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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Parol, R., & Jaworska, A. (2015). Attitudes towards work among prison inmates and the long-term unemployed. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 52, 61-69. <https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.52.61>

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## **Attitudes towards Work among Prison Inmates and the Long-term Unemployed**

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**Keywords:** attitudes towards work; imprisonment; unemployment; work

**ABSTRACT.** The article includes an analysis of differences in attitudes towards work in conditions of imprisonment and among employed and long-term unemployed men not detained in prison. The results of the analysis showed a moderate interaction effect of the factors: imprisonment and unemployment ( $F(1,407) = 6.16, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.36$ ). It turned out that the environment of prison isolation and unemployment are mutually related, and the least favorable attitudes towards work were shown by the men serving imprisonment sentence, having at the same time no employment opportunities.

### **1. BACKGROUNDS**

In the literature there are two main types of attitudes towards work (Isaksson, Johansson, Bellaagh, Sjöberg, 2004): attitudes towards a particular type of work (attitude towards the institution, the workplace, organizational commitment), and attitudes towards work in general (belief in the importance of work and psychological identification with work in general). In this study we shall consider the second of these types of attitudes - attitudes towards work in its general sense, that is, not related to the current activity or lack of it.

The research on attitudes towards work presented in the world's literature show, among other things, that the perception of work as a valuable activity, both in terms of personal development and as a social benefit, influences improved performance (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011), greater satisfaction with work (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, Duffy et al, 2012; Hirschi, 2012), as well as a smaller desire to resign from the job (Berg, Grant, Johnson, 2010). Job loss also causes loss of many related gratification values, leading to a deterioration of mental functioning, disorders of the time structure organization, reduction of social contacts, loss of social status, disorganized activity, which Jahoda called hidden job functions (Kieselbach, 2004).

Meta-analysis of the research on the relationship between long-term unemployment and mental health (McKeRryan, Wernberg & Kinicki, 2005) showed that long-term unemployment (affecting also the persons serving long prison sentences) greatly reduces the chances of finding a job. This may be caused by the change of attitudes towards work developing while the person remains unemployed.

Citing Debris (2004), we can distinguish three main types of work attitudes among the unemployed: resignation (characterized by insecurity and loss of hope for a change in their situation), unrealistic optimism (which is accompanied by excessive hope of finding a good job, although with a sense insecurity) or adaptation (dealing relatively well with the situation of unemployment, but with no hope of finding a job). Types of work attitudes of the unemployed can be a significant predictor of their methods of looking for a job. Previous studies concerning the relationship between the intensity of job search with the possibility of finding a job (Wanberg, 1997; Van Hooft et al., 2004; Van Hooft et al., 2005; Boswell, Roehling & Boudreau, 2006; Song, Wanberg, Niu & Xie, 2006) indicate a positive correlation between the intensity of job search and the success, that is finding a job (though most often the effort of looking for a job gives the desired effect only after a long time). It turns out, however, that the intensity of job search largely results from the presented attitudes towards work (value of the purpose of search). Determining the

attitudes towards work is therefore an important element of expecting employment both by the long-term unemployed, and the offenders leaving prison - the perceived value of the work is the outcome of intense motivation to look for it, and thus increases the probability of employment. However, negative attitudes towards work can lead to a low level of motivation to look for a job or complete lack of it, which is consistent with the expectancy-value theory (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004; Van Hooft et al., 2004; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005) - the greater are the expectations of the unemployed on the possibility of taking up a job are and higher value it represents, the more effort will be put into job search (Maliszewski, Wojtowicz & Žerko, eds, 2005). At the same time, the long-term unemployed often feel a loss of the sense of social and individual benefits of work, which leads not only to resigning from looking for a job, but also to rejection of job offers (and to development of demanding attitudes).

Conservative social concepts regarding work attitudes assume that the unemployed and the employed do not differ in terms of perceived value of work. However, the research on work value analyzed by Dunn (2013) showed significant differences between the unemployed and the employed. The author concludes that, in contrast to employed people, between 50% and 75% of the unemployed have a negative attitude to work and they are not searching for employment. The unemployed, unlike the employed, are also much more picky in terms of the work they would take. The most important conclusion concerns cultural attitudes towards work presented by unemployed people, specified by the author, i.e., the more their closest socio-cultural environment "soaked in" the phenomenon of unemployment, the more negative is their attitude towards their own work and towards work in general. The empirical verification of the expectancy-value theory made by Van den Broeck et al (2010) showed that in the case of the unemployed, a positive attitude to work concerns only about one third of analyzed people. Negative attitudes towards work have also been shown in a study conducted by Kjelsberg, Skoglund & Rustad (2007) on a population of prisoners. In their study, Baumann and colleagues (2008) observed a number of correlations between attitudes towards work and mental suffering both in the case of prisoners and the long-term unemployed. In both groups, a stronger commitment to work was associated with less depression and higher mental wellbeing.

As discussed earlier, findings in this area indicate specific relations between long-term unemployed, prison sentence and attitude towards work (McKeRyan, Wernberg & Kinicki, 2005; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Based on previous studies, we would expect that:

### ***Hypotheses***

Although there is little existing research on the autotelic attitudes towards work in general (in a broad and abstract way), in the environments of both prison isolation and long-term unemployment, it seems reasonable to assume that:

**H.1** The conditions of long-term imprisonment or no prison isolation will differentiate the level of autotelic attitudes towards work, regardless of work situation (permanent job vs. long-term unemployment). Persons serving long-term imprisonment sentence will reveal fewer positive feelings and convictions connected with opportunities for development, pleasure and personal fulfillment that a job provides.

**H.2** Long-term unemployment or having a permanent job will differentiate autotelic attitudes towards work, regardless of life environment (penitentiary institution vs. freedom). The long-term unemployed will show a lower level of belief that job can be a source of personal joy and satisfaction.

**H.3** There will be an effect of interaction of long-term imprisonment, and long-term unemployment. The interaction of these two factors will cause lower level of of positive autotelic attitudes towards work than in the case of each of the factors separately.

## 2. METHODS

### Research procedures

The research was to determine attitudes towards work among men in production age in two life environments: freedom and imprisonment. We wanted to find out whether there are differences in the average level of positive attitudes towards work depending on life environment and work situation. To do this, we compared four groups, two of which comprised of imprisoned men (having a permanent employment during the imprisonment and not working prisoners), and two – comprising of free men that had never been imprisoned (with permanent employment or long-term unemployed). The research was divided into two stages. The first one consisted of research in the environment of men serving imprisonment in Poland. The second stage – in the environment of the long-term unemployed registered in the poviats labor offices and free (never imprisoned) men in production age.

Attitudes towards were adopted as a variable. The research was to check whether, in relations to that variable, there appear the main effects of imprisonment and permanent unemployment and if there appears an effect of interaction of both independent variables. Questionnaire methods were adopted in the research.

### Measurement tools

#### “Attitudes towards work scale”

Attitudes towards work were measured by the use of “Attitudes towards work scale”, a two-factor tool for measuring autotelic and normative attitudes towards work. The scale consists of 14 statements and there are seven statements per each of the two dimensions. The first factor (autotelic) accounts for 31.6 % of the total of valuation variances. The consistency of this dimension is calculated by the use of multidimensional exploration technique – coefficient of internal consistency – Crombach’s *alfa* = 0.81. The other factor, measuring normative attitudes, accounts for 22.9% of valuation variances, and its internal consistency coefficient – Crombach’s *alfa* = 0.76. The result of the questionnaire is the sum of the responses received in its individual factors (separately for each of them). The respondents could express their opinions on the statements included in questionnaire on 1 to 5 scale, so that in each dimension one could score 7 to 35 points. The higher the result, the higher the level of the researched dimension of attitudes towards work. A high result in autotelic factor means that work is perceived as a pleasant activity bringing psychological benefits (an opportunity for self-development). A low result indicates treating work mainly as a forced and unpleasant activity, resulting first of all from economic needs. And as for the normative factor, its high result means that work is perceived as an activity that brings benefits to the society and sets social identity of man. Its low result indicates negating the role of work as a social benefit.

The analyses mentioned in this paper present only the results of autotelic dimension of the scale.

### Subjects

The subjects were 411 in production age (21-67 years of age): 197 convicts serving a sentence in closed penitentiary institutions (age:  $M=37.31$ ;  $SD=11.34$ ) (of whom 96 persons had a paid job while serving the sentence for at least one year, 101 prisoners were permanently unemployed) and 214 persons that had never been in a penitentiary institution, residents of two regions: Pomeranian and West Pomeranian (age:  $M=38.88$ ;  $SD=11.55$ ) of whom 139 had a permanent job, and 75 were long-term unemployed men. The biggest group of the respondents (both among prisoners and free people) consisted of men of low professional qualifications (56% - unqualified manual workers or low qualified workers in services), and a smaller group (27%) were men of no professional qualifications at all. 17 % were men of high professional qualifications (manual workers and professionals).

The research made use of multi-factor analysis of variance, ANOVA, for independent samples according to 2x2 pattern: 2 (life environment on two levels: imprisonment vs. freedom) x 2 (work situation on two levels: permanent job vs. long-term unemployment).

### 3. RESULTS

Multi-factor analysis of variance for independent samples, ANOVA<sup>1</sup>, was used to verify the differences in the level of autotelic attitudes towards work depending on life environment and work situation of men in production age.

The results of the analysis showed significant differences in the level of autotelic attitudes towards work between men with permanent employment and permanently unemployed, and between prisoners and free people. (see: Table 1). The interaction of two factors was also significant.

Table 1 Significance of differences in the level of autotelic attitudes towards work of men in production age depending on their life environment (imprisonment vs. freedom)), work situation (permanent job vs. long-term unemployment) and interaction of the two factors.

Type of variable		M	SE	F	Partial Eta <sup>2</sup>
<b>Life environment*</b>	imprisonment	19.79	.50	24.97	.11
	freedom	23.35	.51		
<b>Work situation*</b>	working	24.44	.47	65.02	.24
	unemployed	18.70	.54		
<b>Interaction of variables**</b>	imprisonment	23.54	.72	6.16	.36
	freedom	16.04	.70		
	working	25.33	.60		
	unemployed	21.36	.81		

Notes: The category "imprisonment" includes men serving long-term imprisonment sentence; the category "freedom" includes men that have never committed a crime ("free" people); the category "working" includes men that have had a permanent job for at least 12 months; the category "unemployed" includes permanently unemployed men, with no job for at least 12 months; interaction of variables means joint impact of "life environment" and "work situation" variables on the level of dependent variable; M= average of the level of autotelic attitudes towards work; SE= standard estimation error

\*p<.001; \*\*p<.05

The data in Table 1 show the effect of main of imprisonment  $F(1,407)=24.97$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $Eta^2=0.11$ , which means that regardless of work situation (permanent employment or permanent unemployment), serving a long-term imprisonment significantly differentiates autotelic attitudes towards work of men in production age. Men of long-term imprisonment show significantly lower level of autotelic attitudes towards work ( $M=19.97$ ) than the persons that have never been imprisoned ( $M=23.35$ ). Compared to the population of free men, the prisoners indicate, on average, lower capacity for perceiving work as a pleasure and an opportunity for personal development, regardless of whether they work or not during imprisonment. Also a significant main effect of unemployment  $F(1,407)=65.02$ ;  $p<0.001$  was shown;  $Eta^2=0.24$ . The effect means that regardless of the life environment (imprisonment vs. freedom), long-term unemployment significantly differentiates men in production age as for perceiving work as a pleasure ( $M=18.70$ ) in comparison with working people ( $M=23.54$ ). It turned out that long-term unemployed men more than working persons perceive work as a economic an economic compulsion and an unpleasant activity (a

<sup>1</sup> IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software was used to make statistical analyses.

necessity) than an opportunity to shape one's own identity. It is so regardless of whether they are imprisoned or free people.

The research, however, also indicated a significant effect of interaction of the two factors: life conditions and work situation  $F(1,407)=6,16; p<0.05, \eta^2=0.36$ . The effect of interaction means that the main effects shown are restricted by mutual impact of both factors. It is also worthwhile paying attention to the power of Eta effects<sup>2</sup>, which in the case of the effect of interaction alone shows moderate values (see; Table 1), and in the case of the two other ones shows a weak effect. The effect of interaction thus accounts for the highest percentage of variances of the variable: *autotelic attitudes towards work*. It thus turns out that imprisonment significantly differentiates men's attitudes towards work, although mainly depending on whether they have employment opportunities during imprisonment

An analysis of simple effects was made to explain the effect of interaction (see: Table 2).

Table 2 The significance of differences in autotelic attitudes towards work between working and long-term unemployed men in the perspective of the environment they live in (imprisonment vs. freedom)

Life environment		M	SD	F
Imprisoned*	employed (N=96)	23.54	5.79	62.42
	unemployed (N=101)	16.04	7.39	
Unimprisoned*	employed (N=139)	25.33	6.95	14.14
	unemployed (N=75)	21.36	8.10	

Notes: M= average of the level of positive attitudes towards work SD = standard deviation;

\*  $p<0.001$

Determining the differences in attitudes towards work depending on life environment (imprisonment vs. freedom) was the first step. One-factor ANOVA for independent samples indicated that both during imprisonment ( $M=16.04$  vs.  $M=23.54$ ;  $F(1,195)=63.42$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and unimprisonment ( $M=21.36$  vs.  $M=25.33$ ;  $F(1,212)=14.14$ ;  $p<0.001$ , long-term unemployed persons show significantly lower level of positive, autotelic attitudes towards work than working men. The main effect of long-term unemployment is not thus limited by life environment (imprisonment vs. freedom) – working persons (both in prison and outside prison) have a positive attitude to work as a personal value than the persons that have not had an opportunity to work for a long time.

The next step of the analysis of simple effects included defining the differences in autotelic attitudes towards work depending on work situation (permanent job vs. long-term unemployment). To do that a comparison of average results of the attitudes towards work of unemployed and working people in free environment and in prison was made (see: Table 3).

Table 3 Significance of differences in autotelic attitudes towards work between imprisoned men and free men in the perspective of their work situation (permanent job vs. long-term unemployment)

Work situation		M	SD	F
Employed	imprisoned(N=96)	23.54	5.79	4.30
	unimprisoned (N=139)	25.33	6.95	
Unemployed *	imprisoned (N=101)	16.04	7.39	20.54
	unimprisoned (N=75)	21.36	8.10	

Notes: M= average of the level of positive attitudes towards work SD= standard deviation;

\*  $p<0.001$

It turned out that unemployed imprisoned men present an average lower level of autotelic attitudes towards work than unemployed persons outside prison ( $M=16.04$ ;  $SD=7.39$  vs.  $M=21.36$ ;  $SD=8.10$ ;  $F(1,174)=20.54$ ;  $p<.001$ ). However, the results showed significant statistical differences between men with permanent employment, regardless of whether they are in prison or outside prison ( $M=23.54$ ;  $SD=5.79$ ;  $M=25.33$ ;  $SD=6.95$ ;  $F(1,233)=4.30$ ;  $p=.51$ ). It must thus be stated that the main effect of imprisonment is limited by a work situation: lower positive attitudes towards work are presented only by the prisoners that have no opportunity to work during imprisonment.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The presented research results confirm the thesis on the possibility of shaping attitudes due to life experience and environment conditions, not only during socialization (Isaksson, Johansson, Bellaagh, Sjöberg, 2004). Many years ago Robert Zajonc (1968) indicated that an exposure of the object alone (multi-contact with it) changes the attitude towards it for a more positive one. Also in the case of our research it turned out that a permanent contact with work has the value of shaping positive attitudes towards work. The conclusion might seem obvious and expected if it were not for the indicated in the research so far negative attitudes towards work in the environment of the imprisoned (Kjelsberg, Skoglund & Rustad, 2007). It thus seemed that the pejorative effects of isolation, depriving the imprisoned of the feeling of autonomy, constitute a strong enough environmental stimulus for shaping a negative, a-effective and cognitive attitudes towards work. Indeed – the results of the research presented here are in line with the results obtained by other authors and confirm that the persons in penitentiary isolation present less positive attitudes towards work than free people. The conclusion, however, turned out to be incomplete, as the tendency shown includes only the convicts who have no work during imprisonment. A permanent contact with work (work exposure) turned out, on the other hand, to reduce even negative impact of prison environment. Although the penitentiary isolation itself turned out to contribute to devaluation of the value of work in the perception of the convicts, having a permanent employment during imprisonment let the imprisoned shape proper and desired in terms of social re-adaptation positive attitude to work. The good, subjectively and socially, effects of positive attitudes towards work indicated in the research so far (Christian, Garza, and Slaughter, 2011; Dobrow, Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy and others, 2012; Hirschi, 2012); Berg, Grant, Johnson, 2010), can be thus experienced also by the long-term imprisoned persons. The condition, however, is that they have a permanent employment, which not only in Poland is not a generally available option. The situation of the unemployed is much more dramatic. As shown, the attitudes towards work of the long-term unemployed take a pejorative and developmentally unfavorable form, which is confirmed by the existing research (Dunn, 2013). It turned out that the interaction of the factors of imprisonment and unemployment significantly increases the effect of negative perception of the value of work, which can be one of the probable moderators of mental health disorders (McKeRyan, Warnberg, Kinicki, 2005; Bauman and others, 2008) and lack of ability to look for a job after imprisonment (Wanberg, 1997; Van Hooft and others, 2004; Van Hooft & others, 2005; Boswell, Roehling, Boudreau, 2006; Song, Wanberg, Niu, Xie, 2006).

It is a significant indication for social policy to pay a special attention to development of positive attitudes towards work before the end of imprisonment. Because it seems that after imprisonment there is not only stigmatization and very limited number of job offers for the persons of low professional qualifications but also no positive perception of autotelic value of work. Both researched groups (the long-term imprisoned and the long-term unemployed) require professional support in terms of a change of negative attitudes towards work.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

The special meaning of the research presented above consists in determining the significance of permanent employment (or permanent unemployment) in shaping autotelic attitudes towards work in two different life environments: in the environment of prison isolation and in free

environment. The research let us show the interesting dependencies between life environment and work situation and attitudes towards work. To sum up we can say that:

- Long-term imprisoned men present less positive autotelic attitudes towards work both in affective and cognitive area in comparison with the men that are not in an isolation environment. Their emotional-evaluation attitude and their convictions about work show a bigger tendency to depreciating the value of work in an individual dimension (value of work for personal development)
- Long-term unemployed men in production age present more depreciating attitude towards work than the persons with permanent employment. They are to a lesser extent willing to perceive work as a personally valuable activity, pleasant and providing development opportunities. The unemployed to a greater extent than the working persons think that work is just an economic compulsion and that it cannot be a source of satisfaction. Regardless of what life environment they are in (penitentiary institution vs. freedom), the unemployed men more often think that they work exclusively for money, and not to attain life objectives. Such depreciating autotelic value of work attitudes are presented by the long-term unemployed regardless of whether the lack of work finds them in a free environment or in the situation of prison isolation.
- Considering life environment and work situation jointly lets us say that the especially negative attitudes towards work are presented by the long-term unemployed men that are at the same time long-term imprisoned ones. Mutual impact of unemployment and imprisonment shows especially pejorative significance given to work by the unemployed long-term imprisoned men. The interaction of the two factors leads to perceiving work as a senseless and unpleasant activity that cannot provide life satisfaction and autotelic benefits.
- Despite the indicated negative effects of imprisonment on shaping autotelic attitudes towards work, the value of having permanent employment turns out, however, to be more highly valued than the pejorative consequences of imprisonment. Long-term imprisonment significantly distinguishes men in production age in terms of negative attitude towards work, but mainly in the case of the imprisoned with no opportunity to work. Imprisonment leads to depreciating the value of work but that effect to a greater extent results from no opportunity to work than from being in isolation. The prisoners with a permanent employment to a greater extent think that work lets them being fulfilled, gives satisfaction, is one of the pleasures in life, lets them do something pleasant and gives man a goal.

### **Limits of the study**

It must be remembered that the presented research is only of a comparative character, and that the cause-effect connections between attitudes towards work and other variables cannot be clearly identified. One must also point out to the fact that both in the case of the imprisoned and in the case of the long-term unemployed it was only the persons that agreed to take part in the research that were tested, which surely excludes the persons that refused to take part in the research, and their attitudes will remain unknown to the researchers. Doing the research only in the territory of Poland is yet another limitation to the generalization and drawing definite conclusions. It is thus not sure if the differences between the unemployed in prison and the unemployed outside prison result from the situation of imprisonment itself or from the conditions of serving a sentence in selected Polish penitentiary institutions Longitudinal research with prior randomization and its extension to other regions of Poland or even the states of Western culture would constitute a significant complement of the research.



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