

# THE SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN-PRISONERS' FEELING OF LONELINESS

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## **Abstract**

The article presents the study on the factors influencing the emergence of loneliness in female prisoners. The results obtained indicate that loneliness is caused not only by subjective factors, such as personal traits, needs, motives, but also by an objective factor – the socially closed structure of detention places and the limited environment there. The main subjective reasons for female prisoners' feelings of loneliness are despair, fears, depression and aggression, caused by their inability to satisfy their needs for communication, safety, personal development and goal achievement.

The feeling of loneliness emerges because of the influence of the following factors: personal traits, insufficient interpersonal relationships, fear of rejection, subjective and objective causes.

***Keywords:** feeling of loneliness, female prisoners, penitentiary institutions, interpersonal relationships, gender identity, sphere of motives and needs, personal traits.*

## **Introduction**

According to the Council of Europe Report 2019, Ukraine belongs today to ten countries with the largest number of prisoners. The share of women serving sentences increased gradually from 4.6% in 1995 to 8% in 2012-2019. Moreover, there are children asylums at the penitentiaries for women where their children live.

To date, the fact that isolation conditions influence the individual's mental health has been proven. The consequences of loneliness experienced because of isolation can be behavioural, psychological and emotional, and these aspects can be considered separately or together.

A penitentiary is a government institution that forcibly restricts prisoners' freedom of movement by enclosing them within a certain area. As a result, increased mental stress can

occur, accompanied by a feeling of longing (for home, relatives, friends), which gradually forms a feeling of loneliness (Yagunov, 2008).

We should note that the conditions of imprisonment are characterized, in addition to increased stress, by the difficulties of adaptation experienced by prisoners due to changes in their living environment. They must adapt to the new environment and overcome its negative influences. The performed studies showed that the new environment was characterized by poor living conditions, a criminal subculture with corresponding leaders, frequent interpersonal conflicts, rudeness, ill will and pressure from both staff, administration, and other convicted women. All these factors further contributed to emerging personality disorders, depression, formed the feelings of loneliness in imprisoned women, up to suicidal attempts (Mahmood, Tripodi, Vaughn, Bender, & Schwartz, 2012; Fritch, 2007; Loucks & Zamble, 2000; Lapshina, 2007).

Moreover, the scientific research on suicides in prisons identified factors contributing to criminal behaviour: low self-esteem, bereavement, depression, physical and mental illness, unemployment (inability to materially satisfy one's own needs), family problems (divorce, death), difficulties in relationships, humiliation and oppression by others, and social isolation (Mann, Apter, & Bertolote, 2005; Penn, Esposito, Schaeffer, Fritz, & Spirito, 2003).

The several studies on personalities of female prisoners (Abyzova, 2007; Dmitriev, 2007; Senik, Stephen, & Michael, 2012) showed that the environment with forced social isolation deformed female convicts' personalities and affected their behaviour due to their inability to adapt to the deprivational living conditions. The correlations were identified between women's borderline, antisocial, narcissistic personal disorders and institutional violence in penitentiaries. These correlations indicated the existence of crime risks such as women-prisoners' violence and abuse in penitentiaries (Nee & Farman, 2003; Warren, Burnette, South, Chauhan, & Bale, 2002; Lebedev & Kuznetsov, 2002).

**The study object** was the factors influencing the feeling of loneliness.

**The study subject** was the social-psychological factors of women's feeling of loneliness in penitentiary institutions.

**The study aim** was to identify the social-psychological factors that cause feelings of loneliness in women serving sentences in penitentiary institutions.

### **Research Sample and Participants**

The study involved 52 women serving sentences in the Krasnopartisan correctional institution of the minimum security level for women No 68 in Sverdlovsk, Luhansk region. The age of the studied women ranged from 25 to 45 years.

### **Methods of the research**

The following psychological examining tools were used for the empirical examination of the feeling of loneliness in women in penitentiary institutions: Freiburg Personality Inventory (FPI) (form B), developed by Fahrenberg, Hampel and Selg and adapted by Krylov and Kulikov to examine personal states and traits especially important for social adaptation and regulation of behaviour, including communicative ones (Vansovskaya et al, 1997); Jersild's Personal Issues Inventory (Kolesnikova, 2019), identifying the individual's stable negative emotional states that affect their attitudes towards people around them, towards themselves and the world in general; Bem Sex-Role Inventory for the study of the individual's gender identity (Kletsina, 2003); Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale studying the causes of loneliness

and attitudes to it (Tikhonov, 2006); Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA) (Di Tommaso & Spinner, 1993) studying emotional states and relationships between people, as well as the degrees of loneliness experienced by them; the questionnaire on the importance of basic needs in the modification proposed by Akidinova, which reveals the importance of basic material needs (security, interpersonal relationships, respect from others) and the need in self-realization (Pugachev, 2003); Ehlers' method examining the individual's motivation for success, achievement motivation success in various life situations (Raigorodsky, 2011); the test of life-meaningful orientations proposed by Leontiev (Leontiev, 2000) and identifying life goals; Differential Loneliness Scale (DLS) proposed by Schmidt & Serma (Tikhonov, 2006) and identifying insufficient social relations and dissatisfaction with them; the questionnaire for the subjective assessment of interpersonal relations proposed by Dukhnovsky (Dukhnovsky, 2007) and determining the causes of disharmonious interpersonal relationships, states and feelings during interactions with other people; the method diagnosing communicative social competence (Fetiskin, Kozlov, & Manuilov, 2002) and identifying the main components of communicative competence; Eliot's Quality of Life Index (Vodopjanova, 2005), identifying general satisfaction with the quality of personal life, as well as the sphere of life that causes the greatest discomfort and dissatisfaction.

Descriptive statistics, correlations and factor analyses were used for statistical processing of the obtained data. The processing of the obtained empirical data was conducted using the statistical software package SPSS 21.0 for Windows.

### Analysis of the research results

Basing on the performed analysis of the data obtained from the following questionnaires: SELSA (Di Tommaso & Spinner, 1993), Jersild's Personal Issues Inventory (Kolesnikova, 2019) and Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Tikhonov, 2006), we have revealed the indicators describing imprisoned women's feeling of loneliness (Table 1).

**Table 1.** The indicators of female prisoners' feeling of loneliness

	Average	Standard Deviation
Social loneliness	52,3	9,72
Family loneliness	42,5	8,54
Romantic loneliness	47,4	7,09
Isolation	2,9	1,66
Fear of being left alone	3,8	1,19

The data presented in Table 1 show that the highest average values were obtained for social and family loneliness, and the lowest ones – for fear of being left alone. In accordance with the obtained results, the indicators can be ranked as follows: social loneliness ( $M = 52.3$ ), family loneliness ( $M = 42.5$ ), romantic loneliness ( $M = 47.4$ ), isolation ( $M = 2.9$ ) and fear of being left alone ( $M = 3.8$ ). The values obtained for the indicators of social, family and romantic loneliness are high, the overall indicator of loneliness is moderate, and the indicator of the “fear of being left alone” is low, which can be explained by forced social isolation and the corresponding compulsory social environment.

Thus, we can conclude that women in penitentiary institutions experienced loneliness, both social, due to limited social contacts, and family and romantic, due to either the limited

allowed number of visits, contacts with family members, with the spouse (partner, roommate), with friends, or due to divorce, refusal of relatives to maintain any contact or, in exceptional cases, the death of a loved one. Low fear of being left alone means only that female prisoners had no fear of losing relationships, because their outside relationships with society were severed, and relationships in prisons did not provide plenty of choices and depended on the period that a female prisoner was serving, and therefore the value of such a new relationship was not stable.

To identify the correlations of the feeling of loneliness with the following indicators: interpersonal relations (the questionnaire for the subjective assessment of interpersonal relations proposed by Dukhnovsky, 2007); masculinity-femininity (Bem Sex-Role Inventory) (Kletsina, 2003), personal traits (Freiburg Personality Inventory (FPI) (form B)) (Vansovskaya et al, 1997), emotional attitudes (Jersild's Personal Issues Inventory) (Kolesnikova, 2019), communicative social competence (Fetiskin, Kozlov, & Manuilov, 2002); the sphere of motives and needs (Ehlers' method) (Raigorodsky, 2011); basic needs (the questionnaire on the importance of basic needs in the modification proposed by Akidinova) (Pugachev, 2003); life meanings (Leontiev's test, 2000), causes and attitudes (Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Tikhonov, 2006) and Eliot's Quality of Life Index (Vodopjanova, 2005), we used correlation analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Correlation coefficients among the indicators of loneliness and interpersonal relations, personal traits, motives and needs for female prisoners

Studied indicators	Social loneliness	Family loneliness	Romantic loneliness	Isolation	Fear of being left alone
<i>Indicators of interpersonal relations</i>					
Masculinity and femininity		0.40*		0.40*	0.38*
Aggression in relationships					0.52**
<i>Personal traits</i>					
Spontaneous aggressiveness	0.42*				
Proneness to hostile conflicts		0.46*			
Open, easy-going, sociable			-0.42*		
<i>Causes and attitudes</i>					
Shyness and social anxiety	0.50**				
Despair	-0.39*				0.39*
Attention to details with tendency to refusals		-0.43*			
Health			-0.38*		
Fear to disclose oneself					0.37*
Work and career					0.39*
Personal reasons and attitudes					0.36*
Optimism					0.45*
Quality-of-life index					0.41*

<i>The sphere of motives and needs</i>					
Motivation for success	-0.39*				
The need for interpersonal contacts		0.39*			
Locus of control – Self		0.37*		0.52**	
Goals			-0.41*	0.57**	
Overall satisfaction with one's life			-0.40*	0.56**	
Financial situation				0.38*	
Process				0.55**	
Result				0.38*	

Note: \*  $p < 0,05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0,01$

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that the greatest number of positive correlations was determined for “fear of being left alone” and the indicators of interpersonal relations, causes and attitudes, namely: aggression in relationships (0.52,  $p < 0.01$ ), masculinity and femininity (0.38,  $p < 0.05$ ), despair (0.39,  $p < 0.05$ ), fear to disclose oneself (0.37,  $p < 0.05$ ), work and career (0.39,  $p < 0, 05$ ), personal reasons and attitudes (0.36,  $p < 0.05$ ), optimism (0.45,  $p < 0.05$ ), quality-of-life index (0.41,  $p < 0.05$ ). Also, a large number of positive correlations was observed between “isolation” and indicators of interpersonal relations, motives and needs, namely: masculinity and femininity (0.40,  $p < 0.05$ ), locus of control – Self (0.52,  $p \leq 0,01$ ), goals (0.57,  $p \leq 0,01$ ), overall satisfaction with one's life (0.56,  $p < 0,01$ ), financial situation (0.38,  $p \leq 0,05$ ), process (0.55,  $p \leq 0.01$ ) and results (0.38,  $p \leq 0,05$ ).

The obtained results indicate the existing positive as well as negative correlations between social, family and romantic loneliness and the studied indicators. The greatest number of positive correlations was determined for family loneliness, namely with the following indicators: femininity and masculinity (0,40,  $p \leq 0,05$ ), proneness to hostile conflicts (0,46,  $p \leq 0,05$ ), the need for interpersonal contacts (0,39,  $p < 0,05$ ), locus of control – Self (0,37,  $p \leq 0,05$ ); the negative correlation was with attention to details with tendency to refusals (-0,43,  $p \leq 0,05$ ). Social loneliness had positive correlations with the following indicators: spontaneous aggressiveness (0,42,  $p \leq 0,05$ ), shyness and social anxiety (0.50,  $p \leq 0.01$ ) and negative correlations with despair (-0,39,  $p \leq 0,05$ ) and motivation for success (-0.39,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). Romantic loneliness had only negative correlations with the following indicators: open, easy-going, sociable (-0.42,  $p < 0.05$ ), health (-0.38,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), goals (-0.41,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), overall satisfaction with one's life (-0.40,  $p \leq 0.05$ ).

The obtained data indicate that interpersonal relationships are an integral part of human life. The study results show that loneliness in general, the fear of being left alone, family loneliness in the interpersonal relationships of imprisoned women are associated with gender identity (the predominance of femininity or masculinity). The revealed correlation between the fear of being left alone and aggressiveness in relationships suggests that these women had dominant masculinity and suppressed femininity, which is one of the causes of their feeling of loneliness. Also, the cause of loneliness experienced is despair associated with the subjective feeling of the impossibility to satisfy one's own needs: women fear to disclose themselves, which can make them defenceless and vulnerable in their environment, they are limited in contacts with loved ones (family, partner, friends), they are also limited in personal development and goal achievement, their material security is poor. These dissatisfied needs and low quality of life in general are conditioned by the socially closed structure in penitentiary institutions,

where strict sentence rules exist and a social group is strictly imposed. It is also important to note that the internal sentence conditions, in which women live, are a stressful factor, evoking anxiety or fear and resulting in their spontaneous aggressive impulses (conflicts, fights, suicide attempts).

Thus, the performed analysis of correlations for the indicators revealing the feeling of loneliness and the studied indicators from other areas revealed that not only subjective factors affected imprisoned women's loneliness, but also objective (social) factors – the structure of imprisonment places closed from society.

We used 12 methods, including 84 indicators, in our empirical study to identify the factors influencing imprisoned women's feeling of loneliness. Since some indicators from different methods measure the same qualities, it has been hypothesized that the feeling of loneliness can be investigated with fewer indicators. Therefore, factor analysis was used to reduce the data amount and to find new cross factors. Using the Kaiser criterion, we have identified seven factors of tested women's feelings of loneliness. These factors contribute 77% to the total data variance (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Factors of female prisoners' loneliness

№	Factor load	Factors
1	20,4%	work and career (0.89), family (0.86), self-control (0.79), tension (0.76), negative emotions (0.68), health (0.65)
2	10,2%	resentment and bitterness (0.78), alienation and isolation (0.71)
3	9,8%	fear of being criticised (0.91), support (0.74)
4	9,8%	meaninglessness of existence (0.80), reactive aggressiveness (0.77)
5	9,7%	emotional lability (-0.76), low self-esteem (0.68), family loneliness (0.52)
6	9,3%	attitude toward larger groups, society (-0.87), free will (0.54)
7	7,5%	depression (0.86), fear of being left alone (0.73)

The content of the calculated factors shows the sources of the emergence of feelings of loneliness in women in penitentiary institutions. Table 3 shows that loneliness is directly influenced, on the one hand, by subjective factors, namely: personal traits such as reactive aggressiveness, emotional instability (lability), irresponsible indifference as a result of meaningless existence, rationalism; personal reasons such as low self-esteem, resentment and bitterness, fear of being rejected, misunderstood, criticized and not getting support, negative emotions, depression, stress, absence of work, difficulties with health, withdrawal and self-isolation from others. On the other hand, the feeling of loneliness is supported by the deficit of interpersonal relationships both with the family and with society as a whole, which is an objective factor: the limited social environment in penitentiary institutions, strict rules and limited communication with significant people, the social environment imposed by the institution.

### Discussion

The searches for social and psychological factors that influence the emergence of the feeling of loneliness in imprisoned women (living in social isolation) are important, since the number of female criminals is currently growing, and prisoners' adaptation to correctional institutions is problematic.

A new environment closed from general society is particularly important for the adaptation and regulation of the behaviour of women serving sentence, because such environment is destructive by its nature and consists of people who have committed various crimes. Therefore, it can be described by tension, the senses of danger, control, anxiety and fear (Mahmood, Tripodi, Vaughn, Bender, & Schwartz, 2012; Fritch, 2007; Loucks & Zamble, 2000).

The study results indicate that female prisoners' feeling of loneliness is fairly grave and affects their personal (family, partnerships, and friends) and social (environment) (Yagunov, 2008) spheres.

The main causes of the emergence of the feeling of loneliness are despair, fears (of rejection, suppression), depression and aggression caused by the inability to satisfy prisoners' needs for communication, safety, personal development and goal achievement (Lapshina, 2007; Senik, Stephen, & Michael, 2012).

Gender identity has a particular impact on loneliness experienced in interpersonal relationships. The study results have shown that female prisoners had dominant male traits and behavioural responses. This was manifested in their spontaneous aggression and proneness to hostile conflicts with others. However, it is important to note that these behavioural responses can also be due to the prison environment (characterised by tension, control, anxiety and fear) or be the signs of defensive behaviour (Mahmood, Tripodi, Vaughn, Bender, & Schwartz, 2012).

### Conclusions

The results obtained from the study indicate that women in penitentiary institutions had a rather pronounced feeling of loneliness, which affected their personal (family, partnerships, and friends) and social (environment) spheres.

The performed analysis of correlations for the indicators revealing the feelings of loneliness and interpersonal relationships, personal traits, the sphere of motives and needs has shown that correlations exist not only with interpersonal relationships but with specific personal traits important for life in society. Thus, gender identity plays a special role, namely male traits, behavioural manifestations and reactions prevail over the female ones. The correlations were also revealed with the examined women's personal traits: spontaneous aggressiveness, hostility, closedness, emotional instability, existing due to subjective reasons: despair, fear, social anxiety and unmet personal needs for communication, safety, personal development and goal achievement. Their source is the socially closed structure of penitentiary institutions with all its strict requirements, norms, and restrictions.

We have revealed as a trend that women's spontaneous aggressive manifestations (conflicts, fights, suicide attempts, etc.) are caused by the influence of the social environment existing in penitentiary institutions; this environment is a stress factor that includes tension, control, anxiety and fear.

In general, the performed analysis of correlations has shown that female prisoners' feeling of loneliness emerges not only under the influence of subjective factors, but also under the influence of social ones, namely, a socially closed structure of a prison with an imposed environment consisting of the criminal contingent.

Thus, female prisoners' feeling of loneliness emerges under the influence of the following factors: negative emotions due to the changed working and family environment, alienation due to isolation, lack of support, lack or loss of the meaning of life, family loneliness, limited interpersonal relationships, fear of being alone.

Consequently, female prisoners require special attention from the penitentiary staff to integrate them better into the environment of sentence serving, build a security system and establish contacts (cooperation) both with the penitentiary staff and between members of the social group, within which prisoners interact during the entire period of sentence serving.

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## THE SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN-PRISONERS' FEELING OF LONELINESS

### Summary

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The article presents the study on the social-psychological factors influencing the emergence of loneliness in female prisoners. Loneliness is a feeling caused not only by subjective (internal) factors such as personal traits, needs, motives, but also by an objective (external) factor – the socially closed structure of detention places and the limited environment there.

The study involved 52 women serving sentences in the Krasnopartisan correctional institution of the minimum security level for women No 68 in Sverdlovsk, Luhansk region. The age of the studied women ranged from 25 to 45 years.

The findings indicate that female prisoners have the feeling of loneliness that affects their personal (family, partnerships, and friends) and social (environment) spheres.

We have revealed that gender identity plays a special role in the feeling of loneliness experienced in interpersonal relationships. Women in penitentiary institutions are characterized by a predominant masculinity in interpersonal relationships and behavioural reactions.

The main subjective causes of female prisoners' feeling of loneliness are despair, fear, depression and aggression, due to the inability to satisfy their needs in communication, safety, personal development and goal achievement, the source of which is the socially closed structure of penitentiary institutions with strict requirements and norms.

We have shown as a trend that the women's spontaneous aggressive manifestations (conflicts, fights, suicide attempts, etc.) are influenced by the internal social environment of penitentiary institutions, which is a stressful factor, because this environment is unsafe with tension, control, anxiety and fear.

The feeling of loneliness emerges because of the influence of the following factors: negative emotions due to the changed working and family environment, alienation due to isolation, lack of support, lack or loss of the meaning of life, family loneliness, limited interpersonal relationships, fear of being alone.

**Keywords:** *feeling of loneliness, female prisoners, penitentiary institutions, interpersonal relationships, gender identity, sphere of motives and needs, personal traits.*

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