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Application of the Life Attitude Questionnaire to Prisoners – Reference to the Author’s Own Research Results

In order to determine attitudes that are characteristic of inmates serving a sentence of imprisonment under EMS and remaining in solitary confinement, a life attitude questionnaire was used which is a Polish adaptation of the well-known Life Attitude Profile-Revised (LAP-R) questionnaire by Gary T. Reker, used in research projects conducted within the existential trend. The questionnaire is a multidimensional self-depiction tool measuring the level of the experienced meaning of life and of one’s motivation to make life meaningful and to define purpose (Klaut, 2010, p. 6). The questionnaire provides an opportunity to look at the human existence in a new perspective of a single person’s experiences while situating the existential experience of the meaning of life in the categories of the concept of attitude that have already been well described in psychology. “The meaning of life is subjective in nature and, like attitudes, it combines three aspects in its definition: cognitive, emotional and motivational-behavioural. This point of view indicates that it is possible to embed existential phenomena in psychological categories that can to a larger extent be empirically described, going away from philosophical concepts and explanations that are theoretical and often ambiguous”. The LAP-R scales capture a person’s existential functioning in a system of six attitudes that constitute the basic existential reference to oneself and life in general (Klaut, 2010, p. 6).

The meaning of life is not just the satisfaction of living. It is not only experienced at an emotional level but also at a cognitive and motivational - behavioural level. The subject of existential attitudes is the individual intentionally experiencing his or her own life while the object is his or her own life. Thus, existential attitudes are expressed in the personal way of experiencing one’s own life in the world.

Therefore, the meaning of life can be regarded as the holistic relation of a person to one’s own life in the area of thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

The result of positive relations to one’s own life is the experience of meaning that represents a sense of understanding of the world and one’s place in it, a conviction of the meaning of one’s own life, a conviction of one’s own actions being direction-oriented and a sense of being in control of life experiences and responsibility for one’s own life.

Reker (1992) distinguished six basic existential attitudes within the framework of the so defined meaning of life:

1. Purpose
2. Inner coherence
3. Death acceptance
4. Existential vacuum
5. Life control
6. Goal seeking

Purpose, inner coherence, death acceptance, life control and goal seeking are defined through the positive pole while existential vacuum through the negative pole.

The standard tables presented in the handbook for the Polish adaptation of the LAP-R questionnaire make it possible to use the life attitude questionnaire in individual clinical or personality studies (Klaut, 2010, p. 8).

The life attitude questionnaire consists of 48 statements. The respondent indicates to what extent they are true about him or her. The replies are placed on a seven-degree Likert scale. LAQ includes six simple scales and two complex scales.

The simple scales which relate to particular existential attitudes are:

- Purpose (P)
- Inner coherence (IC)
- Life control (LC)
- Death acceptance (DA)
- Existential vacuum (EV)
- Goal seeking (GS)

Complex scales:

- Personal meaning (PM) built from two scales: purpose and inner coherence;
- The life attitude balance (LAB) built from all the simple scales where results of the scales: purpose, inner coherence, life control and death acceptance have positive weights while the existential vacuum and goal seeking scales have negative weights.

Each of the simple scales has been described by eight statements.

The characteristics of particular scales, outlined below, are based on the handbook for the original questionnaire Life Attitude Profile-Revised:

Simple scales

Purpose – describes having life goals or a mission in life, as well as a sense of being direction-oriented from the past into the future. It refers to a conviction of the value of life and an assessment of what is most important in a specific individual's life.

Exemplary statements used in the scale:

I have discovered a satisfying purpose in life.

I am basically living the life I would like to live.

Inner coherence – describes a logically integrated, coherent, analytical and intuitive understanding of oneself, others and life in general. Indicates a sense of

order and understanding of existence. A clear sense of identity and awareness of one's place in the world.

Exemplary statements used in the scale:

*I have become aware of a huge and consuming purpose towards which my life is oriented.
I have principles and beliefs that allow me to find and understand the meaning of my life.*

Life control – determines the level of perception of freedom to make all life decisions, accept personal responsibility and inner control of life events. It is an operational indicator of the degree to which a person perceives that he or she has the ability to control his or her life. A conscious assessment of one's ability to act and of possible constraints imposed by one's system of values.

Exemplary statements used in the scale:

*My achievements in life largely depend on my own efforts.
My life is in my hands and I hold control over it.*

Death acceptance – describes the absence of fear of death and the acceptance of death as a natural aspect of life. It is an operational indicator of the extent to which a human understands the perspective of death, has an objective attitude to it and is not afraid of it.

Here are exemplary statements used in the scale:

I think that I generally worry much less about death than others. I understand death as just another life experience.

Existential vacuum – describes the level of the lack of meaning in life, lack of goals, lack of direction in life, boredom, apathy and feelings of indifference. It is an operational indicator of a frustrated "will to have the meaning" – a basic need that stimulates activity aimed at achieving important goals and a meaning in life.

Here are exemplary statements used in the scale:

*I have experienced the feeling that even though I am destined to do something important, I cannot define the object of my action.
I consider myself to be someone withdrawing from life with the "I don't care" attitude.*

Goal-seeking – defines the desire to get out of the routine of life, to reject life patterns, to seek new and varied experiences, the need to act, to take on new challenges, to experience new sensations and to get more out of life. This attitude is characterised by a disagreement with live a life as it is now and by a desire to make a change in it (Reker, 1992).

Here are exemplary statements used in the scale:

*A new challenge in my life would release tremendous amounts of energy within me.
I am strongly determined to achieve new goals in the future.*

Complex scales

Personal meaning – a scale created as a more unambiguous and accurate measure of a sense of meaning in life. It is made up of scales: purpose and inner coherence. It is defined as having life goals, a mission, a sense of being direction-oriented in time from the past towards the future and as having a logically integrated and coherent understanding of oneself, others and life in general. This is an empirically validated scale which corresponds to the first factor obtained in the factor analysis.

The life attitude balance (existential transcendence) is a general measure of attitudes to life that takes into account both the degree to which the meaning of life has been discovered and is being experienced as well as the level of motivation to identify the purpose and the meaning. Life attitude balance is determined by the resulting scores of all six simple scales, of which four have positive weights and two have negative scales. It is a theoretical scale derived from the assumptions of Frankl's existential theory and by Reker, author of the LAP-R. It defines a human individual's evaluation of his or her own life in terms of positive experiences of satisfaction with life and acceptance of the current state. Life attitude balance is associated with a low level of pro-change attitude and the search for new sensations. It is a state of general satisfaction with life, having and pursuing objectives that are important to oneself, understanding and accepting oneself and life in general (Klout, 2010, p. 39–40).

From the point of view of the scientific research reliability, apart from formulating the issues, methods and research tools, an appropriate selection of the research population is a prerequisite. Twenty-four fully completed questionnaires from men aged between 21 and 47 were accepted for the research. The age average was 33.5 with a standard deviation of 5.3.

Below are demographic data describing the group covered by the research.

Table 1. Demographic data of the respondents

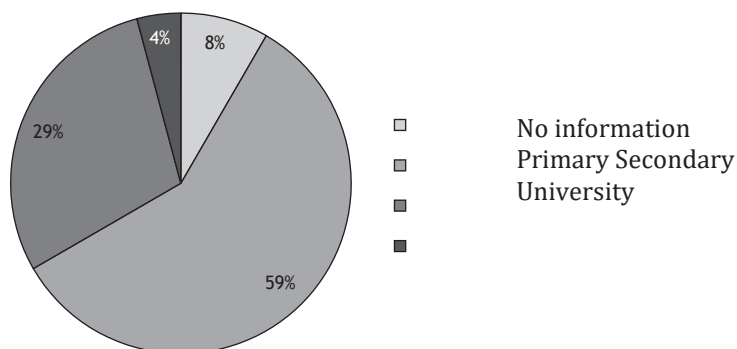
	Variable	Population	%
Penalty system	EMS	12	50
	OTHER	12	50
Sex	Woman	0	0
	Man	24	100
Age	18–23	1	4
	24–38	20	83
	39–59	3	13
Marital status	Bachelor	12	50
	Married	4	17
	Divorced	8	33

Place of residence	City	24	100
	Village	0	0
	No data	0	0
Educational back-ground	University	1	4
	Secondary	7	29
	Primary	14	59
	No data	2	8
Employment	Works	16	67
	Does not work	6	25
	No data	2	8

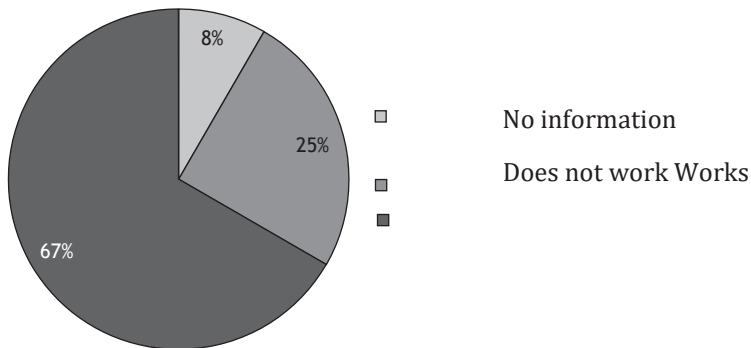
Source: author’s own study

The demographic data analysis shows that half of the respondents are serving their sentence under EMS while the others in other systems. All respondents are male. Unmarried persons prevail and most of them are aged 30-36. As many as 59% of the respondents have the primary education, the second most numerous group are persons with a secondary education 29% and two persons have not provided information. The majority of people are economically active and they account for 67% while 8% of the respondents have not provided information in this regard. The sample group is not sufficient for statistical analysis, so an individual approach was taken towards the results. When using the questionnaire for the purposes of individual diagnosis, once the raw scores were calculated, it was necessary to convert them into standardised scores by means of one of the scales; in this case, the sten scale was used in accordance with the norms given in the Annex. Graphs showing the educational background and professional activity of the prisoners covered by the research are presented below.

Graph 1. Prisoners’ educational background



Source: author’s own study

Graph 2. Prisoners' occupational activity

Source: author's own study

Below, I present an analysis of the prisoners' performance in relation to the particular scales and information on what characterises the persons who have attained low and high scores.

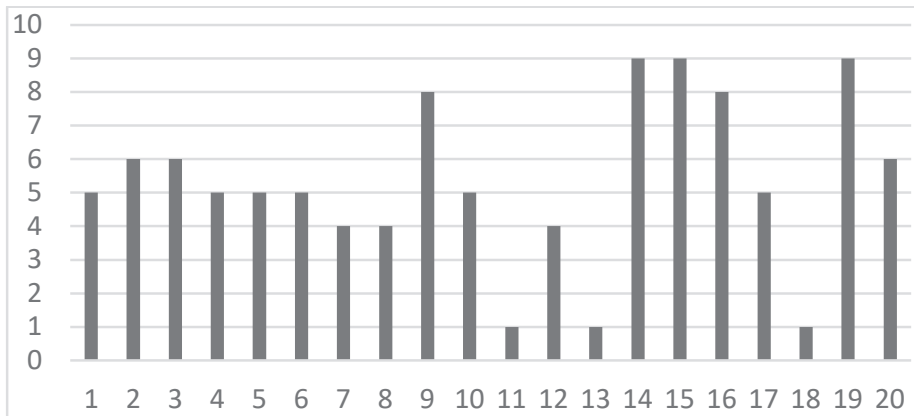
Purpose (P)

High scores characterise people having a direction-oriented life, well-defined life goals and a sense of being direction-oriented in time from the past into the future.

Low scores indicate a lack of direction-oriented attitude in life, the person is characterised by a lack of goals to pursue, which results in a lack of conviction of one's own life being valuable and a lack of positive experiences related with a purposeful activity (Klaut, 2010, p.67).

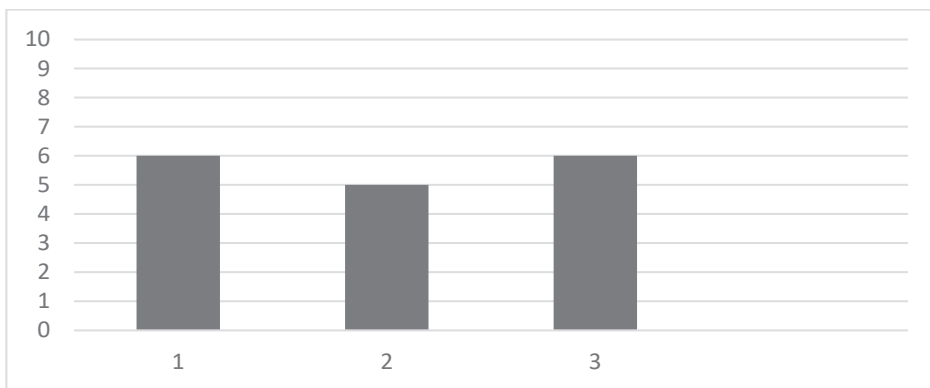
The majority of the respondents have reached medium scores. High scores appeared in the group aged 24-38; however, extremely low scores also occurred in this group. Most of the high scores as well as extremely low scores occurred among respondents in sentences other than electronic monitoring.

Graph 3. Standards for the age of 24-38 – Purpose



Source: author’s own study.

Graph 4. Standards for the age of 39-59 – Purpose



Source: author’s own study.

Table 2. Standards for the age of 18-23 – Purpose

	Raw scores	Sten standards
Purpose	31	4

Source: author’s own study

Table 4. Standards for the age of 39–59 – Life control

	Raw scores	Sten standards
Life control	44	6

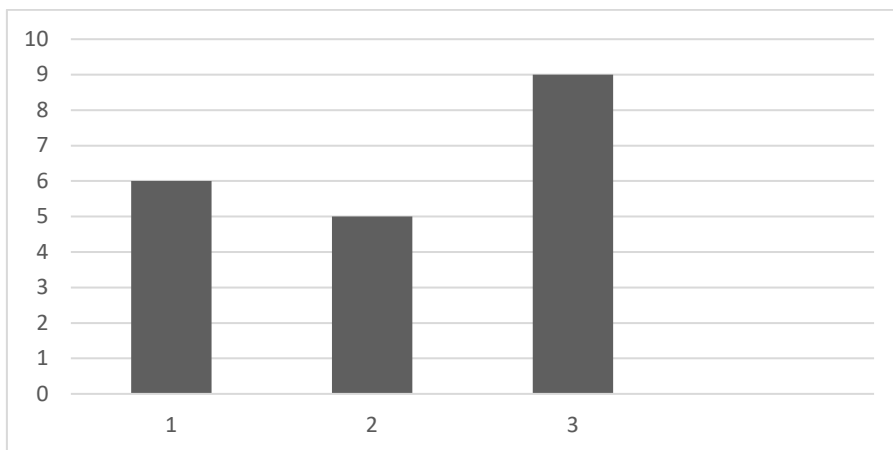
Source: author's own study

Death acceptance (DA)

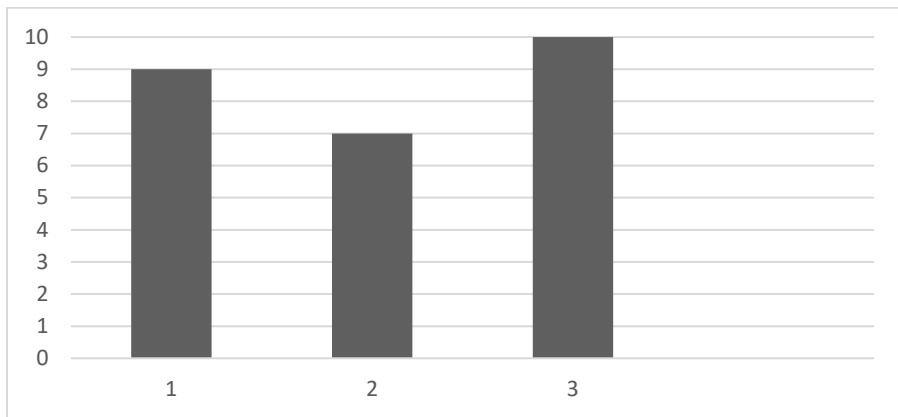
High scores - the person considers death to be a natural aspect of life and thus has no fear of death. This attitude indicates one's objectivity towards life.

Low scores - the person lives the perspective of death in terms of anxiety, experiences fear of the end of their own existence. This attitude indicates a lack of ability to be objective towards one's own mortality (Klaut, 2010, p. 68).

The majority of prisoners reach high scores regardless of their age, which indicates that death is accepted as something natural in existence.

Graph 5. Standards for the age of 24–38 – Death acceptance (DA)

Source: author's own study

Graph 6. Standards for the age of 39–59 – Death acceptance (DA)

Source: author's own study.

Table 5. Standards for the age of 39–59 – Death acceptance (DA)

	Raw scores	Sten standards
Death acceptance	44	8

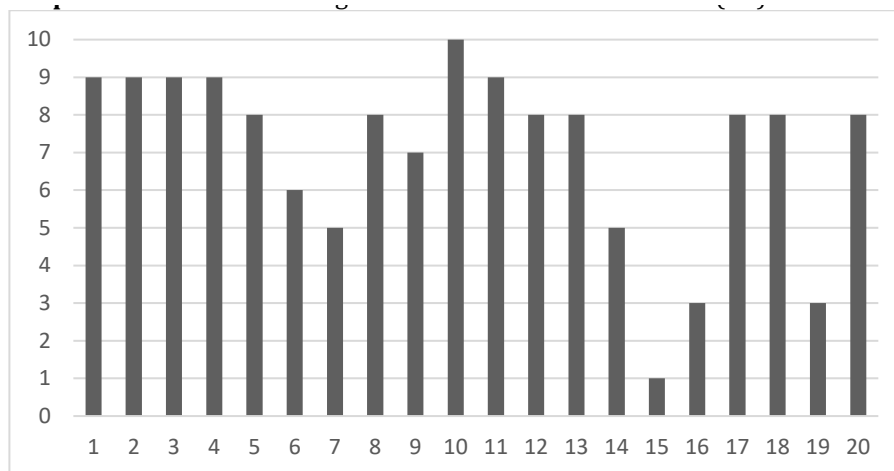
Source: author's own study.

Existential vacuum

High scores - the person has no life goals, his or her life is not oriented towards meaningful activities, experiences apathy and boredom, withdraws from activities without obstacles, experiences inner disturbance as a result of a frustrated need for meaning in life but is unable to streamline this energy.

Low scores - the person shows a lack of negative feelings which is why he or she does not experience existential vacuum; low scores indicate effective sense-making purposeful activity (Klaut, 2010, p. 68).

The majority of respondents scored high indicating a lack of a sense of meaning in their own lives as well as a lack of goals. Such feelings may be due to their current life situation which is related to their imprisonment.

Graph 7. Standards for the age of 24–38 – Existential vacuum (EV)

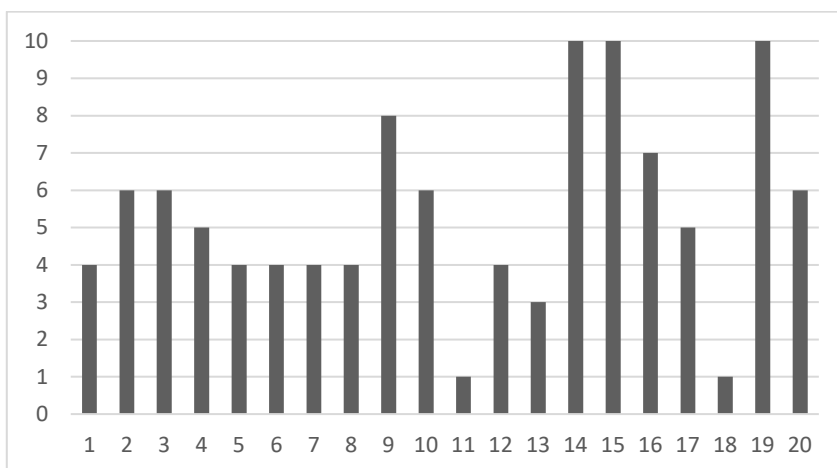
Source: author's own study

Personal meaning

High scores – the person experiences a state of personal meaning; his or her life is ordered, coherent and direction-oriented in time, the person has a defined hierarchy of values and life goals to achieve; the outcome is the experience of personal identity

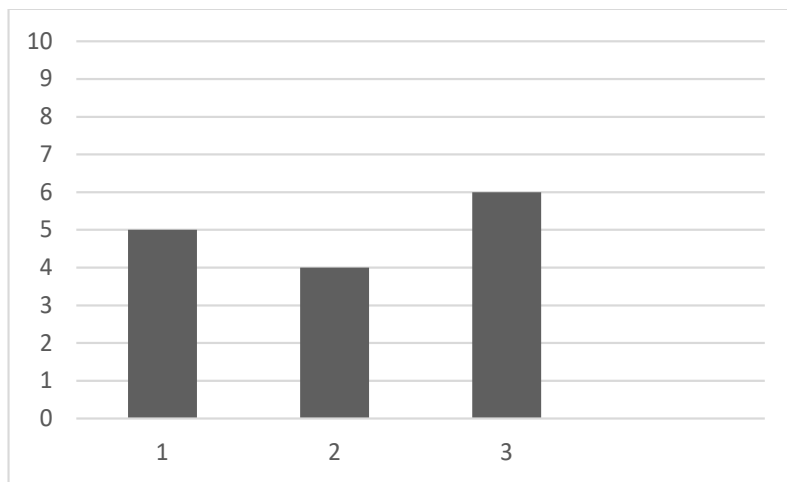
Low scores - the person lacks a sense of meaning, lacks meaning-making activity and the ability to understand the world and experience the ordered state of one's own life; such a person may have problems experiencing his or her own identity (Klaut, 2010, p. 68–69).

The majority of prisoners reached average scores. Scores of both 10 and 1 also occurred.

Graph 15. Standards for the age of 24–38 – Personal meaning (PM)

Source: author's own study

Graph 16. Standards for the age of 39–59 – Personal meaning (PM)



Source: author’s own study

Table 8. Standards for the age of 18–23 – Personal meaning (PM)

	Raw scores	Sten standards
Personal meaning	69	5

Source: author’s own study

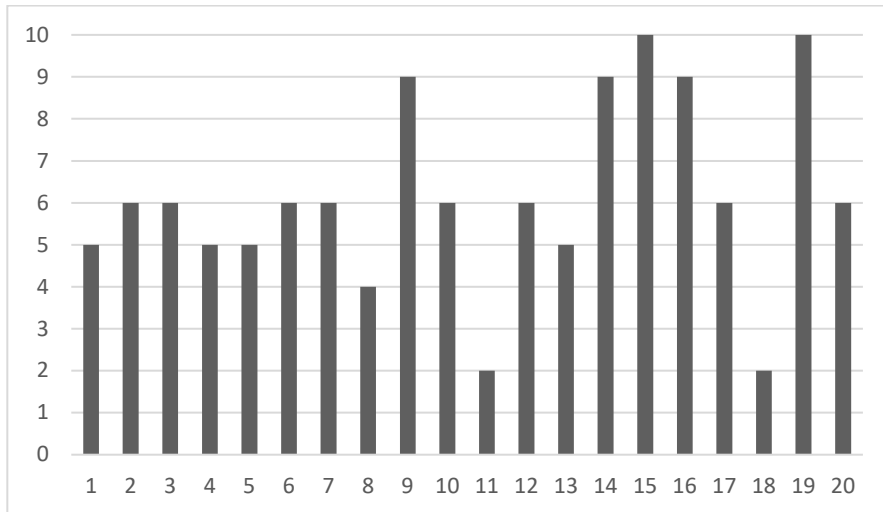
Life attitude balance (LAB)

High scores – “the person effectively experiences his or her own life from the perspective of the meaning – experiences the sense of meaning in life, has a conviction of being in control of one’s own actions, of being the author of one’s own life; also has a distance from one’s own mortality and everyday life, thus is characterised by a more objective perspective of reference to one’s own actions and a fuller understanding of human life; is not affected by the state of motivational tension aimed at the need to change the current lifestyle; high scores on this scale indicate a high level of one’s sense of subjectivity as an individual human being.

Low scores – the person ineffectively lives the perspective of the meaning - lacks having his or her own life activities ordered, lacks objective awareness of his or her own existence; thinking about death intensifies anxiety and fear; a high level of unoriented motivational tension and a conviction of inability to control one’s own actions are characteristic” (Klaut, 2010, p. 69).

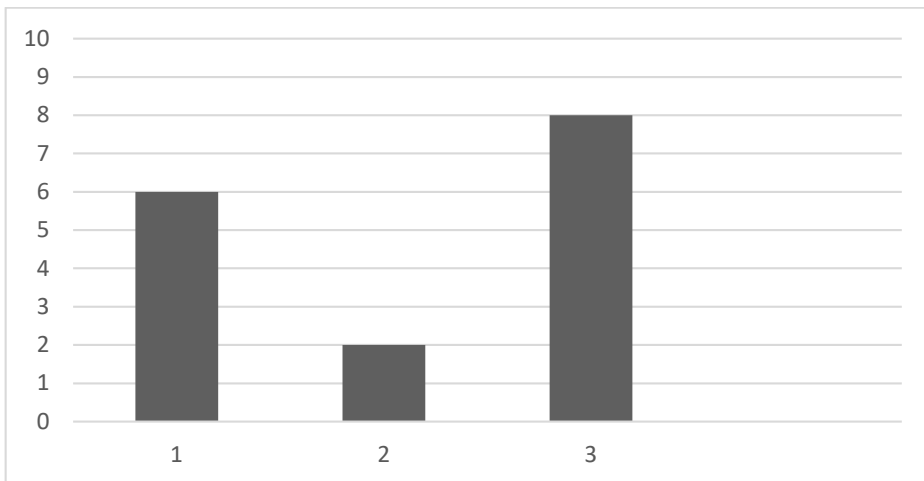
The score for the Life Attitude Balance scale is a compilation of all the simple scales. The scores reached by the respondents are average, with 7 people scoring high and only 2 scoring low. This suggests that most people feel a sense of meaning in life.

Graph 17. Standards for the age of 24–38 – Life attitude balance (LAB)



Source: author's own study

Graph 18. Standards for the age of 39–59 – Life attitude balance (LAB)



Source: author's own study

Table 9. Standards for the age of 18–23 – Life attitude balance (LAB)

	Raw scores	Sten standards
Life attitude balance	100	7

Source: author's own study

Summary

It can be concluded from the research that the type of sentence served does not have an effect on the perception of the meaning of life in general. The respondents reached similar scores for both EMS and other forms of penalty. Attention is drawn to the low scores on the goal seeking scale and to the high scores on the existential vacuum scale, which are a common feature for all the respondents. Persons attaining such scores sense a lack of meaning of their own life and, at the same time, a lack of desire to make a change. Thus, the majority of persons serving a sentence of imprisonment will presumably attain similar scores on these levels but research should be conducted involving a larger group of persons serving a sentence of imprisonment (see more in: K. Gucwa-Porębska *Funkcjonowanie społeczne osadzonych w systemie dozoru elektronicznego*, Warszawa 2020).

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Abstract

The electronic supervision system is a substitute penalty of imprisonment which consists in restricting the prisoner's freedom in his/her place of residence by means of a system of electronic devices. The prerequisites for obtaining a permit to serve a sentence of imprisonment under a electronic monitoring system are set out in the Executive Penal Code

Act in Chapter VIIa (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 523). The purpose of this article is to identify and discuss life attitudes that characterise inmates serving a sentence of imprisonment under EMS and in solitary confinement conditions.

Keywords: electronic surveillance, prison, convicts, life attitudes, questionnaire

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