

THE STUDY OF EMPATHY AMONG SPECIALISTS WITH DIFFERENT TRACK RECORD WITHIN THE SCOPE OF SYSTEMIC-CONTEXTUAL PSYCHODIAGNOSTICS

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to examine the empathy of specialists with different track record. For accomplishing the research objectives and testing the hypothesis, a combination of research methods was used, including: theoretical analysis and consolidation of psychological science findings on the problem; ascertaining experiment; mathematical processing method with the use of Fisher's ϕ^* criterion. The theoretical analysis of literature helped to reveal that empathy is one of the important professional qualities of any specialist, including employees of the penal enforcement system. The study carried out within the scope of SCP-diagnostics enabled us to identify the differences in empathy manifestations among specialists with different track record.

Keywords: empathy, compassion, professional empathy, career, employees of the penal enforcement system, context, system, systematic-contextual psychodiagnostics.

1 Introduction

The cultivation of empathy, as a person's ability to feel compassion for others and understand their state of feelings, is one of the essential components for moral development of a human from childhood to adulthood.

The empathy as an ability to sense, resonate with and understand other people's emotions has been widely studied by both foreign and domestic psychologists.

Empathy is an important element to "the emotional culture of an individual" responsible for social skills that facilitate interaction with others. Compassion is an indicator of humaneness. We all in our lives regularly listen to, support and try to understand others. Some of us do it easily, while for others this task is hard to handle. This is particularly pronounced in the communication skills and relationships of people of social occupations.

Despite extensive research, there are still many contentious points, unexplained mechanisms and manifestations of empathy in people of different ages and professions. Researchers face the task of creating a single theory of empathy, analyzing its functions and exploring the process of cultivating empathy in modern people. The further research of various problems of empathy will help to address many applied tasks. First of all, it will facilitate and improve interaction between people.

The professional life of employees of the penal enforcement system is filled with overwhelming emotions, psychophysical strain and multiple factors causing stress, all of which take a toll on the professional motivation of employees, and, consequently, on the development of empathy.

2 Literature Review

One of the first definitions of "empathy" was offered by Z. Freud (1995). He wrote that therapists should take the patient's mental state into consideration, put themselves into this state, and try to understand it and compare it with their own state (Freud, 1995). In Russian psychology, the term "empathy" began to be used in the early 1970s owing to the works of T. P. Gavrilova (1975). Viewing "empathy" as a product of communication, the author considers it as a purely emotional substance that helps to gain moral experience and build own system of values.

D. G. Artamonov (2016) noted that empathy is seen in many works as the most important element conducive to the helping behavior. M. A. Ponomareva (2010) proposes to distinguish between short-term and long-term empathy. M. A. Zvenigorodskaya (2019) believes that empathic person is characterized by an ability to feel, recognize, and anticipate the emotional state of other people, and to show compassion in actions to improve the human well-being. In her work, A. G. Basova (2012) distinguishes two types of empathy: compassion and sympathy. According to A. P. Sopikov (2016), there are three types of empathy: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral.

The level of empathy may depend on a number of factors. Thus, a study conducted on students from different fields of training showed that the level of empathy depends on the chosen profession. Thus, the level of empathy is higher among future psychologists and lower among future engineers (Morozova et al., 2018). And the study we conducted within the "Change" project – a system of art therapy for substitute families, in 2016–2017, showed that the substitute families have a medium level of empathy (Kargin & Shlaeva, 2017).

Empathy is also one of the important professional qualities of any specialist, including employees of the penal enforcement system. Professional empathy is an important personal and professional dimension.

Personal traits of an employee of the penal enforcement system have long been of interest in psychology research. O. V. Korzhova (2011) notes that qualities essential for profession should be studied in conjunction with enforcement activities. And one of such qualities is empathy.

Professional empathy, as Shalyukhina (2016) writes, is the cornerstone of professional and personal foundation of almost any specialist, including employees of the penal system. T. P. Gavrilova (1975) expressed an opinion that empathic responses depend on a complex intertwining of education, social environment, various needs, interests, desires, moods, and a vast array of personality traits. The empathy may occur during a contact between people depending on the outcome of evaluative and cognitive activities of every participant to this interaction.

A. R. Musalaeva (2011) believes that the prevention of professional deformations consists in the development of systemic resilience giving a spur to the professional and career growth. This may be achieved through shaping the career aspirations, which structural components include motivation, reflection, and professional identity and help to reach unbiased comprehension and further improve the most important spheres of professional activity: emotional-volitional, social-behavioral, cognitive, organizational-activity.

According to A. O. Karnaukhova (2017), professional deformation is a negatively directed change in professional capacities and personal characteristics of a penitentiary staff member under the influence of working conditions and experience in the workplace. When we speak about professional deformation, we mean the influence of working conditions and job content on the negative change in personal qualities and behavior of employees. Penal enforcement officers belong to the special services personnel, which may explain the high risk of professional deformations.

The manifestations of professional deformations may include physical abuse, rudeness, unnecessary use of impact munition. O. V. Krapivina (2004) believes that emotional burnout is also a manifestation of professional deformation of social workers.

Therefore, psychological preparation of employees for professional activity takes on special significance, one of the purposes of which is to develop and cultivate these qualities in

employees. According to M. A. Selyanin, N. V. Vasilyev (2015), psychological training will contribute to the development of employees' professionalism provided it is delivered in a targeted manner and at a high methodological level with simulation of various extreme situations.

3 Research Methodological Framework

Our research was held at the Federal Public Institution "Pre-Trial Detention Center N 1" of the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service in the Republic of Mordovia. It was conducted between November 2019 and February 2020. A total of 52 employees took part in the research, including 26 employees with the track record of less than 10 years and 26 employees with the track record of more than 10 years.

In order to study the professional empathy of penal enforcement staff, the ascertaining experiment was carried out using the following diagnostic methods: I. M. Yusupov's Diagnostics of Empathy Level (Ilyin, 2013), Mehrabian's and N. Epstein's questionnaire Diagnostics of Capacity for Empathy (Karelin, 2007), and V. V. Boyko's Diagnostics of the Level of Empathic Abilities (Boyko, 2009).

The obtained diagnostic data were processed using primary and secondary mathematical statistics methods (percentage, the Fisher's ϕ^* criterion – angular transformation). Comparative analysis of empirical results allowed us to identify the distinctive features of empathy in employees of the penal enforcement system.

The methodological basis of our study was constituted by the systemic-contextual psychodiagnostics (SCP-diagnostics) developed by A. A. Verbitsky (2015, 2016) and M. I. Kargin (2010).

SCP-diagnostics is based on the ideas of A. A. Verbitsky (2015, 2016) that, first, it should be aimed at studying an individual within a group and, second, the potential of a group consisting of individuals (Kargin, 2010). And it was the theory of contextual learning developed by A. A. Verbitsky (2015, 2016) that influenced the development of SCP-diagnostics (Dementieva et al., 2018).

When speaking about psychodiagnostics, it should be highlighted that in a real diagnostic situation, the examination process is sensitive to many variables, i.e. the hidden requirements of the diagnostic situation, anxiety in the face of assessment, researcher's attitude, motivational status, self-presentation motives, etc. (Verbitsky, 2016). These variables interact with each other, creating constantly changing new contexts, and the psychologist observes the end product of these rather complex interactions (Verbitsky, 2015).

In SCP-diagnostics, when analyzing the concepts of "context" and "system", attention is paid to the fact that the development of each member of society occurs in certain social conditions and they are specific to different societies (Kargin & Chirkina, 2019).

The empirical research purpose is to explore the distinctive features of empathy in employees of the penal enforcement system.

The research objectives are as follows:

1. Based on the principles of SCP-diagnostics, select a range of psychodiagnostic methods to explore various indicators of empathy in employees of the penal enforcement system.
2. Conduct a research to identify the distinctive features of empathy in employees of the penal enforcement system.
3. Describe the distinctive features of empathy in employees of the penal enforcement system.

4 Results and Discussion

We will start our presentation of the research findings with overview of the results obtained under the I.M. Yusupov's Diagnostics of the Empathy Level. The research results indicate that 57% of employees whose track record is over 10 years out of the total number of respondents in this sample have a normal level of empathy, 31% of respondents have a high level of empathy. Only 12% of employees with the track record less than 10 years have a low level of empathy. A normal level of empathy was found in many employees serving for less than 10 years, to be exact, in 65% out of the total number of respondents in this sample. A low level of empathic abilities was observed in 31% of employees, while only 4% of respondents have a high level. Neither employees with a track record beyond 10 years nor employees with a track record under 10 years demonstrated extremely high or extremely low levels of empathy.

Further, we would like to analyze the results of our enquiry into the capacity for empathy among employees using the test questionnaire of A. Mehrabian and N. Epstein. The study results show that among employees with less than 10 years of service the medium capacity for empathy is most pronounced - 69% out of the total number of respondents in this sample. High and low levels of empathy were shown by the equal number of employees - 15% out of the total number of respondents in this sample. The analysis of the results obtained from our study of the capacity for empathy among employees serving for more than 10 years that only 4% of respondents have high capacity for empathy. The next in the degree of pronouncedness is the low capacity for empathy. It is characteristic of 31% of the total number of respondents in this sample. The medium capacity for empathy is observed in 65% of employees. There were no respondents with a very low capacity for empathy in either group.

The analysis of results of diagnostics of empathic abilities according to the method of V. V. Boyko (2009) showed that in the group of employees with less than 10 years of service there were no respondents with a very high level of empathic abilities. A medium level of abilities was observed in the majority of employees, 54%. A low level is typical for 38%. 8% of the total number of respondents with a track record of less than 10 years have a very low level of empathic abilities. The majority of employees of the penal enforcement system with more than 10 years of track record, more specifically 73%, have a low level of empathic abilities. A very low level was shown by 23% of respondents, while the medium level – only by 4%. Nobody demonstrated a very high level of empathic abilities.

In order to determine statistically significant differences in the level of empathy among employees of the penal enforcement system, for data mathematical analysis Mann-Whitney test was used. The results indicated 1% difference across 4 indicators: empathy level under the I. M. Yusupov's method "Diagnostics of Empathy Level", capacity for empathy under the A. Mehrabian and N. Epstein's questionnaire that measures the capacity for empathy and under the V. V. Boyko's method (2009) "Diagnostics of the Level of Empathy Abilities", the subtest "rational channel of empathy" and "emotional channel of empathy". The difference of 5% was revealed for 2 subtests: "intuitive empathy channel" and "identification in empathy" under the V.V. Boyko's method (2009).

Summing up the results of the empirical study, we determined that the respondents from both groups have, on average, a normal level of empathy. Such indicators as "capacity to express empathy" and "level of empathic abilities" are more pronounced among employees whose track record is less than 10 years. Employees with a track record of more than 10 years have lower results for these indicators. In order to determine statistically significant differences in the level of empathy among employees of the penal enforcement system, for data mathematical analysis Mann-Whitney U-test was used. Statistically significant differences were found at $p \leq 0.01$ and $p \leq 0.05$ levels.

The results of mathematical processing using Fisher's ϕ -criterion helped us to identify differences in the features of empathy among employees with different track record, and the following was revealed:

- Analysis of the results of diagnostics using the I. M. Yusupov's method "Diagnostics of Empathy Level" found that the majority of employees have a normal level of empathy, the high level is typical for employees with less than 10 years of track record, and the low level is more clearly manifested in employees with more than 10 years of track record. Nobody from the samples had a very high or a very low empathy levels;
- Results of the survey based on the questionnaire of A. Mehrabian and N. Epstein suggest that most of the respondents in both groups have a middle level of empathy, a low level was more pronounced among employees with more than 10 years of track record, and a high level was more pronounced among employees with less than 10 years of track record. There was nobody with a very low level of empathy;
- According to the data obtained under the V. V. Boyko's method (2009) for diagnostics of the level of empathic abilities, the medium level is more pronounced than the others among the employees with a track record of less than 10 years. Among employees who serve for longer than 10 years, only one respondent was found to have a medium level. The majority of employees with more than 10 years of track record demonstrated the low level of empathic abilities. Several employees from each group have a very low level of empathic abilities. There were no respondents with a very high level of empathic abilities.

When determining the significance of differences in empathy levels, it was revealed that all employees with less than 10 years of track record had a higher level of empathy than those with more than 10 years of track record, except for Subtest 4 "Empathy-Boosting Attitudes".

5 Conclusion

Empathic abilities represent an important dimension that defines personality of an employee, both at the stage of hiring and in the performance of job duties. Therefore, it is important to pay due attention to the emotional sphere of personality. Employees must have emotional resilience as concerns the working conditions and future professional competence in the discharge of their duties. In addition, it will allow to identify the direction of psychological assistance for developing the components of the emotional sphere: early prevention and identification of signs of emotional burnout, as well as counselling for employees at various stages of their service. Thus, the data obtained by the ascertaining experiment validates the hypothesis based on the assumption that there are differences in the empathy levels among employees with different length of service.

Psychodiagnostic examination within the scope of SCP-diagnostics helps to more accurately reveal the distinctive features of empathy in employees of the penal enforcement system. By using SCP-diagnostics we arrived at a conclusion that disregard by the psychologist of the context when interpreting the test and methodology results may lead to a situation, when having obtained the examination results, the psycho-diagnostician sometimes has no slightest idea how to use those and how to proceed. The results obtained in this research may help to prevent negative implications of work in this system, and to avoid professional deformations.

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