

COPING WITH EMOTIONS AND ASSESSMENT OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BY EMPLOYEES IN HELPING PROFESSIONS

^aZUZANA BIRKNEROVÁ, ^bMIROSLAV FRANKOVSKÝ,
^cLUCIA ZBIHLEJOVÁ, ^dLADISLAV SUHÁNYI

*Faculty of Management, University of Prešov in Prešov,
Slovakia*

email: ^azuzana.birknerova@unipo.sk,

^bmiroslav.frankovsky@unipo.sk,

^clucia.zbihlejova@unipo.sk, ^dladislav.suhanyi@unipo.sk

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Abstract: One of the significant attributes in the helping professions is coping with emotions in the context of interpersonal relationships. The contribution presents the results of the research attended by 150 respondents employed in helping professions, which was conducted by means of a shortened version of the Functional Idiographic Assessment Template-Questionnaire (FIAT-Q). The FIAT-Q questionnaire enables to identify five attributes within which coping with and expressing emotions; random and close interpersonal relationships were used in the research project. The results pointed to the fact that women indicate that they are aware of their feelings and emotions at a moment when they are just happening to them, they can identify the differences between individual emotions, and are able to name the individual emotions. For women, close relationships are more important than for men. They talk about their experience more often with other persons and they also indicate that they listen to other people and offer them support.

Keywords: helping professions, coping with emotions, interpersonal relationships, gender

1 Theoretical background

Employees of helping professions are daily exposed to stress due to the challenging contact with a large number of other people who are often in a difficult life situation. In the rich mosaic of prerequisites for an effective behavior of employees in helping professions, the issues of coping with emotions and interpersonal relationships have, therefore, also a significant place.

1.1 Managing emotions

Rutherford (2009) describes Skinner's (1953) view of emotions which defines emotions as the predisposition of a person to behave in a certain way at a certain time. Carlson and Hatfield (1992) characterize emotions as part of the inherited and partially acquired predisposition to react remotely, physiologically and behaviorally to changes of certain internal and external variables. Levenson (1994) argues that emotions effectively coordinate different response systems, such as physiological, experiential and expressive responses, helping us to respond to important challenges or opportunities in the environment.

Emotion control can be characterized as a group of external and internal processes that are responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional responses, especially their intensity and time characteristics, to achieve goals of an individual (Thompson 1994; Thompson and Mayer, 2007). Individuals master and control emotions usually in three ways, i.e. habituation, overlap and avoidance (Millenson, 1979; Leslie, 1996). Coping with and regulation of emotions can be defined as the process of innovation, maintenance, adaptation or changes in the occurrence, intensity and duration of the internal emotional states and emotional physiological processes often serving to achieve the objectives of individuals (Eisenberg, 2000). Slaměnik (2011) states that the sources of human emotions are very diverse, and considers interpersonal relationships to be also one of the sources.

1.2 Interpersonal relationships

A person as a social being is highly dependent on interpersonal relationships. The basic element of an emotional and social

development of an individual is the relationship, the bond between people, which has its own specific qualities. Interaction can be understood as a time-bound social event. Interactions are essential to maintain relationships (Skorunka and Mareš, 2007). The basic prerequisite and characteristic of interpersonal relationships is that individuals find themselves in an interaction that leaves a certain "trace" in the form of impression, willingness to reunite, understand, or misunderstand the other (Slaměnik, 2011).

A number of authors (e.g. Hendrick and Hendrick, 2000; Fletcher and Clark, 2003; Mashek and Aron, 2004) introduce Kelly's (1986) concept of interdependence as one of the essential features of interpersonal relationships. It is characterized by the degree of consistency in preferring the common needs and their satisfaction, and the associated positive assessment of relationships that are intertwined with positive emotions. Individuals become interdependent when they become aware of shared responsibility for mutual well-being (Rusbult, Arriaga and Agnew, 2003; Rusbult et al., 2004; Výrost, 2008).

Interpersonal relationships at the workplace are discussed by Bedrnová and Nový (2007). Provažník (2002) considers interpersonal relationships at the workplace to be a significant and effective motivation factor. These relationships can have a significant impact on the quality of performance and work of the workers (Suhányi and Svetozarovová, 2016). Interpersonal relationships may be considered as a space in which human emotions manifest themselves in the most intense and varied forms but, at the same time, it is not easy to clarify all their functions (Slaměnik, 2011).

1.3 Helping professions

Helping professions may be characterized by the need and willingness to help others with respect to the individual needs of each individual (Pilař, 2004). On the part of the company, high demands are placed on their work (Frankovský and Birknerová, 2015). Their work is often underestimated and the performance of helping workers is difficult to evaluate (Čekan, 2010). Determining success criteria is very difficult (Hrbáčková, 2011). Workers encounter tasks that are often psychologically and emotionally challenging (Vávrová, 2009). Helping professions are little appreciated by the society.

According to Kopriva (1997), the human relationship between the helping professional and the client plays a very important role in these professions, the main instrument of the helper being his personality. In this context, interpersonal relationships in the workplace also play a very important role. The helping worker needs admission, participation, or understanding, and also good interpersonal relationships as a signal to satisfy their emotional need and good self-esteem. Křivohlavý (1998) includes among the people who carry out helping professions for example doctors, nurses, health professionals, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, teachers, pedagogues working with mentally handicapped children, entrepreneurs and managers. Based on this it is clear that the mosaic of helping professions is very varied.

An ideal worker in helping professions is a prosocially oriented mature person, aware of his or her life direction, with a positive and realistic sense, personality without neurotic or psychopathic features, with a prerequisite for self-reflection of own decision-making, negotiation and emotions, open to stimuli, willing to proceed with further education (Kraus et al., 2001). Balvín (2012) puts the „prosocial behavior“ label on such behavior that is aimed at helping or benefiting another person without a right to reward. In order for a worker to come to a given insight into the world, he or she needs education, value self-orientation, awareness of life sense, and well-developed coordination of social interactions.

2 Research project

The aim of the research project was to find out whether there are statistically significant gender differences in coping with and expression of emotions as well as in the assessment of interpersonal relationships by the respondents working in helping professions.

2.1 Methodology and research methods

A short version of the Functional Idiographic Assessment Template-Questionnaire (FIAT-Q; Callaghan, 2006) was used in our research. The original version contains 117 items. The FIAT-Q questionnaire is created as part of the FIAT system and is divided into five FIAT classes: Assertion of needs, Bidirectional communication, Conflict in social interactions; Disclosure and interpersonal closeness, and Emotional experience and expression.

For the purposes of our research, we focused on two areas: Emotional Experience and Expression, and interpersonal relationships. The two areas examined describe 24 statements that identify the respondents' attitudes to the phenomena under investigation. The degree of agreement or disagreement could be expressed by the respondents on the 6-point scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Moderately Disagree, 3 = Mildly Disagree, 4 = Mildly Agree, 5 = Moderately Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree.

<i>Examples of items of Emotional experience and expression:</i>						
I have problems with my emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I am able to put a name to what I am feeling.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I express my emotions in an overly intense manner.	1	2	3	4	5	6

<i>Examples of items of Disclosure and interpersonal closeness:</i>						
Close relationships are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I do not want to share things about myself with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I have difficulty making conversation with people.	1	2	3	4	5	6

In order to detect the gender differences between the two variables, an independent double-choice t-test was used. For the statistical processing of research data we have used the statistical program SPSS 20 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences 20).

2.2 Description of the research sample

The research included participation of 150 respondents employed in the helping professions. Of these, 73 were men (48.7%) and 77 were women (51.3%), aged 19 to 60 (M = 37.57 years, SD = 12.61 years). In the research sample, 82 respondents received higher education (54.7%), the remaining 68 respondents (45.3%) reported secondary education with a school-leaving examination certificate. The most represented working area was education (64 respondents, 42.7%), 50 respondents were from the area of social care (33.3%) and 36 were from the healthcare sector (24%).

2.3 Interpretation of research results

The aim of the research was to find out whether there are statistically significant gender differences in assessing the attributes of coping with and expression of the selected emotions in helping professions. Table 1 shows the detected statistically significant differences.

Table 1: Gender differences in assessing the attributes of coping with and expression of the selected emotions in helping professions

	Gender	M	SD	t	p
I am aware of my feelings and emotional experiences as they are happening.	male	3.64	1.378	3.783	.000
	female	4.47	1.283		
I can tell the difference between one emotion and another.	male	3.76	1.208	3.189	.002
	female	4.36	1.075		
My emotional responses make sense to me when I consider the circumstances.	male	3.67	1.191	2.220	.028
	female	4.13	1.331		
I am able to put a name to what I am feeling.	male	3.71	1.124	2.258	.025
	female	4.14	1.211		
I clearly communicate my emotions to people so that they know exactly how I feel.	male	3.45	1.081	2.112	.036
	female	3.84	1.193		
People don't like it when I talk about my emotions.	male	3.27	1.017	2.837	.005
	female	2.75	1.216		

We have recorded statistically significant gender differences in assessing the attributes of coping with and expression of the selected emotions in helping professions (Table 1). Women have shown a higher degree of acceptance of the statements that they are aware of their feelings and emotions when they are currently in the process of identifying the differences between emotions. They are also more inclined to think that their emotional responses make sense when they think about the circumstances. Women are more capable of naming emotions than men, and their emotions are clear, so people around them know exactly how they feel. Men, on the other hand, scored higher only in one statement. They say people around them do not like when they talk about their emotions. It should be noted that, except for the latter case, these differences can only be interpreted as a difference in the degree of agreement with the items analyzed.

Table 2: Gender differences in assessment of interpersonal relationships among the helping professions workers

	Gender	M	SD	t	p
I have had one or more close relationships.	male	3.76	1.359	4.736	.000
	female	4.67	1.224		
I am not able to identify when it would benefit me to share my experiences with another person.	male	3.03	1.190	3.117	.002
	female	2.39	1.309		
I am aware when it is appropriate to ask people about their experiences.	male	3.82	1.110	3.043	.003
	female	4.38	1.172		
I will share personal	male	2.96	1.358	2.386	.018

information with a stranger or casual acquaintance.	female	2.40	1.489		
When friends ask me about how I am doing, I choose not to tell them.	male	2.78	1.158	3.242	.001
	female	2.12	1.347		
I talk about myself and my experiences with other people.	male	3.43	1.225	2.029	.044
	female	3.87	1.380		
Close relationships are important to me.	male	4.08	1.412	3.212	.002
	female	4.81	1.393		
I ask other people to tell me about their feelings and their experiences.	male	3.69	1.266	2.923	.004
	female	4.31	1.300		
When I talk about my experiences, people clearly understand what I am telling them.	male	3.68	1.200	3.357	.001
	female	4.32	1.079		
I exaggerate my good points and brag about my skills and abilities.	male	3.01	1.034	3.469	.001
	female	2.38	1.203		
People say that I talk about myself in a way that downplays my good qualities.	male	2.97	1.147	2.021	.045
	female	3.33	1.001		
I listen to others and offer them support.	male	3.76	1.339	2.856	.005
	female	4.38	1.329		

Subsequently, the focus of the research project was on the analysis of gender differences in the assessment of interpersonal relationships by employees of the selected helping professions. The differences found are shown in Table 2.

Statistically significant gender differences were recorded between the random and the close interpersonal relationships in several statements of the FIAT-Q methodology. Based on the data presented in Table 2, we can conclude that women more than men tend to think that they have often had one or more close relationships at the workplace in the past. They also state that these close working relationships are important to them. Compared to men, they more often ask other people about their feelings and experiences, listen to others and offer them support.

They are aware of when it is advisable to ask people about their experience. When they talk about their experiences, others clearly understand what women say to them.

Women also scored higher in statements regarding the assessment of the downplaying of their good qualities, as well as about talking about themselves and their experiences with others. However, it should be noted that these statements were assessed by the two groups of respondents on a scale of disagreement.

Unlike women, men are more often unable to determine when it would be beneficial to share their experiences with another person and share their data with strangers and random acquaintances. More often they exaggerate their good qualities and brag about their knowledge and abilities. Men, also more

often than women, tend not to answer the question of their friends about how they feel. It is also important to point out that men's responses are on a scale of disagreement, with women disagreeing more with the given statements than men.

3 Discussion and conclusion

Diener et al. (1999) report that people experience relatively more frequently positive emotions. With an increasing unease in the work process, individuals are more likely to express negative emotions as well (Reis, Collins and Berscheid, 2000; Fischer and Manstead, 2008). The emotional impact on participants in the work process is had almost by all the events that take place in it (Weiss, 2002). Stuchlíková (2007) describes the key components of emotional intelligence which she considers to be necessary in expressing emotions in relation to the environment. She emphasizes the understanding of the causes of emotions, the regulation of emotions, the communication of emotional content and empathy. Gross (2011) states that emotion regulation is a process by which people influence what emotions they will have, how they will use and express them.

Slaměnik (2011) claims that the sources of human emotions are very diverse, and considers interpersonal relationships as one of the sources. Expression of negative emotions can significantly affect interpersonal relationships. Negative emotions in the work process can also be caused by work constraints, lack of recognition, and lack of social relationships (Oginska-Bulik, 2005).

Rosenzweig (1990, according to Chenery et al., 2008) states that interpersonal relationships can be manifested in interpersonal communication, which involves mutual intercourse and communication, as well as in cooperation, or mutual collaboration. In order to develop positive interpersonal relationships, the author states, as a basic prerequisite for understanding the other person, the tolerance of other opinions and attitudes. Barsade and Gibson (1998) report that emotions greatly affect the roles we work on, the efforts we put into the work, and the way we influence the team.

The degree of effective emotional management in the work process affects various factors, including gender or work area. The aim of the research project presented in the paper was to find out whether there are statistically significant differences in the level of effective coping with emotions and the assessment of interpersonal relations in the work process among the employees of the selected helping professions from the gender perspective. Sociologists Ross and Mirowsky (2008) report in their study that women, compared to men, experience more negative and passive emotions. This may be due to work environments, workloads, deployment, and a variety of other factors. The addressed women report that they are aware of their feelings and emotions when they are just going through them, they can identify the differences between emotions, and they are able to name the individual emotions. These findings coincide with Goleman's (1997) statement which says that women are more capable of perceiving their own emotions, able to deal with these emotions, use them for the benefit of something, feel the feelings of other people, and deal with relationships properly.

Detecting the differences in the assessment of interpersonal relationships in the work process from the point of view of the group of respondents was another objective of this research. Litz and Folker (2002) report that women are more people-oriented, they create richer social networks, rely more on their contacts and teamwork. The recorded statistically significant differences between men and women are consistent with the claim. For women, close relationships are more important than for men. More often they talk about their experiences with other people, and they also say that they listen to other people and offer them support. On the contrary, men report that they are unable to determine when it would be beneficial to share their experiences with another person. Similar findings were acquired by Vasil'ová (2004), who states that men behave colder and harder than women in interpersonal situations.

The presented results also show that what employees feel, how they express it, and how they behave in interpersonal relationships relates to the gender issues. We can conclude that our research sample of the helping professions workers supports this fact. In the future, we plan to extend the research sample to other professions and study this issue in other contexts as well.

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