



Prejudice against Psychology as a Factor in Increasing Extremity of the Service and Maladaptation of Penal System Employees

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Abstract

In the article, the authors consider the problem of prejudice against psychology and its creative possibilities on the part of the staff of penitentiary institutions. *Purpose:* based on the generalization of theoretical materials and analysis of the practice of activity in penitentiary institutions to show that in conditions of constant impact of quantitative and qualitative factors of penitentiary activity on the personality of employees, they should be ready for aggressive actions of inmates. Without professional psychological assistance, employees' adaptation process and behavior in extreme situations can be affected and risks of developing professional destructions can be created. *Results:* the attitude to uncertainty is considered by the authors as a personality trait underlying adaptation processes and processes to perceive extreme conditions of work. Having considered specific professional activity of penitentiary system employees, the authors show how the problem of prejudice against psychology increases extremity of service and what subsequent negative consequences can be, in particular in the adaptation period. *Conclusions:* the similarity of the processes of adapting to service activities and extreme conditions is shown, and the emphasis is also placed on the need to work with prejudice against psychological support of employees' activities.

Keywords: adaptation; readiness; penal system; extremity; extreme situations; psychological support; attitude to uncertainty.

5.3.9. Legal psychology and security psychology.

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Introduction.

The problem of adaptation to professional activity is a focal point of many disciplines. Despite a significant amount of both general theoretical and applied research, the specific of this problem lies in its intrinsic relevance, regardless of the current state of society. Any socio-economic, political, environmental and other changes, both positive and negative, make a person adapt to them [1, pp. 186–187; 2, p. 15]. The problem of adaptation to a specific work activity is refracted through the prism of specific conditions and factors caused by the boundaries set by the goal and the tasks it solves, as well as the implementation of a system of actions to achieve them with the individual and personal characteristics available to the subject. The Russian penal system is no exception in this matter.

Key results.

In the system of normal functioning of the society, the penal system occupies a special place, since it ensures the security of society not only by isolating offenders, but also by correcting them [3, pp. 8–9; 4]. The official statistics data provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia and the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia can demonstrate the relevance of the penal system activities. So, 1,966,795 cases were registered in the Russian Federation in 2022. Despite the fact that this indicator decreased by 1.9% compared to 2021, there was a rise in registered crimes in 10 subjects [5]. Employees of the penal system work with the convicted to correct them. As of January 1, 2023, 433,006 people were held in penitentiary institutions [6]. These figures show high workload on the penal system employees, who daily interact with this very diverse set of people, for whom the fact of committing a crime is common. The quantitative factor of impact on professional activity presupposes the presence of a qualitative one. This factor, in our opinion, is key in determining the real burden on the staff of the penal system. The qualitative composition of persons held in pre-trial detention facilities and correctional institutions is so diverse that

the criteria for assessing and describing the discussed population are also multiple. For instance, according to the criterion of mental state, the spectrum of groups of convicts and persons in custody varies from a relative norm to the presence of mental anomalies within the boundaries of sanity [7, pp. 20–21; 8, pp. 291–293; 9, pp. 250–252]. Disabled people also require a special approach. Convicted persons with disabilities need additional attention and assistance on the part of the staff of the penitentiary system [10]. Besides, suspects, accused and convicted persons differ in terms of age, gender, criminal and prison experience, education level, upbringing characteristics, nationality, belonging to a certain social group, etc. [11, pp. 159–60]. It should also be taken into account that the listed criteria may constitute different combinations. At the same time, we deliberately do not touch on psychological characteristics, as they widen the diversity. All this is reflected in the behavior of persons in places of deprivation of liberty. In particular, convicts in correctional institutions may behave conditionally normally, observing the requirements established by law, or they may violate the regime up to the commission of crimes. Cases of attacks on correctional facility employees, infliction of bodily injuries of various degrees of severity, taking hostages, etc. are rather common [12].

Undoubtedly, the staff of the penal system is aware of such threats and constantly ready for aggressive actions on the part of the special agent. This affects their psychological and physical condition, causes fatigue, overstrain and other forms of depletion of their available resources. So, including for these reasons, professional activity in the penal system is considered extreme [12, p. 142; 13, p. 33–34; 14, p. 3; 15, p. 235–236].

This determines, on the one hand, special requirements for employees' personality, special knowledge, skills and abilities and, on the other hand, for organization of their work and creation of special conditions that take into account these circumstances of the

service, fulfill the supporting and developing functions and are based on modern scientific developments. Psychology here plays an important role, since it has modern achievements in the field of self-regulation of emotional state, overcoming life and professional difficulties, correcting negative personality traits, etc. At the same time, practical implementation of psychological knowledge is often hindered by employees' resistance and unwillingness to participate in psychological activities of both group and individual nature. Such behavior and attitudes may be based on employees' prejudice against psychology [16, pp. 290–297], formed due to the problems currently existing both in penitentiary psychology itself and its perception by the society. The authors have repeatedly covered this issue [16, p. 167; 17, pp. 19–20; 18, pp. 124–125], but it does not lose relevance [19].

In modern psychological science, there is no unambiguous interpretation of the term "prejudice". This phenomenon is provoked by many interrelated factors: economic, political, historical, cultural, socio-structural, socio-psychological.

In foreign psychology, prejudice is disclosed in works of F. Denmark, W. Lippman, D. Myers, T. Nelson, G. Allport, etc., in Russian – G.M. Andreeva, A.I. Dontsov, G.U. Soldatova, T.G. Stefanenko, P.N. Shikhirev, etc. Penitentiary psychologists Yu.M. Antonyan, S.N. Enikolopov, V.M. Pozdnyakov, A.I. Ushatkov and others consider certain phenomena of prejudice in the penal system.

We believe that the most complete definition of prejudice against psychological activity is given by G. Allport, arguing that prejudice is a negative attitude to some outgroup: an inaccurate, unreasonable and generalized attitude, necessarily including an affective reaction [20]. It should be noted that low-skilled psychologists themselves contribute to this state of affairs, discrediting psychology as a scientific and practical field of activity capable of providing assistance.

Hence, this circumstance causes an increase in the level of extreme professional

activity of employees of the penal system and their maladaptation.

The maladaptation problem is relevant in the work of any team, but for occupations that have an extreme character, it is especially acute. Researchers note that the adaptation mechanism is developed by a person during his/her life and is used in different conditions [21, p. 8]. Adaptation is the process when a person enters and accommodates him/herself to a new system of professional requirements, values and social norms of behavior in a work team.

Problems and violations of the human adaptation process in various types of labor activity are revealed in the works of S.G. Antipin, I.A. Miloslavova, V.A. Korytkov, M.V. Sinel'nik, S.V. Smirnova, etc. In the penal system, various issues related to professional adaptation of an individual are studied within the framework of pedagogical, psychological and legal science by Yu.A. Aleksandrovskii, Yu.A. Alferov, Ts.P. Korolenko, L.E. Panina, V.B. Salakhova, A.I. Ushatkov, etc.

"Specialists' desire to work in a team and make a career in an organization" is considered as an indicator of their successful adaptation [22]. Besides persons' readiness to link their professional future with the organization, successful adaptation is also expressed in their performance. The higher performance indicators, the greater benefit of employees and the organization. This is an approximate pattern of successful adaptation; the problem is to work with people unable to successfully adapt to professional activity.

The adaptation mechanism factors in the penal system are the following: a period of official activity (initial, during service, after service), adaptation to the environment (including official and off-duty aspects), and specifics of professional activity. The first two factors are sufficiently fully represented by researchers of other professional groups, while the latter one is characteristic of the penitentiary service. Adaptation to the specifics of professional penitentiary activity is of the following types:

- professional (formation and development of professionally significant personality traits and qualities; motivation for the chosen professional activity, professional self-development, striving to achieve professional identity);
- psychophysical (adaptation to service conditions);
- socio-psychological (acceptance of new social roles);
- organizational and administrative;
- economic.

It is also worth mentioning that the success of the adaptation process depends on a significant number of factors, both internal and external, namely: an employee's adaptability level; mentors and psychologists' skills; nature of the socio-psychological climate in the department, etc. [17, p. 20; 23, p. 332].

The problem of successful adaptation and extreme situations have similar elements. We will consider people's willingness to act in a situation and attitude to uncertainty [24].

The term "attitude to uncertainty" has various interpretations in the scientific literature. For example, it can be interpreted as "an individual tendency to assess an uncertain situation as desirable or dangerous", "a kind of psychological discomfort", "a cognitive style associated with the inability to accept stimuli suggesting alternative interpretations without comfort", etc. [18, p. 113; 23, p. 233; 25, p. 529]. So, one way or another, this condition is associated with anxiety and self-doubt and self-confidence. This is an unstable state in which a person can commit actions that endanger both him/her and others. Hence, the process of adapting to professional activity is similar to an extreme situation as something indefinite.

Uncertainty in the activity is understandable for people who are just starting their professional path in a particular position, due to the lack of necessary work experience. At this time, a penal system employee needs to be assisted and supported by all employees of the institution, departments and services.

As a rule, with the accumulation of a certain amount of both life and professional experience, employees of the penal system already act more confidently in various suddenly arising situations, both standard and non-standard, which reduces the level of extremity of the service [18].

At the same time, the way to this level of professionalism, self-confidence is associated with a large number of hardship, overcoming difficulties, experiences, etc. Unfortunately, not everyone can make it, maintaining emotional balance, calmness, the desire to serve and carry out the assigned duties in good faith to the end. The inability to cope with such challenges leads to dismissals in early terms of service and maladaptation. It can lead to alcoholism, increased aggressiveness, sharpness in communication, alienation from the team, etc., which in fact represents the personnel loss, since the likelihood of negligent attitude to the performance of professional duties goes up, employees commit legal violations up to crimes.

Conclusion.

It seems that the psychologists' activity in working with penal system employees should be conducted in personal and organizational directions. Thus, the personal direction includes formation of a certain reputation of a psychologist as a person who is a professional in his/her field, confident in his/her professional capabilities, respected by the team, observes ethical principles prescribed by the profession. Employees come to a professional psychologist to solve both professional and personal problems, as well as the psychologist him/herself seeks supervisory help and psychological support as a demonstration of the need for this direction of professional support in the penitentiary system. Only such a psychologist can effectively work with employees' biases about possibilities of psychology.

The organizational direction consists in creating special conditions for conducting psychological work. Specially equipped rooms (offices) give the opportunity for both individual and group work, while maintaining the priva-

cy of classes. Besides, this direction includes management of a temporary resource. Time should be specially set aside for joint work of a psychologist and employees. It should be exclusively working hours. In this matter, the position of the institution management, coordinating activities of all subordinate employees, is of great importance. If the management itself negatively relates to the role of a psychologist in the institution or does not attach appropriate importance to it, the overall organization of psychological work is jeopardized with all the consequences outlined in this article.

The indicated aspects of overcoming prejudices among employees of the penal system require special attention of both a psychologist and his/her direct and immediate heads for the normal organization of psychological work.

Obviously, psychological work with employees is not separate from the results of other departments and services of the institution. Success in the work of a psychologist has a beneficial effect on the performance of the entire institution, as it helps preserve the personnel and labor capacities.

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