | Locus of control – self | 0.074 | 0.405 |
| Sentence term | Overall level of adaptability | -0.110 | 0.219 |
| | Moral and ethical normativity | -0.132 | 0.138 |
| | Behavioral self-regulation | -0.107 | 0.229 |
| | Communication potential | -0.039 | 0.663 |
| | Overall level of meaningfulness of life | -0.161 | 0.070 |
| | Goals in life | -0.115 | 0.199 |
| | Life process | -0.089 | 0.321 |
| | Life performance | -0.098 | 0.273 |
| | Locus of control – life | -0.145 | 0.105 |
| | Locus of control – self | -0.176* | 0.048 |
| Adaptability | Overall level of meaningfulness of life | 0.429*** | 0.000 |
| | Goals in life | 0.335*** | 0.000 |
| | Life process | 0.513*** | 0.000 |
| | Life performance | 0.324*** | 0.000 |
| | Locus of control – life | 0.338*** | 0.000 |
| | Locus of control – self | 0.370*** | 0.000 |
| Meaningfulness of life | Overall level of adaptability | 0.429*** | 0.000 |
| | Moral and ethical normativity | 0.245** | 0.005 |
| | Behavioral self-regulation | 0.436*** | 0.000 |
| | Communication potential | 0.284*** | 0.001 |

Notes: *** $p \leq 0.001$ (very high significance value)

** $p \leq 0.01$ (high significance value)

* $p \leq 0.05$ (statistically significant value)

The two highlighted indicators are equal – this is the same pair.

There is reason to speak of close directly proportional consistencies between all indicators of adaptive personal potential and meaningfulness of life. Thus, the indicators of average levels of these integrative personal characteristics correlate at the level of $r = 0.429$ with $p \leq 0.000$. Consequently, those subjects who have clearer ideas about themselves, other people, and the world in the past, present, and future, who are convinced of the manageability of their lives, adapt more easily to new living conditions, integrate faster into a new team and in unfamiliar situations, as well as form behavior and socialization strategies faster. At the same time, the indicator of a general level of adapt-

ability is directly consistent with all indicators of meaningfulness of life at $p \leq 0.000$, and the total indicator of meaningfulness of life also directly correlates with the indicators of all components of adaptive potential (at least at $p \leq 0.005$).

Based on the obtained results, we can make the following conclusions:

1. No reliable differences in indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life are found among three groups of first-time convicted men differing in age. The general level of adaptability of convicts in each of the compared groups is average. Behavioral self-regulation has the highest indicators and moral normativity – the lowest (its indicator only tends

towards average values) in its structure. The main percentage shares in these groups fall on individuals with an average level of meaningfulness of life; individuals with high indicators are an exception; a larger share of convicts with a low level of meaningfulness of life is found in the older age group (26.7%); in all groups, the component "life process" has the lowest indicators in the structure of meaningfulness of life, which means that the subjects are dissatisfied with their current life but can give it meaning by focusing on the future or recalling the past.

2. No reliable differences in indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life are established among three groups differing in sentence terms. However, it is worth highlighting the group of convicts with a sentence of more than 10 years, where the share of individuals with a low level of meaningfulness of life constitutes almost one-third (over 30%).

3. Neither the age, nor the sentence terms show close correlations with either adaptability or meaningfulness of life. The exception is the registered correlation of the sentence term with the locus of control-self at a statistically significant level of $p \leq 0.05$. From this correlation, it follows that the higher the sentence term of convicts, the lower their indicators of self-perception as a strong personality with choices for realizing their goals and meanings. Nevertheless, although no linear connections of adaptability and meaningfulness of life indicators with the age and the sentence term are found among first-time convicted men, it is still possible to assume that their correlations are not direct but complexly dependent.

4. A directly proportional and very close consistency is revealed among all indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life, providing grounds for the conclusion that high meaningfulness of life is characteristic of convicts with high adaptability, and low meaningfulness is characteristic of individuals with low adaptive potential, and vice versa. Only the correlation between meaningfulness of life and moral normativity is somewhat weaker (at the level of high significance).

Ultimately, the hypothesis about the existence of intergroup differences in indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life among first-time convicted men serving sentences in strict regime correctional institutions, and the connection of these integrative personal characteristics with the age and the sentence term is not confirmed. However, a directly proportional and close interrelationship between all indicators of adaptability and meaningfulness of life is established, which is important both scientifically and practically.

The obtained results may be of interest to penitentiary psychologists, postgraduate students, teachers at departmental universities of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia and staff of strict-regime correctional facilities. They can also find practical application in the work of psychologists with convicts, for example, be considered in programs preparing them for life after release (as a objective of increasing the level of meaningfulness of life and moral normativity – a poorly developed component of adaptability).

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NADEZHDA A. TSVETKOVA – Doctor of Sciences (Psychology), Associate Professor, Chief Researcher at the Department 1 of the Research Center-2 of the Research Institute of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, Moscow, Russia, TsvetkovaNA@yandex.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0967-205X>

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