

Life Imprisonment. Killer, His Felony and Punishment

conducted by

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Since life imprisonment was reinstated as a penalty in Poland, 299 murderers were sentenced between 19 November 1995 and 31 December 2011. The research is conducted under the direction of Professor Andrzej Rzepliński, human right expert, member of International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, a President of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal.

The aim the research project is:

- a) criminological analysis of qualified homicides and their perpetrators;
- b) analysis of the judicial dimension of life imprisonment;
- c) analysis of life sentence implementation from the perspective of interested parties (the prisoners, prison staff, families of perpetrators and victims, the judiciary and the public).

The study provides the unique opportunity to learn about the nature, administration, and implementation of life imprisonment over a span of nearly 20 years that it has been applied toward a specific and internally diverse group of prisoners. The research also provides systematic knowledge about a small, but important group of perpetrators (killers) and the penalty applied to them. Further, the results of this research will provide substantive, empirically legitimated, arguments for the academic and public debate regarding the meaning and implementation of life imprisonment policies. They may contribute to the improvement of such life sentence implementation and thus bring the academic and practical knowledge closer to the knowledge accrued in Western European countries, in which complex criminological studies are regularly conducted. These studies also will help in shaping a coherent system of individualized approaches to life sentence prisoners or a model strategy for working with such prisoners. The studies are complex and make use of various research methods - the study of official documents (court records, prison records, documents from the Office of the Ombudsman) as well as the analysis of print and electronic media, documentaries (reportage), data from non-governmental organizations, and data from university law clinics, also field research and coordination of semi-structured interviews on the basis of a questionnaire with a representative group of prisoners and with other interested parties (representatives of prison staff, the judiciary, etc.) and case studies with consideration of criminological criteria (type and nature of the homicide), e.g.:

- a) commissioned killings, serial killings, or murder under the auspices of organized crime;
- b) female perpetrators;
- c) the motives of murder;
- d) and also with consideration of penitentiary criteria (length or stage of a served sentence):
 - convicted inmates;
 - prisoners who reached a certain stage of their sentence (10 years, after 15 years);
 - convicted prisoners spending the most time in isolation (over 20 years).

The proposed research is the first of its kind in Poland, unique because of its topic, research method, and goal. Previous empirical studies of life imprisonment were of a partial character and presented the problem from one perspective.