

Well-being of female convicts in Serbian prisons: personal autonomy and personal development*

The paper delves into the analysis of well-being, considering social, psychological, gender, and other theoretical aspects. Its objective is to explore ways for achieving and enhancing the level of well-being among female prisoners within the context of prison life. The theoretical examination primarily focuses on concepts essential for well-being, namely personal autonomy and personal development. Drawing from philosophical and psychological theories, personal autonomy and personal development are seen as sub-dimensions of overall well-being within the framework of researching the quality of prison life (MQPL). A fundamental and extensive thesis of research on the potential for identity transformation in prisons implies the necessity of a supportive environment conducive to fostering growth identities. This thesis recognizes the individual's agency in shaping and evolving their identity while undergoing a process of redefining their values, ultimately leading to desistance from criminal behaviour. It envisions the development of a pro-social, positive identity rooted in elements such as relationships, trust, well-being, and openness. Research conducted as part of the PrisonLIFE project at the only women's prison in Serbia, the Correctional Institution for Women in Požarevac, has validated that various factors impact the levels of personal autonomy and personal development among female inmates. Notably, differences emerge in how female inmates assess their prison experience concerning various aspects of well-being and development, as outlined in the MQPL framework. Female prisoners rated the dimension of well-being significantly lower than both personal development and personal autonomy. This suggests that female inmates may perceive feelings of pain, punishment, and tension associated with incarceration more intensely compared to their engagement in activities related to personal growth and preparation for reintegration into society, as well as their sense of agency and self-determination within the prison environment.

Keywords: Well-being, personal autonomy, personal development, female prisoners, prison, moral climate

Introduction

The conceptualization of human well-being involves establishing criteria and principles for selecting and prioritizing well-being indicators. This process draws from philosophical concepts as well as socio-political and ideological perspectives that shape our understanding of what constitutes a fulfilling life or well-living. Both, objective and subjective factors contribute to determining well-being levels and how they interact with each other is a topic of theoretical discussion. Integrative approaches have been explored to conceptualize well-being, considering psychological, social, cultural, economic, health and other dimensions. Ultimately, well-being encompasses a broad spectrum of aspects related to life and living.

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For example, social constructionism implies that well-being is a product of the specific overall context of one's life (Bulatović, 2014:105). Well-being provides a person with a sense of how their life is unfolding in light of one's circumstances, activities and 'mental capital' (psychological resources) (Bulatović, 2014:106). Psychological well-being can be defined as the experience of positive psychological states, functioning well within one's environment, personal growth, and positive relationships (Netten & Gibson, 2023).

Functioning well in a social environment links the social and individual psychological components of well-being. Socially healthy individuals have a realistic view of the world and the desire to give meaning to life experiences (Keyes, 1998). Such people are likely to experience greater personal well-being than others and are likely to be instrumental to the achievement of social well-being from which both they and others benefit (Bulatović, 2014:108). The feeling of social integration also has positive effects on psychological states: in terms of a sense of belonging and self-esteem (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001). In terms of its functional value, social support can have an impact on stress-producing outcomes or interact with stress perception. It has been hypothesized that social support may reveal its beneficial effects on health and emotion only during periods of individual distress, as it moderates the adverse effects of stressful events, the moderating effect known as the stress buffer effect (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001:459). The positive influence of social integration and social roles is well-recognized in fostering self-esteem and preventing psychopathology (Berkman et al., 2000).

The effective functioning within prison communities requires respecting the particularities of the prison environment, which simultaneously emerges as a source of distress, deprivation, and diminished well-being, but also as an opportunity for personal transformation and growth. Focusing on the negative consequences resulting from prison deprivation and their prevention, while at the same time endorsing the positive interpersonal relationships, forms and habits condition prison life (Ilijić, Milićević, & Pavićević, 2020: 86). Developing an instrument for measuring the quality of life in prisons, Alison Liebling designed and refined over time the concept of "MQPL" (Measuring the Quality of Prison Life) with the aim of improving and deepening the understanding of prison life and identifying those dimensions that have proven to be truly important in the reality of prison life (see Liebling, assisted by Arnold, 2004). The model evaluates the quality of prison life and its relevant outcomes in penal and forensic settings and also provides valuable insights into the prison environment and its impact on prisoners' well-being and adaptation. It has 21 dimensions thematically grouped into five global dimensions: staff-prisoner relationships, professionalism, security, conditions and family contact, and well-being and development (Batrićević et al., 2023: 275). The dimensions of well-being and development examined the following aspects of prison life: Personal development - an environment that helps convicts develop their potential, deal with criminal behavior and adequately prepare for release ("I see the time spent in this prison as a chance to change"); Personal autonomy - convicted person's feelings regarding personal autonomy and self-determination ("You can preserve your personality in this prison"); Well-being - the suffering of imprisonment and the feelings of pain, punishment and tension experienced by convicted persons ("The time spent in this prison acts to a large extent as a punishment"); Anxiety - feelings of serious inner turmoil ("I thought about suicide in this prison") (Liebling, assisted by Arnold, 2004; Liebling, Hulley

& Crewe, 2011; Stevanović, Ilijić & Vujičić, 2023). In the prison context personal autonomy represents prisoners' feelings of agency and self-determination, and as such, it serves as a prerequisite for personal development and growth, serving the purpose of attaining well-being and transforming the identities of convicted individuals towards non-criminal ones. Personal development involves unlocking the potential of convicted individuals.

Personal autonomy and personal development

Aristotle's understanding of well-being as a life lived in accordance with virtue and wisdom, in the pursuit of fulfilling one's full potential, is developed by Ryff and Singer through ideas from developmental psychology, existential, and humanistic philosophy (Ilijić, Pavićević & Milićević, 2024). These perspectives define virtue as the utilisation of one's talents and capacities, self-realisation through personal growth and development at different life stages, and thriving in challenging, sometimes unbearable life circumstances (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Their integrative approach includes six dimensions as conditions for achieving individual well-being. These are: Self-acceptance; Positive relations with others; Personal growth; Purpose in life; Environmental mastery and Autonomy (Ryff & Singer, 2008:20-21).

In this context, comprehending well-being within prison settings pertains to the subjective well-being experienced by incarcerated individuals. This understanding is grounded in an integrative psychological approach that emphasises personal development and autonomy as essential prerequisites for achieving and improving well-being. What may seem paradoxical in this conceptualization of subjective well-being applied within the context of prison life is the close association between autonomy and the concept of freedom, which is significantly restricted in such settings. Autonomy, as a dimension of well-being in assessing the quality of prison life, becomes constrained by the limitations imposed by the deprivation of freedom. People in prison have limited autonomy, are separated from their family, friends and support networks, and threat and suspicion are often part of day-to-day life (Netten & Gibson, 2023). The capacity of incarcerated individuals to make decisions for themselves is often confined to mundane matters pertaining to daily prison routines. Despite this, the provision of greater opportunities for independent choices and decisions can foster the development of responsibility and self-confidence among convicted individuals, even though the scope of these decisions remains narrow (Pavićević, Batrićević & Ilijić, 2024:158). For example, the deprivation of liberty and autonomy may be felt less severely by people who spend most of their time out-of-cell, are free to move around the prison, or are able to work outside the prison during the day (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2017). Even the ability to self-cater, for individuals to cook their own meals, may mitigate the deprivation of autonomy and enhance well-being (Parsons, 2017). Staff providing opportunities and allowing prisoners a degree of choice and control (where feasible) appears to enhance their wellbeing. In addition to this, we know that mastery (having a sense of control, being proactive, capable, or able to achieve/develop skills) has also been linked to psychological wellbeing. There is some evidence that when prisoners have a sense of meaning, this has a positive effect on their wellbeing, optimism, and resilience (Netten & Gibson, 2023:26).

However, exploring whether personal freedom can be enhanced within the confines of prison life necessitates a deeper understanding of the meaning of freedom and the potential ways for its attainment amid severe restrictions. The notion of achieving personal autonomy, intertwined with the concepts of personal growth and development, has the capacity to transcend the physical constraints of freedom present in prison environments. Autonomy is one aspect of freedom - autonomy refers to an individual's capacity to independently make decisions and control their life, whereas freedom pertains to the absence of constraints or coercion in carrying out specific activities. Within the context of the quality of prison life, it is primarily conceptualised as the pursuit of positive freedom. Negative freedom concerns control, whereas positive freedom concerns the source of control - it signifies the individual's aspiration to be their own master: a rational and active entity who determines and governs themselves (Stančić, 2020: 21). Consequently, positive freedom can be interpreted as autonomy and self-realisation (Stančić, 2020: 26). The distinction between positive and negative freedom can also be viewed as a difference in the conception of who holds freedom. Advocates of negative freedom typically regard the individual as the sole subject of freedom, whereas proponents of positive freedom may encompass our rational, moral self, or higher self as the bearer of freedom (Stojadinović, 2023: 12).

Personal autonomy transcends mere independence from external directives or unobstructed authority over one's life domains, or the simplistic individualism offered by negative freedom. It encompasses positive freedom linked to the desire, capacities, and psychological resources for self-governance (Oshana, 2003: 102).

According to relational theory, the capacity to develop autonomy has an inter-subjectivist character, reflected in a range of skills and competencies that individuals need to possess to lead a self-determined life. Personal autonomy requires rational, affective, reflective, and self-interpretative skills and competencies that require daily practice. Affective attitudes on which the development of autonomy depends include self-confidence, self-respect, and self-assurance. Although these attitudes are of an affective nature and therefore linked to others' attitudes about us, their development and practice can only be achieved through the normative pragmatics of mutual recognition, "these skills are learned from others and with others" (Anderson, 2014: 138).

Autonomy – the qualities underlying the multidimensional model of well-being include self-determination, independence, and internal regulation. This involves a developed internal locus of evaluation that is not dependent on the approval of others but is guided by personal standards. It enables a freedom of living and thinking that is independent and self-determined in relation to collective beliefs, dogmas, fears, and conventions. Authentic living is inherent to an autonomous personality that freely realises its choices, attitudes, and actions, independently of the commands of others and even the norms that govern everyday life (Ryff & Singer, 2008:20-21).

The development and maintenance of autonomy occur within a pervasive and ongoing context of interpersonal, social, and systemic threats such as social dominance, oppression, and inequality, which constitute social injustice. Achieving personal autonomy requires consideration of various social, psychological, and ethical factors. In addition to encountering restricted opportunities to exercise personal autonomy, numerous inmates enter

prison with a diminished level of personal autonomy, thus resulting in constrained assumptions for personal development.

Personal autonomy is not a fixed, isolated trait possessed or lacking in individuals; rather, it is cultivated within relationships that encourage or facilitate its growth. Competencies for autonomous behaviour are cultivated through interactions with others (Braudo-Bahat, 2017: 131). Freedom, understood as autonomy, extends beyond mere absence of constraints; it encompasses the range of choices available to individuals. According to Gray, true autonomy is realized when individuals are presented with a spectrum of possibilities, transforming abstract choices into tangible opportunities (Gray, 1980). The social and moral climate in prisons represents an important context for well-being and its dimensions, such as autonomy and personal development. The moral quality of prison life and the potential for its measurement open up a new realm in the treatment of convicted individuals. The concept of the significance of the moral climate in prisons is derived from abstract and philosophical contemplations that must be applied to real and complex lives, thereby giving them meaning and value (Pavićević, Batrićević & Ilijić, 2024:62). Ideas regarding the importance of the moral dimension of life in prison emphasise the type and nature of interpersonal relationships that enhance the moral capacities of participants in prison life (Liebling, 2021). It involves relationships that deepen human connections, acknowledge the tragedy of human struggles, and respect the importance of meaning, significance, and recognition of the convicted individual as a unique person (Liebling, 2021; Pavićević, Batrićević & Ilijić, 2024:62). For Deci and Ryan, autonomy is a prerequisite for individual development. The feeling of autonomy is the main precondition for the emergence of intrinsic motivation and is a key element of integration and internalisation. The degree of internalisation will precisely depend on the degree of satisfaction of the need for autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When an individual is driven by autonomous motivation, they may feel self-directed and autonomous; when the individual is driven by controlled motivation, they may feel pressure to behave in a certain way, and thus, experience little to no autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Autonomy refers to the sense that one's activities "are endorsed by or congruent with the self" (Reis, et al., 2000). The need for autonomy is not fulfilled if one feels pressured or controlled to display a certain form of behaviour. However, the understanding of autonomy raises various uncertainties that are intertwined with gender, cultural, ideological, legal, and numerous other aspects, which influence the conceptualization and practice of personal autonomy¹.

¹ In individualistic societies, such as the United States, Canada, and those of Western Europe, it is argued that the self is construed as independent or separate from the social order, leading to a morality emphasising individual rights, personal agency and choice, and equality. In contrast, it is argued that in collectivistic societies, such as those in Asia, South America, and Africa, a socio-centric or interdependent self emerges, defined in terms of the unique social roles that individuals occupy in the family or society, often by birth (Helwig, 2006). The view of the self-held in collectivistic cultures leads to a morality of duty, in which conformity to existing social role obligations, upholding hierarchy, and maintaining social harmony is stressed (Shweder et al., 1987 according to Helwig, 2006).

Gender issue

The gender paradox, as highlighted by certain authors, represents a specific aspect of the relationship between the well-being of women and men. This paradox is supported by data indicating that women generally experience poorer mental health compared to men, report lower levels of current well-being, and express less satisfaction across various life domains. However, paradoxically, women also tend to exhibit higher life satisfaction and greater happiness overall. In essence, women appear to be simultaneously more prone to depression yet more content with life (Becchetti & Conzo, 2022).

While a quick critique of the gender paradox did not contest the higher prevalence of depression among women, it emphasised the complexity and the necessity for a deeper comprehension of the differences in subjective well-being between genders. This complexity encompasses the application of various concepts, considerations of life course changes, regional disparities, and the inclusion of other pertinent control variables (Inglehart, 2002; Bartram, 2022). Gender differences in well-being, particularly concerning mental health, have previously been linked to biological factors like hormones (estrogen and progesterone production) or neurotransmitters, as well as to the family environment, social norms, social support, and measurement issues (Piccinelli & Wilkinson, 2000). However, the literature that assumes a biological foundation for these differences has faced criticism for not adequately exploring gender-specific factors contributing to this well-being gap, especially those related to exposure to sexual harassment (Patalay & Demkowicz, 2023). Gendered risk factors include vulnerability to sexual harassment and consequent victim blaming. Rather than attempting to alter the emotional response of women to entrenched misogynistic structures through 'emotional regulation training', we ought to make structural social changes (Spencer & Broome, 2023).

The effects of social ties on mental health differ also by gender (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001: 461). Gender differences related to stress coping and the presence of social support manifest in several fundamental characteristics: women tend to maintain more emotionally intimate relationships than men, mobilise more social supports during periods of stress than men, and provide more frequent and more effective social support to others than do men (Belle, 1987 according to Kawachi & Berkman, 2001: 462). Indeed, the documented differences highlight that women consistently experience higher rates of mental health issues compared to men across various countries and throughout different time periods. This trend persists regardless of the specific measure employed to assess mental health, indicating a consistent pattern of women facing greater challenges in this aspect compared to men. (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2023). Women tend to report significantly poorer health than men on self-reported health indicators (Boerma et al., 2016, cited according to Blanchflower & Bryson, 2023), women also tend to take antidepressants more than men (Blanchflower, Oswald, 2016 cited according to Blanchflower & Bryson, 2023).

Women also score lower on self-esteem measures (Kling et al., 1999). Gender-specific vulnerabilities and risks that negatively affect women's well-being intersect with the challenges encountered by highly vulnerable social groups. The female prison population exemplifies this intersection, as the living conditions in prison profoundly impact their well-being.

Classical liberal approaches to personal autonomy, briefly mentioned for the purpose of understanding the possibilities for achieving personal autonomy in the context of prison life, have not adequately considered women's personal autonomy, in fact, the gender aspects of personal autonomy. The starting point for achieving women's personal autonomy is the prevention of destructive relationships, primarily domestic violence, which undermines personal autonomy in multiple ways. Domestic violence violates a woman's bodily integrity, her self-respect, and self-confidence, depriving her of constructive relationships within the home, and often prevents her from developing alternative and constructive relationships outside of it (Friedman, 2003: 170). Friedman emphasises that the focus of abused women on personal safety and survival hinders the use of cognitive and emotional resources for the development of personal autonomy and the implementation of autonomous reflexive processes (Pavićević, 2021: 186).

Female prisoners in Serbia – wellbeing, autonomy and personal development

In Serbia, the Correctional Institution for Women in Požarevac is the only facility for female prisoners, housing adult women and older female minors serving sentences for criminal offences and misdemeanours. Previous research highlighted the alarming living conditions for female prisoners, emphasizing the need for wider implementation of alternative sanctions, increased budget allocation, and better prison conditions to safeguard basic inmate rights and ease staff work (Batrićević et al., 2024: 275). A recent study, the results of which are published in 2024. by Batrićević et al revealed rather contradictory findings regarding: Prisoner adaptation, Distress and Well-being, in the sense that female prisoners demonstrated high levels of prison adaptation and distress but experienced low levels of well-being. Such difference seems to be the result of factors “inherited” from their pre-prison experiences, i.e., which involved long-lasting efforts to adapt to stressful living conditions, depression, anxiety, victimisation, abuse of substances, multi-faceted discrimination and marginalisation (Batrićević et al., 2024: 282). So, autonomy, as a sub-dimension of well-being for female prisoners, represents a severely limited and endangered personal characteristic. Due to its diminished value, there is an expectation of low potential for personal development, and enhancing it poses a complex and demanding task, achievable in prisons capable of establishing and maintaining high standards of moral prison climate. The foundational and comprehensive thesis of research on the possibility of identity transformation in prisons implies a supportive environment for fostering growth identities (Liebling, 2012; Szifris, 2017; Pavićević, Ilijić & Stepanović, 2021). This thesis acknowledges the individual's role as an agent in shaping and evolving their own identity during the process of altering their self-perception of values, leading to desistance from crime (Pavićević, Ilijić & Stepanović, 2021: 118). It encompasses the potential development of a prosocial, positive identity characterised by personal growth and advancement grounded in elements of relationships, trust, well-being, and openness (Szifris, 2017).

The journey towards increased autonomy involves evolving into an autonomous individual, finding significance in one's uniqueness, and endeavouring to authentically express inner qualities such as preferences, traits, and emotions (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997; Švarn, 2004). Two distinct types of autonomous values can be identified: the first pertains to ideas and opinions, while the second relates to emotions and feelings. Intellectual autonomy

values emphasise the importance of expressing independent ideas and defending individuals' rights to advocate for their intellectual orientations. Examples of this value include curiosity, open-mindedness, and creativity. Affective autonomy values manifest in the independent pursuit of emotionally positive experiences, such as pleasure, excitement, and enjoyment of life (Švarn, 2004: 67). The challenging circumstances hindering the autonomous personal development of incarcerated women in Serbia originate from their pre-prison lives, where they faced significant obstacles in acquiring, understanding, developing, and practising personal autonomy. On one hand, cultural values perpetuate the dominance of collectivist and hierarchical values², reflecting a re-traditionalized patriarchal order and gender treatment of women in Serbian society. On the flip side, a materialistic orientation and a power orientation emerge, which, according to Švarn's research on youth transitioning in Serbia, exhibited a notable correlation with hostile depression and sociopathic aggressiveness in both male and female subgroups (Švarn, 2004). T

he personality traits composing a hostile-depressive personality structure include: feelings of life failure and meaninglessness, hopelessness, disinterest in others, a sense of inferiority, indecisiveness, poor behaviour grades in school, uncertainty in actions and thoughts, lack of empathy, and the need for power through instilling fear in others. It is crucial to emphasise that in this context, the term "materialistic" orientation does not solely signify a quest for economic and material security; rather, it denotes a form of materialistic hedonism, indicating the pursuit of immediate and direct gratification of one's desires and impulses (Švarn, 2004:87).

Directing towards positive and prosocial values, within the framework of the theory of basic values, entails embracing egalitarian values that prioritise transcending selfishness in favour of the well-being of others. This embodies an aspect of personal transformation that involves autonomously, self-consciously, and willingly rejecting values rooted in power, humility, authority, and material wealth (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997; Švarn, 2004). However, the performed studies showed that the prison environment was characterised 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 according to Baranauskienė, Kovalenko & Leonova, 2020:57). Considering that prison is a particularly fragile moral environment, it is important to understand how morality functions in such an extreme situation and to what extent it manages to maintain the moral economy of internal prison life, which includes feelings of reconciliation and

² Basic values differentiate into several dimensions. One of them is based on the nature of the relationship between the individual and the group. This value dimension is bounded by poles such as "conservatism" on one side and "autonomy" on the other. The "conservative pole" relates to the individual as an entity rooted in collectivity, perceiving life's meaning through relationships with members of the close group, highly valuing the status quo, and showing resistance to anything that could disrupt group solidarity or traditional order. Specific examples of this value type include social order, respect for tradition, family security, and respect for parents and elders (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997; Švarn, 2004).

cooperation that are present “when people talk” (Sparks, 2003 according to Liebling, 2004: 213). Prisoners have a sense of justice, and this sense becomes even more acute due to their experiences of prison life (Liebling, 2004).

Results

The research on the quality of life conducted as part of the PrisonLIFE project at the only women's prison in Serbia, the Correctional Institution for Women in Pozarevac, has confirmed that various factors influence the levels of Personal Autonomy and Personal Development. Primarily, there are differences in how female inmates evaluate their prison experience concerning different aspects of Well-being and development, as outlined in the MQPL framework. Starting with Well-being, female prisoners rated this dimension significantly lower than both Personal Development and Personal Autonomy ($p < .001$). As concluded by the authors, this finding could suggest that female inmates perceived their feelings of pain, punishment, and tension associated with the "pains of imprisonment" to be more pronounced compared to their engagement in activities related to personal growth and preparation for release, as well as their sense of agency and self-determination within the prison environment (Ilijić, Pavićević & Milićević, 2024).

Furthermore, female prisoners rated Distress significantly higher than Well-being, Personal Development, and Personal Autonomy ($p < .001$). In summary, female inmates reported lower levels of severe emotional disturbance relative to their experiences of pain, punishment, and tension associated with imprisonment, as well as their engagement in personal development activities and sense of agency and self-determination within the prison environment (Ilijić, Pavićević & Milićević, 2024). Among female prisoners with long-term sentences (more than three years), significant differences were noted between the middle and high-risk categories in the dimensions of Personal Development, Distress, and Global Well-Being and Development Score, suggesting lower scores in the high-risk category (Ilijić, Pavićević & Milićević, 2024). According to the findings presented in this study, participants who admitted to being disciplined exhibited significantly lower scores on the Personal Development scale compared to those who reported never being disciplined (2.64 versus 3.18, $t(89) = 2.73$, $p = .008$). Furthermore, participants who acknowledged being disciplined showed significantly lower scores on the Personal Autonomy scale compared to those who stated they had never been disciplined (2.59 versus 3.06, $t(89) = 2.41$, $p = .018$). Furthermore, respondents who confirmed disciplinary measures such as solitary confinement had a statistically significantly lower score on the Personal Development scale compared to respondents who stated they had never been disciplined in this manner (2.61 versus 3.07, $t(89) = 2.05$, $p = .043$). Conversely, there was no statistically significant difference confirmed between these two respondent subgroups regarding the Personal Autonomy score (2.58 versus 3.00, $t(89) = 1.80$, $p = .075$). Respondents who confirmed disciplinary actions with any of the special measures had a statistically significantly lower score on the Personal Development scale compared to respondents who denied this question (2.48 versus 3.13, $t(82) = -3.10$, $p = .003$). Similarly, respondents who confirmed disciplinary actions with any of the special measures had a statistically significantly lower score on the Personal Autonomy scale compared to respondents who denied this question (2.54 versus 2.98, $t(89) = -2.15$, $p = .035$).

Regarding differences between types of departments, no statistically significant difference was confirmed in the Personal Development score. However, when it comes to the Personal Autonomy score, the results indicated statistical significance, $F(2, 83) = 3.02$, $p = .026$. Subsequent comparisons using the LSD test confirmed that respondents in closed departments had a statistically significantly lower score compared to respondents from semi-open departments (2.65 versus 3.24, $MD = -0.53$, $p = .024$). A statistically significant negative correlation was found between the Personal Development score and the length of stay in prison, where longer stays in prison were associated with lower values of Personal Development ($r = -.274$, $p < .01$). Similarly, the number of stays in prison, as well as the total number of years spent in prison, were associated with lower values of this score ($r = -.293$, $p < .01$, and $r = -.444$, $p < .05$, respectively). Statistical significance was not confirmed in the differences between the scores of Personal Development and Personal Autonomy among respondents based on marital status and employment status. Specifically, respondents who did not have a spouse or partner and those who did have a spouse or partner reported comparable scores on Personal Development (2.93 versus 2.97, $t(89) = -0.20$, $p = .839$) and Personal Autonomy (2.81 versus 2.92, $t(82) = -0.54$, $p = .588$). Similarly, respondents who stated they were not employed and those who were employed reported comparable scores on Personal Development (2.80 versus 3.01, $t(87) = -0.96$, $p = .342$) and Personal Autonomy (2.84 versus 2.86, $t(87) = -0.10$, $p = .924$). Support factors for Personal Autonomy and Personal Development among female prisoners originating from prison services, which are statistically significantly associated with these aspects of well-being, include the treatment service - educational service (Personal Autonomy $r = .414$, $p < .01$, Personal Development $r = .574$, $p < .01$), security service (Personal Autonomy $r = .460$, $p < .01$, Personal Development $r = .477$, $p < .01$), and health service (Personal Development, $r = .351$, $p < .01$). Concerning prison support, it is interesting to note that the presence of a religious figure within the prison is significant for Personal Development ($r = .373$, $p < .01$), while a slightly lower correlation coefficient was confirmed for Personal Autonomy ($r = .255$, $p < .05$).

It is important to note that support from other inmates is not statistically significantly correlated with the mentioned aspects of well-being. Regarding external support, a religious figure outside the prison also represents significant support for Personal Development ($r = .268$, $p < .05$), while there is no statistically significant correlation for Personal Autonomy ($r = .097$, $p = .479$). Support from parents and children does not show statistically significant correlation, nor does support from spouses and friends outside the prison. The assessment of the overall quality of prison life is positively correlated with Personal Development ($r = .571$, $p < .01$) and Personal Autonomy ($r = .587$, $p < .01$).

Additionally, the Personal Development score positively correlates with the Personal Autonomy score ($r = .742$, $p < .001$), as well as with general Well-being ($r = .899$, $p < .001$). Personal Autonomy has a significant positive correlation with the Well-being dimension ($r = .871$, $p < .001$).

Further analysis of the collected data enables us to identify correlations between risk factors and support factors concerning female inmates' attitudes towards Personal Development and Personal Autonomy. A statistically significant negative correlation was

established between the total number of years spent in prison throughout one's life and the extent to which support from educators, or the treatment service, was perceived ($r = -.380$, $p < .001$). Hence, female inmates who spent more years in prison tended to perceive the support received from educators as less significant. Additionally, the duration of imprisonment is highly negatively correlated with the assessment of the quality of life in prison ($r = -.293$, $p < .01$). This emphasizes the need for special attention from treatment services to this segment of the female prison population, as the prolonged stay in prison represents a continuous state of extremely low levels of well-being without any positive correlation with prison or non-prison support. Female prisoners incarcerated for up to 6 months tended to have more positive perceptions of prison life, whereas those imprisoned for over 2 years held less favourable views. Negative correlations were observed among female prisoners, indicating that longer periods of imprisonment were generally associated with lower scores. Notably, the Well-being dimension consistently scored the lowest regardless of the duration of imprisonment among female prisoners (Ilijić, Pavićević & Milićević, 2024).

There is a statistically significant correlation between the support from prison clergy and all prison services, including support from the treatment service and educators ($r = .616$, $p < .01$), as well as support from the security service ($r = .383$, $p < .01$). This correlation highlights the need for female inmates with health issues, especially mental health problems, to receive emotional and spiritual support from all available sources within the prison. Ilijić, Pavićević & Milićević (2024) compared the well-being and distress levels of female prisoners based on their history of psychiatric hospital stays. Female prisoners with a history of psychiatric hospital stays showed slightly lower well-being scores, but this difference wasn't statistically significant. However, they exhibited significantly lower distress levels compared to those without such a history. Interestingly, when considering the overall global well-being and development score, there was no significant difference between the two groups. Thus, while psychiatric hospital stays seemed to influence distress levels among female prisoners, they didn't significantly affect their overall well-being scores.

Education of the inmates positively correlates with the perceived support received from parents ($r = .301$, $p < .01$) and the relationship with the marital partner ($r = .435$, $p < .001$). It has been shown that higher levels of education negatively correlate with the perception of personal autonomy and personal development, both in men and women (Ilijić, Pavićević & Milićević, 2024). This can be explained by the fact that conditions of prison life disproportionately threaten the perception of personal autonomy and personal development among educated categories, regardless of gender, compared to men and women in lower educational categories.

Conclusion

Based on the data obtained, it can be confirmed that there is an association between the subdimensions of Personal Autonomy and the dimension of Personal Development, and their significance for overall Well-being. Additionally, inmates characterised by longer stays in prison, disciplinary problems, and difficulties adapting to prison living conditions are associated with lower levels of Personal Autonomy and Personal Development. Moreover,

there is a correlation with lower levels of education, poor family and social relationships, as well as negative correlations with almost all support factors. Enhancing Personal Autonomy as a prerequisite for Personal Development poses a challenging task that necessitates improving the quality of prison life, which is perceived as very low among these respondents.

These findings align with previous research conclusions, indicating the importance for mental health professionals to address issues such as reducing social isolation, promoting social integration, and enhancing social well-being, which positively affect individuals' sense of belonging, security, and self-esteem (Kawachi, Berkman, 2001). Furthermore, studies on suicides in prisons have identified various factors contributing to criminal behavior, including low self-esteem, bereavement, depression, physical and mental illness, unemployment, family problems, difficulties in relationships, and social isolation (Mann, Apter, & Bertolote, 2005; Penn et al., 2003, as cited in Baranauskienė, Kovalenko & Leonova, 2020:57). The specificities of the female prison population concerning Personal Autonomy and Personal Development indicate two types of issues that should be addressed in potential treatment programs. On one hand, there are inmates with lower scores of Personal Autonomy and Personal Development due to the challenges faced upon entering prison, where their perceived levels of autonomy and development are threatened. These inmates often have higher levels of education, originate from urban areas, and have stronger family and social ties.

The second category of inmates enters prison with low levels of Personal Autonomy and Personal Development, lacking the necessary knowledge, skills, and understanding of what these dimensions of well-being entail, let alone how to achieve them. They are characterised by longer stays in prison, disciplinary measures, low education, mental health problems, coming from rural areas, and having a low level of family and social contacts. Research has confirmed correlations between women's borderline, antisocial, narcissistic personality disorders, and institutional violence in penitentiaries. These correlations indicate the existence of crime risks such as violence and abuse among women prisoners in penitentiaries (Nee & Farman, 2003; Warren et al., 2002; Lebedev & Kuznetsov, 2002, as cited in Baranauskienė, Kovalenko & Leonova, 2020:57).

Preserving or attaining personal autonomy, along with the journey towards qualitative transformation and comprehending personal development among female prisoners through the influences of trust, security, humanity, and dignity, present intricate challenges for treatment and other prison services. The ethical atmosphere within the prison, as reflected in the quality of prison life, holds the potential to offer female prisoners insights and support, fostering positive changes in their comprehension and subsequent pursuit of well-being, extending beyond the realm of crime and transcending gender-oppressive environments.

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