

## Results of the Implementation of a Comprehensive Socio- Psychological Program to Foster Professional Empathy Among Professionals in the Helping Professions

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**Abstract:** *The article presents the results of research on the empathy of policemen, rescuers, doctors and psychologists, as the best representatives among helpers. It also describes the qualitative and quantitative changes in the levels of empathy among these specialists after the implementation of a comprehensive socio-psychological program.*

**The goal** is the approval of a complex socio-psychological program for the formation of professional empathy among specialists in helping professions, in particular, police officers, rescuers, doctors and psychologists. To conduct the research, the following **methods** were used: psychodiagnostic technique “Diagnostics of the empathic abilities level” by V. Boiko, content analysis, and Wilcoxon *t*-criteria to determine statistically significant shifts.

**The results.** On the basis of the conducted research, it was established that empathy undergoes positive changes under the influence of the proposed comprehensive social-psychological program. As we can see the *t*-Wilcoxon results showed statistically significant shifts at the  $p < 0.01$  and  $p < 0.001$  levels. Positive changes occurred among representatives of all studied professions, however, the highest rates of change were found among psychologists and police officers.

**Conclusions.** Theoretical analysis shows that empathy is mostly considered as an emotional component of the personality, which often appears in a negative way for specialists of some professions. However, the empathy of rescuers, police officers, doctors and psychologists manifests itself through a behavioral component and contributes to the emergence of empathic actions. Therefore, the positive results of the implementation of a complex socio-psychological program allow us to insist on the effectiveness and feasibility of its application for other specialists in the field of helping professions.

**Keywords:** *empathy, rescuers, police officers, doctors, psychologists, specialists of helping professions.*

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## Introduction

The humanization of relations in the society requires the ability to understand another person, to enter his situation, as well as the ability to empathize and sympathize, which, in turn, encourages helping. We often talk about empathy in different age periods, generally about empathy in our society as opposed to aggression and lack of compassion for other people.

It is a person's ability to empathize with others - this is one of the main motivation factors for choosing the help professions. As well, the empathy is considered an important factor of individual and professional development of the person, in particular, in professions of the socioeconomic type.

The issue of developing empathy is mostly considered in two main contexts - personal (universal) and professional. The role of the issue in personal and professional development is a subject of scientific research for a long time. This is due to the fact that empathy, as a socio-psychological phenomenon, significantly affects the personality as a whole, increases motivation, productivity and effectiveness of its activities.

The ability to empathize consists in the ability to lead an emotional response to feelings, thoughts and feelings of the empathy object. Some scientists believe that empathy - is the emotional ability to respond to signals that convey the emotional experience of another. Others define empathy as a behavioral ability that manifests itself in helping, facilitating, and altruistic behavior in response to the experiences or problems of another person. M.-L. Hoffman considers empathy as a biologically determined tendency to altruistic behavior. In his works, he emphasizes that sincere compassion (empathy) generates altruistic motivation for helping behavior (Hoffman, 2020).

Therefore, empathy as a motivational factor of help is divided into certain forms of helping behavior: real actions aimed at providing help; prosocial behavior, altruistic behavior.

Ch. Batson formulated his hypothesis of "empathy – altruism". Its essence is that the true altruistic behavior of a person aimed at helping another does not involve any benefit or social encouragement in return, rising esteem or self-esteem because of giving help that is motivated by empathy itself (Batson, 1997).

Empathy as a factor of motivation for moral behavior and altruism has certain definitions in this context:

- an affective response that is more appropriate to the other person's situation than your own;

- feelings are focused on another person, corresponding to the psychoemotional state;
- affective reaction to the emotional state of another person and sometimes a similar feeling or experience that is observed in that person;
- ability to respond emotionally to others experiences.

It is believed that the empathy of representatives of helping professions can be studied in two directions such as empathy as a factor of successful professional activity and empathy as a motivational factor of choosing a profession. Therefore, most often empathy, as a professionally important quality, is studied by representatives of such helping professions as: psychotherapists, doctors, teachers and teachers of higher education institutions, practical psychologists, social workers, their professional training and self-determination, etc.

Empathy in medical practice is extremely necessary and significantly affects the success of treatment and further favorable conditions for the course of the disease. Empathy in doctors' practice allows you to make more accurate and early diagnoses and avoid unnecessary research, which allows you to achieve stable results in the treatment process.

Empathy for therapists is an essential quality of professional competence that helps to convey to the patient and help him. In addition, empathy as a quality of the doctor's personality will help to establish an emotional connection and promote an open, trusting atmosphere in communication between the doctor and his patient. The researchers also investigated the relationship between empathy, compassion satisfaction, and fatigue. The study shows that a quarter of doctors who participated in the experiment are at risk of stress due to excessive empathy (Hunt, 2019). Researchers have studied the empathy in the structure of personal volunteers, as representatives of helping kinds of activity (Koval & Spitsyna, 2021).

The presence of empathy in the psychologist's personality structure will help in the process of interaction with the client to demonstrate his sincere desire to help in a difficult life situation. "Empathetic listening" is perhaps the most important skill in the practice of a psychologist. Because the psychologist's ability to listen empathetically contributes to the creation of a positive microclimate in working with the client and establishing rapport (Vavryniv, 2020).

Empathy has a positive effect on the development of interpersonal relationships. It allows to provide support to a person not only under usual conditions, but also in difficult extreme situations, when he especially needs it. Most often, in this context, these qualities correlate with the requirements

of professional and personal competence of specialists in risky professions, in particular, rescuers and police officers.

In modern literature, a study of empathy in the personality structure of a rescuer is presented, its role in their professional activity and self-realization is determined (Vavryniv, 2020; Yaremko et al., 2022).

Research on the personality of the rescuer, his personal and professional qualities, in particular, neuropsychological stability, motivation, peculiarities of response to stress, interpersonal interaction, etc., is also widely presented in scientific works. (Wagner et al., 2021). Scientists have also made attempts to establish the causes of alcoholism and committed suicides among rescuers, drawing parallels with the peculiarities of professional activity (Healy & Vujanovic, 2021; Zegel et al., 2022). Scientists are searching for effective methods of therapy for the negative impact of professional activity on rescuers (Becker et al., 2022).

Empathy is considered an important social quality of law enforcement officers. There are works that emphasize the need to diagnose the level of empathy in police officers at the stage of professional selection. That is why it is believed that empathic compassion will be important when interacting with victims (Bloksgaard & Prieur, 2021).

The professional and personal qualities of police officers and their influence on professional activity and self-realization are widely investigated (Fedorenko et al., 2020; Ponomarenko et al., 2022; Olalde-Mathieu et al., 2022).

There are studies on the relationship between empathy and motivation, as well as the possibility of forming sustainable empathy through understanding the motives for showing compassion (Weisz et al., 2021). That is why, empathy will emerge itself in a more active form, when the empathizing person understands the motive of his own sympathy.

In general, the development of professional empathy in the process of developing the personality of a specialist holds a significant place and is expressed in the mastery of the ability to effectively interact with other people at the professional and personal levels.

**The goal** is the approval of a complex socio-psychological program for the formation of professional empathy among helping professions specialists, in particular, police officers, rescuers, doctors and psychologists.

**Research methods and samples.** To diagnose the level of empathy, we conducted “Diagnosis of the level of empathic abilities”, the method used by V. Boyko. A content analysis was carried out and the level of statistically significant changes was established using the SPSS 20 mathematical statistics program and the Wilcoxon t-test. The total research sample of 557 specialists in helping professions, in particular, police officers,

rescuers, doctors, and psychologists. 202 people were selected to conduct the formative part of the experiment, including: 50 rescuers, 40 medics, 52 policemen and 60 psychologists.

### **Justification of the complex socio-psychological program of formation of professional empathy among specialists of helping professions**

The purpose of the formative experiment was to develop and implement a comprehensive socio-psychological program for the formation of professional empathy among specialists in helping professions. In accordance with the purpose of the formative experiment, the following tasks are distinguished:

- 1) to determine the methods, psychological conditions and factors of the formation of professional empathy among future rescuers;
- 2) to develop the content, structure and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a comprehensive socio-psychological program for the formation of professional empathy among specialists in helping professions;
- 3) to test a comprehensive socio-psychological program for the formation of professional empathy of specialists in helping professions.

While preparing a comprehensive socio-psychological program for the formation of professional empathy among specialists in helping professions, we analyzed and took into account the research of modern scientists.

So, modern research suggests that doctors and psychologists with sufficient and high levels of empathy are more likely to suffer from professional burnout, and rescuers and police officers should do their work without excessive emotionality and compassion. That is why the emphasis in the programme focused on the development of empathic (helping) behavior skills, the ability to analyze and assess the situation, the formation of self-regulation and self-control skills in the professional stressful situations.

The program consisted of 14 training sessions, that include exercises and techniques to promote interpersonal communication, group discussions, mini-lectures to deepen knowledge about the problem of empathy and its importance in personal and professional growth, game methods (situational role-playing games, etc.), psychodrawing, psychogymnastics, relaxation, meditation and visualization, methods of autogenic training. The experiment included a video demonstrating the features of professional activities of police officers, rescuers, doctors and psychologists, followed by debriefing: professional and psychological analysis of the situation, emotions and experiences of its participants. There was also a discussion about the specialists feelings who participated in the program. Classes are designed for

1.5-2 hours of group work. The goal of the program is to develop professional empathy among specialists in helping professions.

In accordance with the goal of the comprehensive socio-psychological program, we have identified the following tasks:

- 1) formation of internal motivation for helping behavior;
- 2) increasing the level of empathy in general;
- 3) development of skills of empathic behavior and active empathic determination;
- 4) development of the most optimal (effective, adequate) types of empathic interaction;
- 4) identification and development of the most appropriate (effective, adequate) types of empathic interaction;
- 5) formation of humanistic and altruistic orientation towards another person, which is the basis of empathy;
- 6) to actualize an empathetic attitude and develop the ability to analyze and assess the situation;
- 7) developing self-regulation and self-control skills to cope with stressful situations;
- 8) activation of the processes of self-knowledge and self-analysis, as well as development of reflection skills;
- 9) to form a positive orientation of unconditional acceptance of oneself and others.

The exercises and techniques of the program take into account the actual problems of the service and professional activities of the participants in the experiment. The program includes exercises that, while contributing to the formation of professional empathy, also develop and consolidate the professional skills of police officers, rescuers, doctors and psychologists. In general, the content and structure of the developed comprehensive socio-psychological program fully reflects the goal of developing professional empathy in helping professionals.

In the introduction of the training, the main tasks were to familiarize the participants with each other and the rules of group work, to identify the level of awareness of participants about the problem of empathy, to help defining the concept of “empathy”, to understand its importance in the life and development of specialists in helping professions, to interest participants in active interaction, to create an atmosphere of trust towards each other, to help breaking down destructive barriers in communication, to get to know themselves and other group members better.

The main part of the training was aimed at realizing the importance of the profession and empathy within it, understanding one’s strengths and

weaknesses in it, developing the ability to assess one's personal professional qualities and friend's qualities, self-motivation for professional development, understanding one's own feelings and experiences, developing a sense of self-worth and the ability to reflect, and improving empathic abilities, formation of professional empathy in combination with increasing professional skills, formation of ability to understand feelings and feelings of other people, formation of motivation of help behavior (ability to empathy actions), development of sympathy to others, ability to care about the needs, understanding of reasons of crime on the subject of the empathy for its further purpose of blocking, increasing confidence and self-esteem, to work out the ability to "keep the blow", to harmonize the emotional state, to define and fix the basic ways of managing their emotions in special and extreme conditions for successful formation of stressful behavior, to acquire skills of muscular control, to realize own body sensations.

The final part was aimed at understanding the limits of their own emptiness and peculiarities of its manifestation, understanding of positive changes that took place after the training and fixing the result, understanding the value of professional activity of rescuers, raising motivation to improve professional qualification, carrying out emotional discharge of participants, and successful finishing.

## Results

At the stage of the formulation experiment, control and experimental groups were selected and formed from the entire selection of participants. The control and experimental rescue groups included 25 respondents (total number of 50 persons); the control and experimental groups of doctors included 20 respondents (total number of 40 persons); the control and experimental groups of police included 26 respondents (total number of 52 persons); the control and experimental group of rescuers included 30 respondents (total number of 60 persons). In order to assess the effectiveness of the socio- psychological training in the formation of the professional empathy of future rescuers, we conducted a repeated psycho-diagnostic research.

Table 1 presents the results of a comparative analysis of changes in the empathy levels of the specialists under study. As we can see, positive changes have affected all specialists in helping professions. The most significant changes are observed in high and very low indicators. As we can see in the table, after the implementation of a comprehensive social-psychological program, psychologists have a very low level of empathy. This indicates a positive influence and qualitative changes in the empathy level as a professionally important quality of specialists in helping professions.

Table 1. Results of comparative analysis

Indicators	Rescuers		Doctors		Police		Psychologists	
	before	after	before	after	before	after	before	after
Very high empathy level	18%	25%	20%	29%	18%	24%	20%	27%
High empathy level	20%	28%	22%	30%	19%	25%	24%	33%
Normal empathy level	20%	27%	23%	30%	21%	31%	27%	35%
Low empathy level	20%	9%	18%	8%	20%	11%	18%	5%
Very low empathy level	21%	11%	17%	3%	22%	9%	11%	0%

Source: Author's own conception

After the comparative analysis, there is a need for statistical confirmation of the obtained results. In accordance with this need, we used the Wilcoxon t-test to determine statistically significant changes.

Table 2 shows the results of applying the Wilcoxon t-test.

So, the most statistical changes in the empathy of the rescuers can be noted low ( $p < 0.001$ ) and very low levels of empathy ( $p < 0.001$ ). At the significance level of  $p < 0.01$ , changes in very high, high and normal levels of empathy were statistically confirmed. Changes in very high, low and very low levels of empathy were found among doctors at the  $p < 0.001$  significance level. Also, significant changes occurred in high ( $p < 0.01$ ) and low ( $p < 0.01$ ) levels of empathy. Among police, the most statistical changes occurred in normal ( $p < 0.001$ ), low ( $p < 0.001$ ) and very low ( $p < 0.001$ ) levels of empathy. Statistically significant changes in the group of psychologists at the significance level  $p < 0.001$  were found at high, low and very low levels. Significant changes also occurred in high ( $p < 0.01$ ) and low ( $p < 0.01$ ) levels of empathy. Significant changes also occurred in very high ( $p < 0.01$ ) and normal ( $p < 0.01$ ) levels of empathy.

Indicators	Rescuers		Medics		Police officers		Psychologists	
	t	p	t	p	t	p	t	p
Very high level of empathy	-3,101 <sup>a</sup>	,002	-4,101 <sup>a</sup>	,000	-2,911 <sup>a</sup>	,004	-3,142 <sup>a</sup>	,003
High level of empathy	-3,248 <sup>a</sup>	,002	-3,257 <sup>a</sup>	,002	-2,869 <sup>a</sup>	,004	-4,248 <sup>a</sup>	,000
Normal level of empathy	-3,111 <sup>a</sup>	,002	-3,051 <sup>a</sup>	,003	-4,822 <sup>a</sup>	,000	-3,132 <sup>a</sup>	,003
Low level of empathy	-5,121 <sup>b</sup>	,000	-4,821 <sup>b</sup>	,000	-5,262 <sup>b</sup>	,000	-5,021 <sup>b</sup>	,000
Very low level of empathy	-4,813 <sup>b</sup>	,000	-5,563 <sup>b</sup>	,000	-5,458 <sup>b</sup>	,000	-5,823 <sup>b</sup>	,000

**Note:** **a** – positive ranks are used (increased); **b**-negative ranks are used (decreased).

Source: Author's own conception

There is an opinion that the empathy of police officers and rescuers should be at a low level. Since it is believed that these specialists should carry out their professional activities quite coolly. We partially agree with this opinion. However, we consider it necessary to note that most often police and rescuers work with the category of the population that has suffered from certain troubles. These people primarily seek compassion and understanding, and need some help. It is the high levels of empathy in the personality structure of rescuers and police officers that will encourage them to provide the necessary both professional assistance and moral support. After all, we consider empathy not only as an emotional component of the individual, but also behavioral - which forms the motivation for providing assistance and focuses the specialist's activities on saving victims. Also, the fact that a significant part of the participants were endowed with at least a minimal level of empathy contributed to obtaining high results in implementing a comprehensive program. It also suggests that a significant proportion of the rescuers and police officers studied chose their future profession under the influence of an internal need for assistance.

This assumption can also be expressed in relation to the studied doctors and psychologists. The doctors under study are general practitioners who have to cooperate directly with patients: listen to their complaints (not just about their health), support them at the stage of treatment, make treatment based on the patient's personality, and so on. The empathy of doctors will contribute to establishing contact with patients and a positive attitude toward treatment. Not in vain, empathy is considered a crucial quality of a psychologist, as it contributes to the establishment of rapport and further work with the client. If the client understands the sincerity of the psychologist's intentions to help in the situation, he will work more actively. Also, empathy serves as a kind of key in customer discovery.

## **Discussion**

The obtained results of the study allow us to assume that empathy acts as a factor in choosing a profession of helping type, in particular, policemen, rescuers, doctors, and psychologists. This is confirmed by initial rates of empathy levels and their positive dynamics as a consequence of the implementation of a comprehensive social and psychological program. So, our research resonates the works of other scientists who study the influence of empathy on personality and its professional formation, consider empathy an important quality of representatives of helping professions, as well as other types of helping activities, in particular volunteering (Koval & Spitsyna, 2021; Veloski & Hojat, 2006). There is a similar tendency in studies

that demonstrate the remarkable influence of empathy on the training process, implementation in the profession, in particular, among medical students (Delgado Bolton et al., 2022; Hojat et al., 2020).

Despite the presence of scientific works that are tangential to our research and complement it, there is no or almost no intelligence that would refer to the empathy of police officers and rescuers, as the brightest representatives of the field of helping professions. Because of this, empathy is mostly considered an important professional quality of doctors, psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, teachers, volunteers, and other representatives of helping professions. The conducted study complements our previous research and confirms that empathy is subjected to formative influence in such specialists of helping professions as policemen, rescuers, doctors, and psychologists. That is why, the highest indicator was found in the empathy level increase due to the implementation of the formulation actions. Let us assume that our achievements will allow to expand the limits of research among specialists of assisting professions, and also to establish empathy role and place in professional activity of experts of this field.

## **Conclusions.**

Summing up the results of our scientific research, we can say that the empathy is mainly seen as an emotional component of personality and professional important quality, which often acts in a negative way. So excessive emotional sensitivity can lead to fatal errors in the work, in particular, specialists such as rescuers, police officers, doctors and psychologists. However, if analyzed on the basis of a theoretical and experimental research, the issue of experts data is primarily manifested through behavioral component and promotes occurrence of empathy actions. Finding ways to help the consumer will not allow excessive emotional sensitivity to appear.

The program offered by us is used not only to raise the level of empathy, but also to relieve emotional stress, relaxation, meditation, etc., that will allow participants to apply them as necessary and quickly restore stability and to begin to fulfill professional duties. Thus, we can state that the complex social and psychological program of formation of professional empathy of specialists of helping professions offered by us is effective and can be used not only for police, rescuers, medicals and psychological, but also for other specialists of the sphere of helping professions.

Our research does not cover all questions about the issue and its role in the work of specialists of the helping professions. We consider studying

of the issue of specialists of helping professions in gender and age context, and also depending on the experience, position and duties, peculiarities of professional activity, etc. to be perspective.

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