



Ideas of Russian Penal System Employees about the Official Behavior Pattern Forming a Humane Attitude towards Convicts

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Abstract

Introduction: issues related to certain aspects of the professional activities of personnel of institutions and bodies executing criminal penalties in the context of the progressive process of humanization of the domestic penitentiary system are relevant. Features of the staff's official activities when organizing the correctional process in places of detention are analyzed from a psychological point of view. *Purpose:* to identify the subjective component of professional activity through concretization of the ideas and views of penal system employees about humane treatment of convicts, followed by the choice of a socially approved pattern of official behavior. *Methods:* the author applied a psychological verbal and communicative method and used an author's questionnaire specially developed for the purpose of the study. The study covered current penal system employees and public monitoring commission members (n=150, 3 focus groups). *Results:* attention is focused on the subjective side of the performance of official tasks by employees, which is based on existing functional behaviors, specifics of perception of situations in the process of exerting penitentiary influence on convicts, willingness to demonstrate humane attitude towards persons serving criminal sentences. The author determined respondents' ideas about significant and insignificant personal qualities that contribute to or hinder the process of humanization in places of deprivation of liberty, their understanding of readiness and their definition of the official behavior pattern that allows them to effectively and systematically carry out the correctional process using humane methods of influence. *Conclusion:* employees' choice of the official behavior pattern based on a humane attitude towards the personality of a convicted person is an effective tool for professional activity within the framework of general humanization of the social sphere. This makes it possible to expand possibilities of the ongoing penitentiary process, the core of which is the fundamental principles of the construction and implementation of socially approved practice of the execution of criminal penalties.

Keywords: penitentiary system, penal system employee, convicts, official activity, behavior pattern, ideas, humane attitude.

5.3.9. Legal psychology and accident psychology.

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Introduction.

The dynamic component of the Russian penal system development at the present stage is determined not only by the specifics of the challenges, goals and objectives, but also by the constantly changing ratio of legal, social, psychological and pedagogical elements of the official activities of employees, which find their expression both at objective and subjective levels. Professional activity in the penitentiary system is considered as a specific form of relationship among its employees, as well as the staff of penitentiary institutions and convicts, aimed at solving the tasks of executing criminal punishment imposed on employees by regulatory documents and requiring them to develop a high degree of skills and extensive specialized training in order to fulfill this social role. It is known that in modern society there is a large number of job occupations characterized by the intense nature of interpersonal relationships in specific social areas, including those with a pronounced extreme and conflict-prone component. Professional and official activities in the penitentiary system are among such occupations. Service of penal system employees is associated with conflict situations and sometimes life-threatening circumstances. Such conditions can have a negative impact on a person, hinder solution of professional tasks, and negatively affect the performance of official tasks. At the same time, person's psychological stability and ability to constructively communicate with various categories of citizens, as well as an effective and reasonable algorithm of actions in extreme conditions and situations, underpin professional activity of penal system employees.

A complex of current problems in the penal system, which in some cases "lead to violations of the rights of convicts and negatively affect the public opinion about the system executing criminal penalties in general and incompetence of employees in particular" [1, p. 272]. In this regard, there is a "need to find ways to boost effectiveness of professional activities of the penal system staff, aimed, inter alia, at carrying out corrective action on convicts by humane methods" [2, p. 24].

Paradoxically, to date, there have been much more studies on the problems of persons in places of deprivation of liberty than studies on

the category of persons responsible for working with them. Since in most cases convicts are the object of activity of penitentiary staff, consideration of this factor is one of the fundamental ones in employees' activity. In this regard, it is possible to identify a number of specific requirements for realizing professional activities that have important psychological content: a) formation of a prosocial orientation in convicts by penal system employees; b) development and improvement of practical skills of employees to study the personality of a convicted person in the process of serving a criminal sentence, including using psychological criteria; c) development and maintenance of professionally important qualities at a high level related to the operational situation assessment in the course of official activity; d) promotion of a professional attitude to preventing the use of illegal methods of influence, inhuman cruel, degrading treatment and unlawful use of physical force and special means among employees of a correctional facility.

At the same time, to achieve these requirements is quite difficult. At the moment, service in the penitentiary system requires an employee to have a wide range of competencies in the field of personnel management, law, pedagogy, social and clinical psychology, conflictology for timely decision-making and the ability to competently build and maintain interpersonal relationships in the professional sphere, and perform specific functions related to the execution of criminal penalties. Unfortunately, this is not always observed in practice. In this regard, the importance of forming and improving relevant professional competencies of the personnel is dictated by the ongoing humanization of the domestic penal policy, which is reflected in the Concept for the Development of the Penal System of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030 and suggests the existence of an objective need to completely abandon stereotypical approaches to the treatment of convicts and move to a real humane attitude to them on the part of penal system employees [3, p. 48].

Empirical part.

A humane attitude towards a person sentenced to imprisonment is known to be the subject of research of many scientists and public figures, which in itself makes it "multidimensional, quite difficult to study and to a certain

extent contradictory” [4, p. 23]. In relation to convicts, consideration of the humanism concept “is associated with human rights and the analysis of detention conditions in terms of the attitude towards the convict from the standpoint of the personality value” [5, p. 22]. Therefore, humanization of the correction process “begins with the creation of an environment, conditions for correction in penitentiary institutions and also depends on the level of development of personal qualities, formed professional competencies” of the personnel of the penal institution [6, p. 35]. Taking into account the specifics of the problem under consideration, it should be emphasized that the role and importance of the humanization process in places of detention cannot be underestimated, since this form of relationship is one of the key factors of a stable operational environment in correctional institutions. This contributes not only to improving detention conditions of convicts, but also to increasing the effectiveness of their correction, including through employees’ conscious attitude to humanism.

Taking into account the indicated problem, the subjective component of the professional activity of penal system employees is of interest, which consists in the personal perception and understanding of the functional duties assigned to them, as well as the existing views on the problem of relations with convicts, expressed in the choice of one or another model of official behavior in the process of exercising penitentiary impact on them.

To this end, a questionnaire survey was conducted at the Tomsk Institute for Advanced Training of Employees of the Federal Penitentiary Service in 2023. It covered current penal system employees undergoing training (vocational education, vocational retraining, advanced training), as well as members of public monitoring commissions (hereinafter – PMC). Respondents were divided into two experimental focus groups formed on the basis of professional experience and a control focus group.

The Focus Group 1 is comprised of penal system employees being trained under the educational program “Vocational training of citizens first recruited into the penal system” (persons with up to one year of service in the penal system) – 42 people (n=42). The composition of the group allows us to assume that respon-

dents have a low and average formation level of the official behavior pattern, part of which is a humane attitude towards people in conditions of social isolation. This group is represented by relatively equal proportions of female (n=24, 57.1%) and male employees (n=18, 42.9%), which confirms a general upward trend of women in the penitentiary service. All respondents of the Focus Group 1 are in the group aged under 40. Most of them are young people aged 18–30 years (73.8%) and only 26.2% aged 30–40 years.

The Focus Group 2 is compound of employees with 5 years or more of service in the penal system, whose duties are directly related to ensuring that the staff of a correctional facility do not use illegal methods of influence, treat convicts well and observe the law when applying physical force and special means. This group includes employees of security departments of the correctional facility, regime departments of the pre-trial detention center, operational departments of the correctional facility and the pre-trial detention center, squad heads of the correctional facility, employees of psychological laboratories of the correctional facility and the pre-trial detention center – a total of 98 people (n=98). These are those employees, who are supposed to have a more holistic official behavior pattern that contributes to the humanization of the process of correcting convicts. It should be noted that their distribution by gender is significantly different from the data obtained for the Focus Group 1. The share of male employees is significantly greater (n=75, 76.5%) than that of women (n=23, 23.5%). The age composition of the surveyed employees of the Focus Group 2 allows us to identify two relatively equal groups: 54% – persons aged 25–35, 46% – persons aged 35–45.

The Focus Group 3 includes members of public monitoring commissions, as persons exercising public control over ensuring human rights in places of forced detention – 10 people (n=10). These respondents act as supervisors (third-party experts) who are well acquainted with the problem of the possible use of illegal (inhumane) methods of influence on convicts (suspects, accused people) by penal system employees.

Thus, the total number of respondents was 150 people (n=150).

We have already noted that serving in institutions executing criminal penalties places increased demands on moral (essentially human) qualities of employees, their level of “emotional endurance, tolerance, self-control, social immunity to the possible effects of criminal subculture and other unfavorable factors” [7, p. 50]. In this regard, personal qualities of employees are of particular importance, which in their official activities become professionally significant and necessary in solving various situations related to relationships and interaction in the context of the existing dyad “employee – convict”.

It seems essential to focus on personal qualities of employees, the consideration of which will contribute to the development of appropriate skills and abilities within the framework of humane implementation of the penitentiary (correctional) process in working with convicts.

The analysis of the data obtained during the survey showed that for the respondents of the Focus Group 1, “stress tolerance” (66.7%) is a crucial component when considering the specifics of penitentiary activities. At the same time, based on the processing of results of the ranking of the considered indicators, 90% of the respondents rank this quality from first to third. There is no doubt that stress tolerance is an important component when considering the specifics of penitentiary activities. Penal system employees meet high requirements for service, including a level of stress resistance higher than that of an “ordinary” citizen. A quality, such as “balance”, is ranked second (40.1% of the respondents put it in one of the first three places). We believe that this quality is certainly important for solving various operational and educational tasks, since penal system employees should control their emotions and remain calm in difficult situations. This allows them to effectively perform their official duties and ensure the safety of both their colleagues and convicts. It seems important that an employee remains calm in any difficult situations, makes decisions based on logic and common sense, not emotions. The results obtained show that stress tolerance and balance are key interrelated qualities necessary for the effective performance of tasks within the framework of professional penitentiary activities related to the humanization of the process and conditions of serving a criminal sentence.

A quality, such as “justice” (the total rank value, taking into account the degree of importance of the first three places, amounts to 30.1%), which can be considered to a greater extent as one of the moral values that helps form a positive professional attitude both to personal self-determination and group work.

Nevertheless, attention should be paid to the fact that respondents identify insignificant qualities (the last three places in the ranking), such as “sincerity” (26.7%), “initiative” (23.3%), “fairness” (23.2%), “nonjudgmental attitude” (20%), and “empathy” (20%).

These qualities are more or less important, though underestimated by young penal system employees. This can be explained by the fact that at the beginning of their service they face strict subordination inherent in service teams performing important law enforcement functions, the current principle of unity of command and the prevailing dominant attitude to persons serving criminal sentences in places of deprivation of liberty. Another reason may be employees’ lack of awareness of their strengths due to a short period of time in the service, lack of professional experience, as well as psychological denial of certain qualities subjectively understood as unnecessary and unimportant.

We believe that employees of the psychological service should pay attention to the development of stress tolerance and balance in the course of performing functional duties, as well as communicative qualities. It is the harmonious combination of relevant elements in the personality structure of a first-time employee, taking into account the development of professional abilities, that will allow him/her to form the dominant orientation of his/her personality in line with the humanization of the penitentiary influence process.

A slightly different picture is observed when analyzing responses of employees with more than the 5-year public system service (Focus Group 2). Also, like the respondents of the Focus Group 1, they find “stress tolerance” (50.1%) as the most significant quality to prevent the use of illegal impact methods in relation to convicts (suspects, the accused) by penal system employees. Employees consider “balance” to be the next most important indicator (24.5%), followed by “fairness” (16.3%).

It is noteworthy that these three qualities are consistently present in the responses of most respondents. Taking into account the total ranking indicators according to the degree of importance of the first three places, 80.7% of respondents chose “stress tolerance”, 58.2% – “balance”, and 52% – “fairness”. It should also be noted that the number of important personal qualities included “self-discipline” (36.7% in the sum of the first three places in terms of importance), and “sociability” (35.7%).

The following qualities do not seem relevant for experienced employees: “sincerity” (more than half of the respondents (52%) rank this quality the last), “lack of self-esteem” (43.9%), “empathy” (39.7%). In our opinion, employees’ underestimation of these qualities can act as an emotional burnout marker, and, as a result, professional deformation in the course of service.

Unfortunately, we have to admit a certain unhealthy skepticism and personal detachment in the course of working with convicts, manifestations of narrow egoistic interests, a kind of “closed” understanding of their professional activities. So, many penal system employees have distorted moral attitudes and levelled basic personal qualities related to respect and protection of the rights, freedoms and human dignity.

When analyzing responses of public monitoring commissions members (Focus Group 3), we find out that “stress tolerance” (60%) is the most significant quality to prevent the use of illegal influence methods in relation to convicts (suspects, the accused) by penal system employees. Besides, there is a number of distinctions associated with a slightly different view of the Focus Group 3 on professional activities of penal system employees, including critical ones. Thus, 20% of the respondents put qualities, such as “nonjudgmental attitude” and “sincerity”, first.

It should be noted that the staff of the penitentiary service does not consider these qualities as significant in the implementation of penitentiary measures with persons in places of deprivation of liberty. According to the PMC members, the actualization of methods of psychological verification of sincerity in human behavior is of great importance, which is an important prerequisite for the successful professional activity of employees. The same

can be said about self-esteem as an important competence for successful interpersonal communication and professional activity, which helps to see the convict objectively, understand and evaluate him without bias and judgments. A high importance of “balance” (80% of the respondents ranged it second) is noteworthy. Penal system employees work with people who are in a difficult life situation, that is why face unpredictable behavior of convicts. Therefore, balance, according to the Focus Group 3 respondents, is one of the crucial qualities that a penal system employee should have. A balanced employee is able to effectively manage difficult situations while maintaining his/her emotional stability, control his/her emotions and prevent them from influencing his/her actions, including when solving issues related to assessment of convicts’ behavior.

According to the Focus Group 3, personal qualities insignificant for penal system service are as such: “empathy”, “emotional flexibility”, and “initiative”. Nevertheless, we would like to draw attention to the fact that a lack of control over one’s emotional state can cause negative consequences in the service, such as loss of control over the situation, mistakes in decision-making, and interpersonal conflicts. On the other hand, the respondents believe that penal system employees should be able to set boundaries in their relations with persons serving criminal sentences in order to prevent violations of their rights and not be subjected to emotional pressure from representatives of the criminal environment. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the management of emotions and their role in the activities of a penal system employee.

The next important aspect of the study was to identify the respondents’ opinions regarding the choice of a behavior pattern, which indicates that the employee is ready (inclined) to apply inhumane (illegal) influence methods. As previously noted, during the implementation of professional competencies, employees serve in difficult stressful situations, are exposed to professional risks, experience negative psychological effects on the part of the suspected, accused and convicted persons, which inevitably leads to personal changes expressed in manifestations of their professional deformation, such as “increased aggressiveness and

emotionality, irritability, frustration, depression, and speech aggression" [8, p. 49].

The respondents of the Focus Group 1 identify behavioral qualities, (indicators), which demonstrate an employee's readiness to use illegal influence methods, characterized as inhumane, against a convicted person: manifestation of physical aggression by an employee in case of disagreement with his/her opinion (23%), manifestation of temper by an employee if his/her instructions are not followed (23%), demonstration of verbal aggression by an employee in case of disagreement with his/her opinion (15.4%), manifestation of excessive perseverance by an employee in relationships with other people (15.4%).

To the least extent, demonstration of indifference by an employee in the case of a convict contacting him/her with a problem (69.2% of the respondents place this indicator in the last three places), demonstration of overestimated self-esteem (61.5%), and commission of acts in relation to convicts for selfish reasons (38.5%) will trigger unlawful actions on the part of convicts.

It seems to be an important aspect to consider professional behavior patterns and manifestations of employees with more than 5 years of service experience. One of the problems, in our opinion, is that employees, using their authority and official position, may allow manifestations of physical aggression towards convicts in case of conflict situations. Undoubtedly, this problem is very relevant, since 63.3% of the surveyed experienced employees indicate its existence, while 32.7% consider it crucial to solve. 19.4% of the respondents believe that an employee may use illegal impact methods against a convicted (suspected, accused) person when being furious that his/her instructions are not followed. Attention should also be paid to employees' demonstration of arrogance towards convicts and their overestimated self-esteem (16.3% of the respondents consider this indicator to be the crucial one). Also, 16.3% of the respondents believe that the employee's willingness to commit certain illegal actions is indicated by excessive persistence in relationships with other people. The analysis of the ranking, taking into account the importance of indicators for the first three positions, also show that the high probability of committing illegal actions

includes demonstration of verbal aggression by an employee in case of disagreement with his/her opinion (52%).

The respondents of the Focus Group 2 consider the following indicators as insignificant: demonstration of indifference when a convict asks an employee to solve a problem (24.2%); demonstration of excessive self-esteem (22.4%); employee's manifestation of excessive perseverance in relationships with other people (20.4%).

According to the respondents of the Focus Group 3, attention should be paid to behavioral qualities (indicators) that show an employee's readiness (inclination) to choose an inhumane behavior pattern towards convicts: demonstration of verbal aggression in case of disagreement with his/her opinion; demonstration of overestimated self-esteem (80% of the respondents rank it from first to third), manifestation of an employee's temper if his/her instructions are not followed (60% of the respondents note it).

The most insignificant indicators of the parameter under consideration are the following: manifestation of excessive perseverance by an employee in relationships with other people (100% of the respondents put this quality in the last 3 places), absence (thoughtless change) of their point of view due to the statement and inability to resist the opinion of the team (group) (60% of the respondents).

In our opinion, the most relevant is the likely (predictable) choice of a particular behavior pattern, which will act as a marker that an employee, on the contrary, will demonstrate a humane behavior pattern in official activities. In this case, the relevant behavioral portrait of an employee is important, the essence of which is that it is not the quality of character or psychological feature itself that comes to the fore, but how it will manifest itself in certain official situations, how a person will behave in specific conditions providing for contacts with persons serving criminal sentences in places of detention. For example, such a portrait includes information about behavioral risks of an employee, motivating and demotivating factors, communicative features, the prevailing current emotional background, etc.

Persons from among those recruited for the first time believe that controlling their emotional state, especially in conflict situations, will con-

tribute to the rejection of choosing a behavior pattern that may facilitate the use of inhumane methods of influence against convicts (this is noted by 82% of the respondents; 50% rank this indicator first). The next most important indicator is the ability to focus on important points of activity in a stressful situation, not to get involved in disputes (62.8% of respondents rank this quality from first to third). Besides, 59.3% of the respondents indicate an employee's orientation towards key goals and general requirements when solving official tasks, despite any external pressure factors.

Not so important for forming an effective behavior pattern are successful establishment of contact with other people, creation of an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding (73% of the respondents put this quality in the last three places), identification of the causes of the current non-standard office situation, followed by the proposal of a clear, logical and practical solution to the problem (68.2%), and the necessity to take responsibility in solving official tasks related to the execution of criminal penalties (67.9%, while 36.4% of the respondents rank it last).

Thus, it seems important to take into account the actual emotional state of young penal system employees in the course of performing official tasks aimed at observing the rule of law in places of detention. We believe that this will not only improve their work, but also improve the quality of execution of sentences and protection of the rights of convicts.

An employee's focus on using humane methods of influencing a convicted person is an important aspect of professional ethics. Most employees with extensive service experience in correctional institutions understand that the use of inhumane methods can lead to violations of the rights and dignity of convicts, as well as to negative consequences for correctional workers themselves.

Most respondents of the Focus Group 2 believe that when exerting penitentiary influence on convicts (especially in conflict situations) it is necessary to keep emotions under strict control, not to let them spill out, so as not to provoke further development of any conflict situation (note that 56.7% of the respondents rank it first and 78.1% put this factor in the first three places). In this case, it is important to take into

account features of speech activity (content, intonation of speech, presentation of verbal material, semantic aspects), facial expressions, and gestures. No less significant is another behavioral and volitional aspect related to an employee's ability to focus on important points when communicating with a convict (which is often stressful), key goals of the penitentiary process, and general requirements imposed on convicts, despite external socio-psychological factors (64.3%, according to the ranking by the degree of importance (first three places)).

According to experienced employees, responsibility in solving official tasks related to the execution of criminal penalties (26.5% of the respondents rank this quality last), as well as the ability to quickly change their approach to decision-making when the situation requires it (21.4%), are not so important for the formation of an effective behavior pattern.

The members of public monitoring commissions also note the importance and relevance of manifestation of some components of professional ethics and standards of conduct in professional activities of the penal system personnel, which include adherence to a humane behavior pattern in official activities. The existence of such a pattern contributes to maintaining public trust and respect for the functioning of the Federal Penitentiary Service, since correctional officers are representatives of the state and should act in accordance with high standards of professional, social and moral norms.

According to the respondents of Focus Group 3, the emotional component of official activity should be of particular importance for penal system employees. Thus, the importance of controlling emotions, especially in conflict situations, is noted by 100% of the respondents. It also seems to be a priority that in a stressful situation, an employee is able to focus on important points rather than get involved in disputes (80% of the respondents believe so, according to the ranking by the degree of importance). 40% of the respondents believe that during the penitentiary impact on convicts, an employee should maintain a mature and even restrained point of view, make objective decisions, despite the existing cases of psychological pressure, both from the management of the institution and from representatives of the criminal environment.

As an insignificant indicator in the penitentiary system, the PMC members indicate the possibility of changing their approach or style of work with convicts under the influence of changing circumstances in the institution, or the current situation (80% of the respondents put this factor in the last 2 places).

In addition, focus on the use of humane methods of influencing convicts is of practical importance for ensuring the safety and effectiveness of correctional institutions. Violation of the rights and dignity of convicts can lead to conflicts and violence within the institution, which poses a threat to life and health not only for convicts, but also for penal system employees.

Conclusion.

Penal system employees carry out duties to ensure safe detention conditions for convicts and preserve their life and health – the main human value. Accordingly, a humane attitude towards the personality of a convicted person is not only the basis of the regulatory framework of domestic penal legislation, but it also sets a clear vector aimed at developing skills and abilities that allow choosing the most effective official behavior pattern with regard to a specific area of activity. Of course, this will help young people become more effective and successful in their work, identify their strengths and weaknesses, improve their skills, and gain important experience in the practice of humane treatment of persons who have violated the law.

Consideration of the predicted behavior pattern of a penal correction officer with a pronounced humanity vector will help determine

with great accuracy the fundamental principles of conducting vocational training (academic discipline with regard to the specifics of the job category being trained), which further will contribute to forming professional competencies aimed at humane treatment of convicts. In this regard, special attention should be paid to the following organizational measures that will contribute to the formation of both professional qualities and appropriate behavioral patterns in the office activities aimed at preventing inhumane methods of influence, inhuman cruel, degrading treatment: a personal example of direct and immediate supervisors demonstrating respect for the personality and dignity of employees of the office, conducting special thematic classes in the service training system, bringing to legal liability employees who have committed cases of physical and psychological humiliation of convicts.

In conclusion, it should be noted that today a fairly wide range of measures is being carried out with the penal system personnel to form mature and adequate motivation to perform official tasks, actualize psychological readiness for service in specific circumstances, develop professional and psychological qualities of employees, as well as the ability to use verbal and non-verbal means of communication when working with different categories of convicts. Accordingly, their professional activity, like no other, is aimed at humanizing the process of execution of punishments by mitigating emotional tension between prison staff and convicts, which is an integral component of the successful and effective penitentiary system as a whole.

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