

## RPTSS 2018

### International Conference on Research Paradigm Transformation in Social Sciences

#### OPTIMIZATION OF PURPOSE-IN-LIFE ORIENTATIONS OF CONVICTS DURING PRE-RELEASE PREPARATION

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#### *Abstract*

This article focuses on the problem of improving the quality of pre-release preparation of convicts serving sentences in correctional facilities. The author shares her experience of working with convicts preparing to be released under the program updated by methods of correction and optimization of their purpose-in-life orientations. It is noted that optimization of convicts' purpose-in-life orientations is one of important conditions for their re-socialization both during their stay in a correctional facility and at large. The article presents the results of empirical research on 162 convicts sample, 62 of whom attended the updated program of pre-release preparation. Convicts, who did not participate in this program were arranged in two control groups: 40 convicts who served sentences in correctional facilities for the first time, and 60 convicts serving a sentence for second convictions. The results received based on the updated program were tracked through the Purpose-in-life test (PIL). It is stated that the convicts preparing for release, engaged in the updated program, were able to increase the overall level of understanding of life and its particular indicators, especially such as "life purposes"; "efficiency of life and satisfaction with self-realization", "locus of control-I", "locus of control-Life or controllability of life". After attending the updated program the convicts showed significantly higher figures than the convicts of the other two groups who did not attend there. It is concluded that the optimization of methods of purpose-in-life orientations in pre-release preparation of the convicts will be expedient.

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**Keywords:** Convicted males, pre-release preparation, purpose-in-life orientations, goal-setting, differences, personality.



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## 1. Introduction

Purpose-in-life orientations represent an integral system of conscious and selective connections, reflecting personality orientation, life purposes, concision of choices and assessments, satisfaction with life (self-realization) and the ability to take responsibility for it, influencing its course. According to Chudnovsky (2003), the purpose-in-life orientations should be “productive”, i.e. adequate to reality and contribute to personality positive development. Optimization of purpose-in-life orientations of convicted persons in custody is an essential condition of re-socialization during their stay in a correctional facility and then their successful adjustment to life after release.

Serving a sentence in custody for the committed crime is the period when a person is in a state of stress, confusion. Once in a correctional facility, the convicts learn to adjust to new, unusual conditions, norms, and social roles. They lose specific social priorities and values, which gives start to the process of desocialization. Over the time spent in correctional facility, each of them changes the individual system of meanings that determines personal soleness and uniqueness. And if penitentiary psychologists ignore this intrapersonal psychological factor that ensures the success of post-penitentiary resocialization of persons released after serving their sentences, the risk of recurrence increases. Therefore, the pre-release preparation of convicts includes individual and group forms of work that allow the convicts to clarify the prospects for the future, determine life priorities, build a life plan, and thus, optimize the system of purpose-in-life orientations. Such psychological work is essentially a prevention of recidivism, and its role in correction of criminals is undeniably great.

## 2. Problem Statement

In Russian and foreign literature, life orientations are considered in two aspects. First, these are the spheres of life in which a person is highly likely to find the meaning of his own existence. Secondly, it is the connection of the meaning of life with the future, present and past of a person. The “source” of the meaning of life can be found by a person either in the future (goal), or in the present (process), or in the past (result), or in all three components of the time of life. The meaning of life is a leading criterion for personality formation, an indicator of how a person is ready to manage his life and is independent of any external circumstances.

Researchers considered the problems of “the meaning of life” as the highest benchmark of human behavior, as well, (Frankl, 1990; Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, 1991; Asmolov, 2002; Chudnovsky, 2003; Istomin, 2008, et al.) and as a universal mechanism existing at different levels of human behavior (Leontiev, 2000, 2005; Karpinsky, 2002; Golysheva, 2009; Ezhevskaya, 2009; Kolesnikova and Tsvetkova, 2011; Lipunova, 2015, etc.). At the same time, various categories are used in scientific literature, such as: “meaningfullness of life”, “life sense”, “personal meaning”, “sphere of personality senses”, “optimal meaning of life”.

Frankl (1990) talks about human desire to find meaning in personal existence. He notes that striving for the meaning is a fundamental motivational force in people. People need to discover meaning simply in everything, right down in their last breath: “Man's search for meaning is a primary force in his life.... This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning (Frankl, 1990).

Only few authors developed the problem of studying and, particularly, optimization of purpose-in-life orientations of convicted persons in Russian psychology (Karpinsky, 2002; Pirozhkov, 2007; Istomin, 2008 and 2010; Kalinenko, 2012; Lipunova, 2015; Bystrova, 2016; Tsvetkova, Kolesnikova, Rybakova, Petrova, Fomina, 2016; Durova, 2017; Tsvetkova & Durova, 2017, et al.). At the same time, purpose-in-life orientations are quite thoroughly explored as a functional system, forming the meanings, values and purposes of human life, governing the ways of their achievement (Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, 1991; Asmolov, 2002; Leontiev, 2000 and 2005; Chudnovsky, 2003, et al.), i.e. without respect to psychologists's work with convicts within the penitentiary system. This means that there is a problem of developing and introducing into pre-release convicts preparation practice of such programs and methods that would contribute to optimization of the system of value orientation of persons in the process of release.

### **3. Research Questions**

The empirical study was based on the assumption that convicts pre-release preparation program, including methods of psychological correction of their purpose-in-life orientations, would allow convicts to optimize the perception of their own life process as managed by them, to encourage them to achieve results, to increase interest in life, satisfaction with self-realization, and as a result, the overall indicator of life meaningfullness.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to determine the effectiveness of the updated program of pre-release preparation of convicts, including the work of psychologist to optimize their purpose-in-life orientations to ensure successful adjustment to life at large.

### **5. Research Methods**

The study was conducted on the basis of Federal Correctional Facility, Penal Colony-6 Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia in Lipetsk region (a correctional facility with a strict regime for males serving sentence for the first time in places of confinement) and in Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia in Krasnodar Territory (penal colony for the males serving sentence for repeatedly committed crimes). The study involved 162 male convicts. They were divided into three groups: group I (62 persons) - males serving their first conviction, engaged in pre-release preparation program; group II (40 persons) – convicts of the same correctional facility who were not engaged in program; group III (60 persons) – convicts serving a second conviction who were not engaged in program. The groups were balanced according to the study criteria.

As a method of psychodiagnostics the purpose-in-life test, developed by James Crumbaugh, adapted in Russia by Leontiev (2000) and known as "PIL Test" was used. The test, along with a general indicator of the life meaningfullness, also includes five sub-scales, reflecting three specific purpose-in-life orientations (life purposes, the saturation of life and satisfaction with self-realization), as well as two aspects of locus control (locus control-I and locus control-Life). We monitored change of these parameters by having tested 162 convicts prior to start of the work on program of pre-release preparation and after its completion.

## 6. Findings

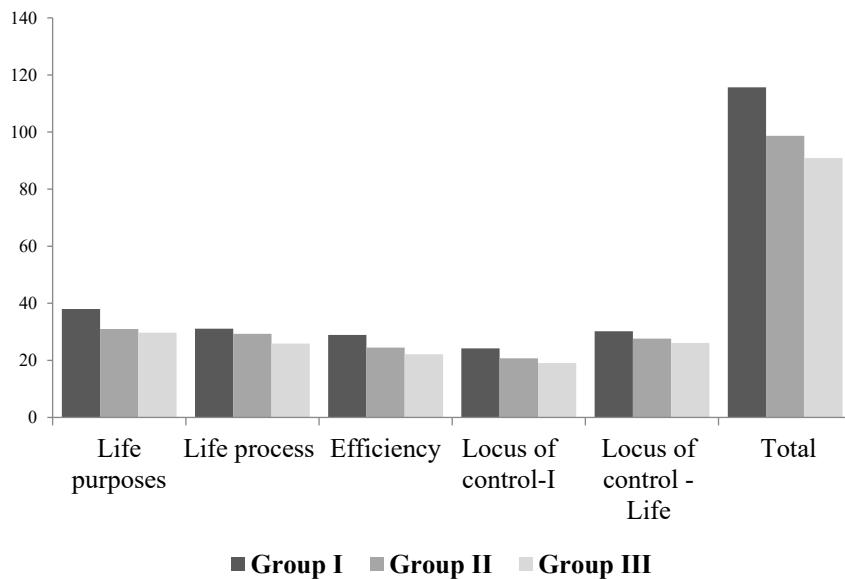
The results obtained by the purpose-in-life test are summarized in Table 1 and presented in Figure 01.

Table 01 and Figure 01 show a dominating tendency of convicted persons group who have attended the updated programme of pre-release preparation in terms of monitored parameters. The results they have achieved are approaching standard values.

The results of convicts in group II are at a low level. However, the lowest rates on all scales are observed for convicts in group III, who serve their second conviction sentence and did not attend the updated program of pre-release preparation. A comparative analysis of data using Mann-Whitney U-test revealed significant differences between the results of group I of convicts who had attended pre-release preparation under the updated program and the two other groups that were not involved therein. These differences were significant in the general level of meaningfulness of life, and its particular indicators such as: life purposes; efficiency and satisfaction with self-realization; locus of control-I, locus of control-Life (controllability of life).

**Table 01.** The results of psychological diagnostics of convicts obtained from the purpose-in-life test (average values in three groups)

PIL measured variables	Max. scores	Limit of normal	Group I (convicts, completed preparation program)	Group II (convicts not involved in preparation program)	Group III (convicts serving a second sentence)
1. Purposes in life	42.0	39.0	38.0	31.0	29.7
2. Life process, interest and	42.0	36.0	31.1	29.3	25.9
3. Life efficiency, satisfaction with self-realisation	35.0	30.0	28.9	24.5	22.1
4. Locus of control-I	28.0	25.0	24.2	20.7	19.1
5. Locus of control - Life or life	42.0	36.0	32.2	27.6	26.1
6. Total indicator of life meaningfulness	140.0	116.0	115.7	98.7	90.9



**Figure 01.** Change of purpose-in-life orientations of convicts in the process of their pre-release preparation under the updated program

## 7. Conclusion

The results show the efficiency of the updated program for convicts' preparation for their life at large, which includes methods for optimizing the purpose-in-life orientations of convicts. The convicts preparing for release were able to increase the general level of meaningfulness of life and its particular indicators, especially such as "life purposes"; "efficiency of life and satisfaction with self-realization", "locus of control-I", "locus of control-Life or controllability of life". Thus, the hypothesis put forward at the beginning of the study was confirmed. This means that psychologists of correctional facilities should include methods of optimizing the convicts' purpose-in-life orientations in their pre-release preparation, as well as the fact that our program can be recommended for wider application.

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