



Research of Empathy Indicators of Ukrainian Pharmacy Professionals


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ABSTRACT

The paper is dedicated to the investigation of key indicators of empathy among pharmacy professionals in Ukraine, and its structural elements. It has been established that pharmacy professionals, in whom the sense of empathy is better developed, are sensitive to even the smallest social manifestations, which helps them better understand the people and greatly improves the quality of pharmaceutical aid provided. It has been found that the majority of the studied specialists have an optimal level of empathy, which significantly simplifies their psychological adaptation to possible interpersonal complications related to the psycho-emotional state of others and helps to develop an optimal strategy of behavior in interpersonal communication.

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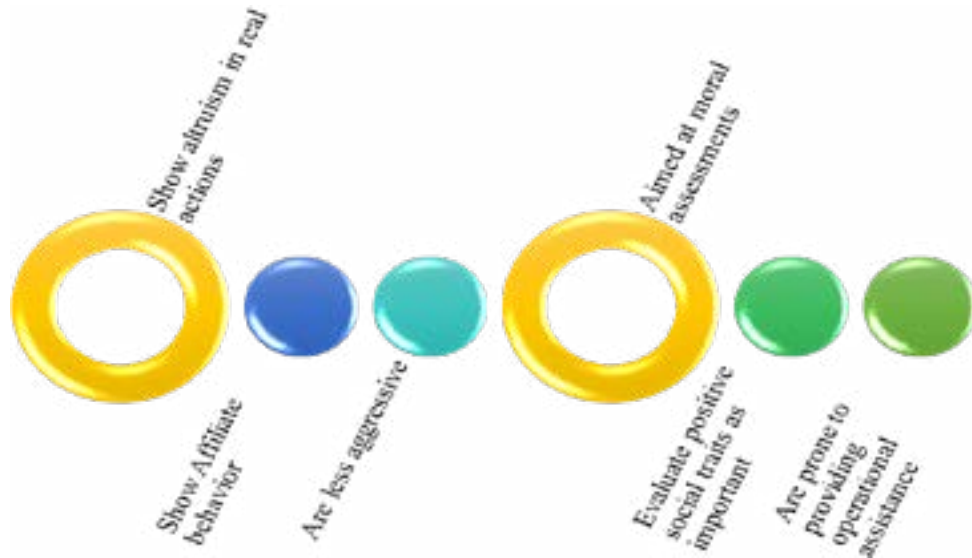


Figure 1. Key features of pharmacy professionals with high rates of empathy

1. Introduction.

Currently, the effectiveness of socially oriented professions, which in psychology are referred to as “human-human” type, not only depends on the professional qualities of specialists but is mainly conditioned by the presence of some personal qualities, such as a high level of education, communicative competence, adaptability, emotional intelligence, a high level of tolerance, developed empathy and many other individual factors, which are an important key to providing an effective pharmaceutical care^(1,2).

Bright representatives of the above type of professions are modern pharmacy professionals, whose activity is associated with the need for daily and numerous communications with others, primarily with visitors of pharmacies. These communications require understanding of emotional state and needs of the people, that is possessing a suf-

ficient level of empathy. At the same time modern pharmacists should be tolerant an patient, should know how to use various psychological techniques of influencing an opponent to create a confidential atmosphere.^(3,4)

Therefore, the ability to clearly show empathy is one of the significant qualities of modern pharmaceutical specialists from a professional point of view, which directly characterizes their professional suitability. At the same time, the level of empathy of specialists is the basis of many aspects of their moral assessment and actions and is a mandatory component of a number of personal qualities, which allows achieving a balance in interpersonal communications and establish a favorable emotional background.^{5,6}

Thus, the investigation of empathy indicators of modern pharmaceutical workers is a relevant direction of research, which allows to highlight the psychological aspects of their professional affilia-

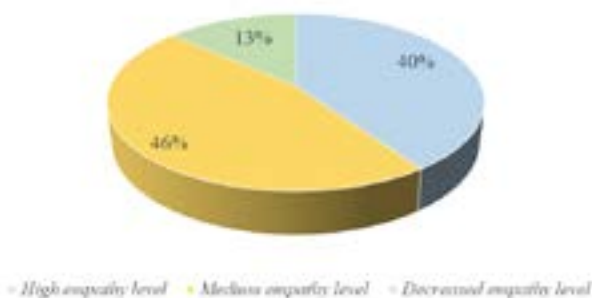


Figure 2. Indicators of empathy level of the respondents

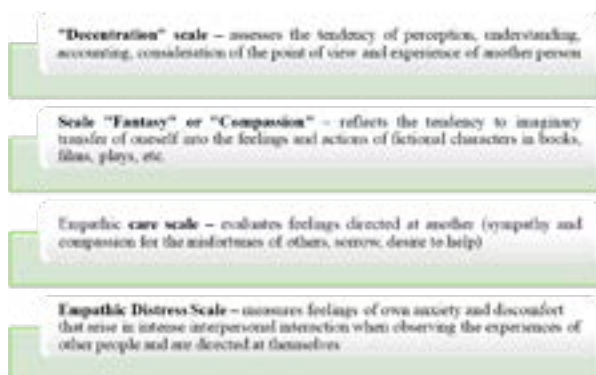


Figure 3. Characteristics of the key scales of M. Davis psychological questionnaire

tion and generally characterizes the quality of the services provided by them^{7,8}.

The aim of the present study is to establish indicators of the emotional empathy level of pharmacy professionals and its basic components.

2. Materials and methods.

The research methods are general theoretical, such as analysis and synthesis of the literature on the outlined research problem, comparison, systematization, generalization, interpretation of existing theoretical approaches, and empirical results on the research topic, which allowed to investigate key indicators of empathy of pharmacy profession-

als. Psychological research methods: psychological questionnaire of general empathic tendencies (M. Mehrabyan, N. Epstein); M. Davis' multi-factorial psychological questionnaire in the adaptation of T. Karyagina, N.A. Budagovskaya, S.V. Dubrovskaya.

3. Results and discussion.

It should be noted that empathy is based on a person's self-awareness because a deep awareness of own emotional state leads to a more meaningful understanding of the emotions and feelings of others.

In general, high empathy represents a deep and unmistakable perception of another person's inner world, his hidden emotions and semantic shades and emotional harmony with his mood and experiences. Some facets of empathy are reflected in the concepts of "attentiveness", "compassion" and "care".

The ability to empathize, that is, the ability to put oneself in the place of another person, forces individuals to adhere to appropriate moral principles, which requires more careful study^(9,10,11).

During the experimental part of the study, held during September-October 2023 we conducted a psychological survey of 67 pharmacy professionals who carry out their professional activity in pharmacies of Kharkiv, Ukraine.

The psychodiagnostic methods we have chosen as a tool for studying the empathic tendencies of pharmaceutical specialists meet all the necessary requirements for psychological tests of this area, namely: socio-cultural adaptability - compliance of test tasks and assessments with the cultural characteristics of the subjects; simplicity of presentation and wording of test materials for the subjects; availability of normalized values for further interpretation of the obtained indicators, average indicators of a large group of people identical to the subject in terms of social and demographic characteristics; availability of a clearly described procedure for use.

Thus, the above methodological framework meets the following requirements for psychodiagnostic tools: reliability; validity; discriminativeness; avail-

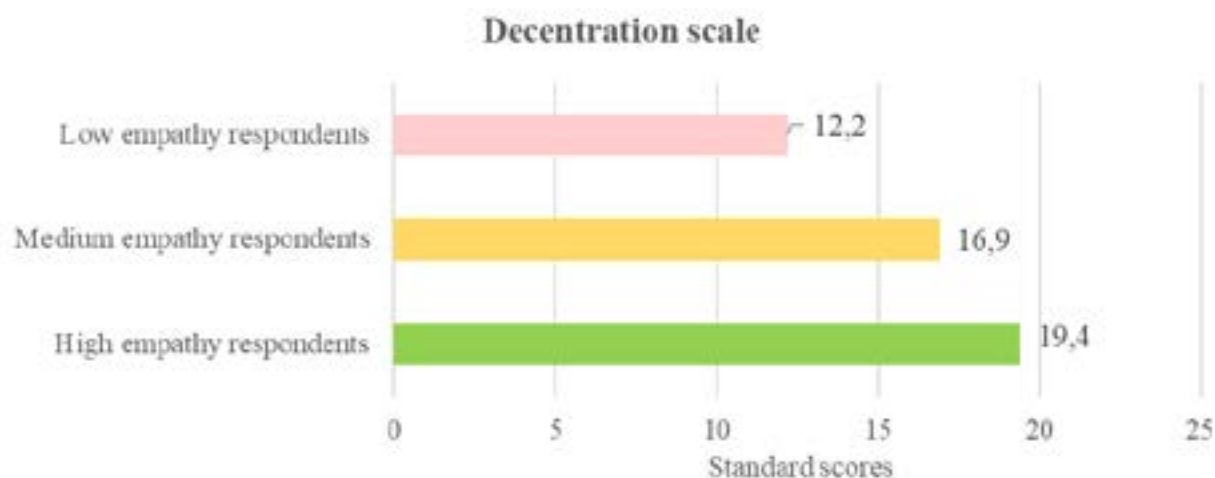


Figure 4. Test results of respondents with different levels of empathy on the Decentration scale (averages)

ability of normative data.

The statistical reliability of the research results was determined using statistical inference methods. It should be noted that there are no strict recommendations for preliminary determination of the required sample size. However, according to the recommendations, if the relationship between any properties is studied, the sample size should be at least 30-35 people.

Based on the results of the experiment, we accepted 134 test forms composed using the above-mentioned psychological methods filled out by specialists, which allow us to measure the level of empathy and analyze its structural elements.

Taking into account the specifics of pharmaceutical activity, the majority of respondents who took part in the psychological survey were female, 58 specialists (86.6%), and the remaining 9 respondents were male (13.4%). The age range of the subjects was 28 to 56 years.

At the first stage of the experiment, the psychological technique by A. Mehrabian, N. Epstein "Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale - BEES", has been applied which is designed to assess the level of emotional empathy of respondents.

This questionnaire consists of 25 closed-ended statements, which are both direct and inverse in nature, to which the respondents must assess the de-

gree of their agreement or disagreement. The processing of the obtained data and further interpretation of the indicators was carried out in accordance with the presented method key, according to which respondents were awarded from 1 to 4 points for each answer. The overall score was calculated by summing the points. The degree of severity of the respondents' empathy level was determined using a table for converting "raw" scores into standard scores on the sten scale.

The results of pharmaceutical specialists testing using the psychological methodology of A. Mehrabian / N. Epstein¹² have established that a high level of empathy is inherent in almost half of the specialists – 27 respondents (40.3%).

It should be emphasized that the highest indicators of the ability to empathize in these respondents are in negative correlation with aggressiveness and a tendency to violence. These subjects are characterized by such personality traits as compliance, willingness to forgive others, and the desire to perform in a calm rhythm routine work, which includes the daily professional activities of pharmacy workers.

Key personal characteristics of specialists with high empathy values are shown in Fig. 1.

The majority of the surveyed professionals possess average indicators of empathy – 31 respon-

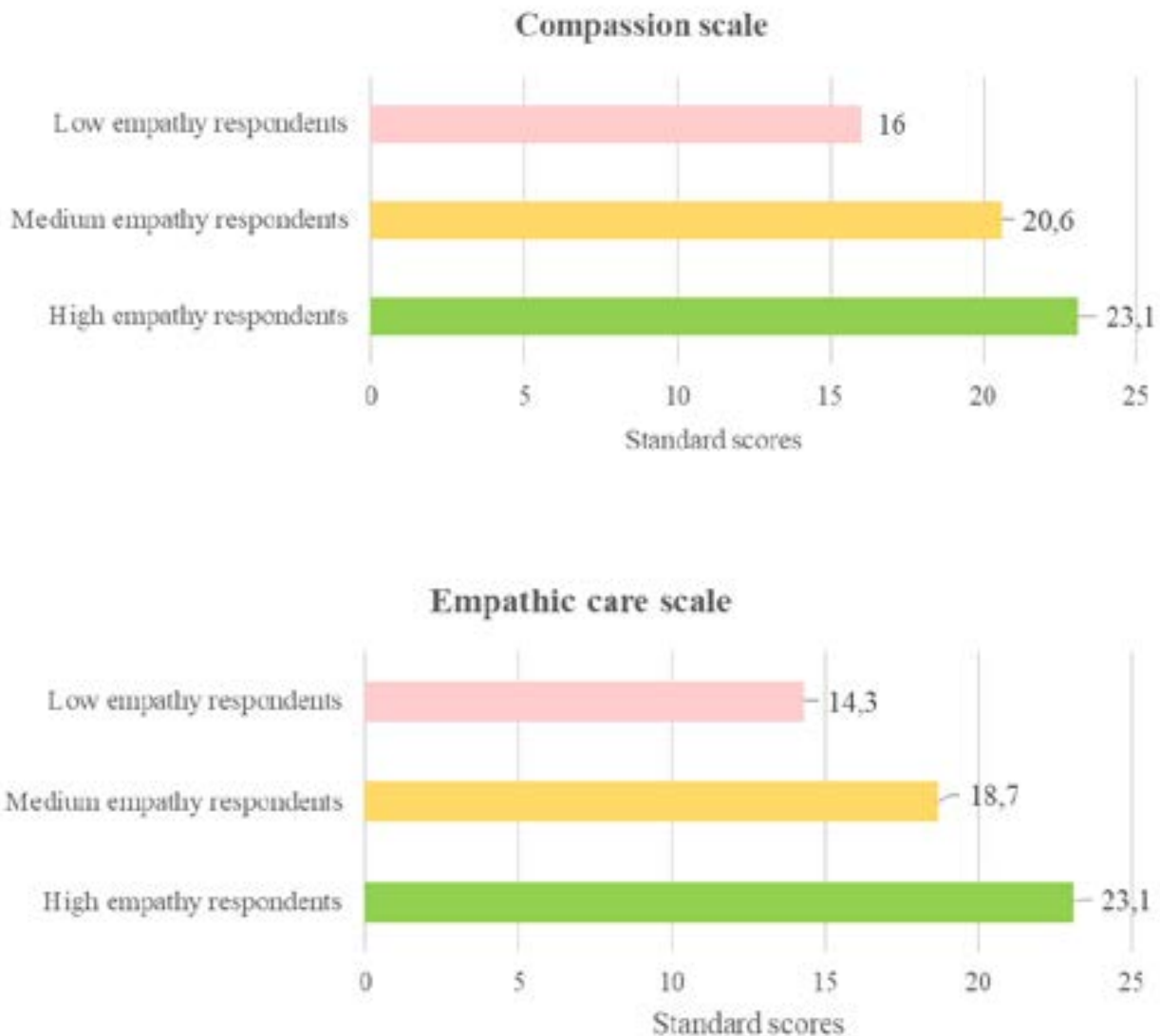


Figure 6. Test results of respondents with different levels of empathy on the Empathic Care scale (averages)

dents (46.3%). When assessing the nature of interpersonal relationships of such specialists, it should be noted that they tend to judge others by their actions rather than trust personal impressions. At the same time, in the course of communication, they usually have good control over their own emotional state. At the same time, these specialists often cannot predict the further development of relationships with others.

Insufficient empathy is inherent in 9 respondents (13.4%), which is a corresponding indicator of a decrease in the effectiveness of pharmaceutical care provided by these professionals. Usually, in interpersonal relationships, such specialists experience difficulties in establishing contacts with others, in many life and work circumstances, they are not fully able to understand and evaluate the emotional manifestations and actions of people, which is why

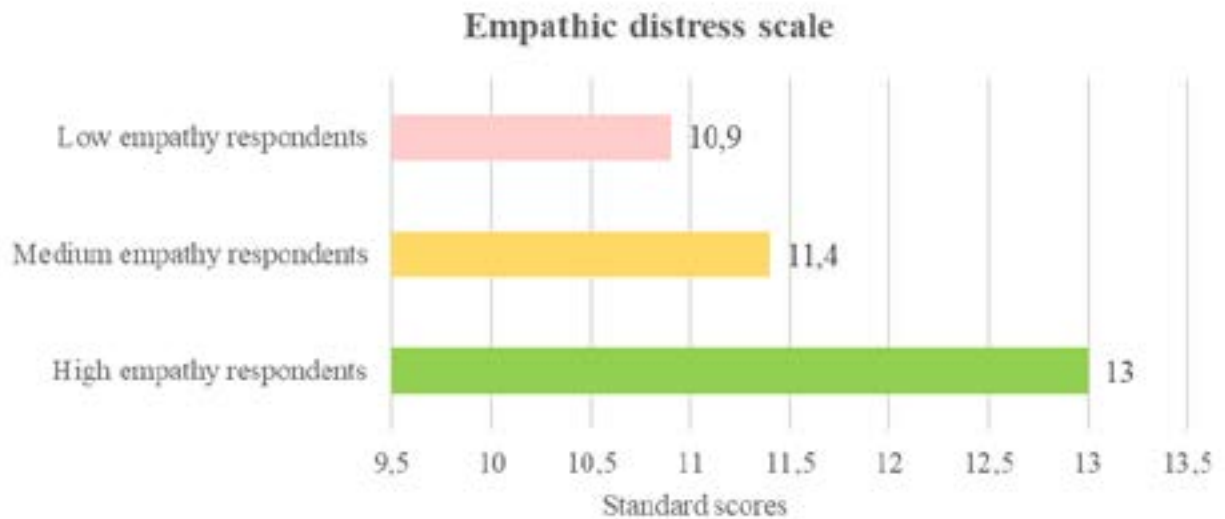


Figure 7. Test results of respondents with different levels of empathy on the Empathic Distress Scale (averages)

they often do not find understanding in interpersonal communications. As a rule, these respondents often feel uncomfortable in a large team. At the same time, these specialists are much more effective in carrying out individual work than in group work, are prone to rational decisions, and value others more for their business qualities and clear mind than for responsiveness. At the same time, there are no too low rates of empathy among this sample of respondents.

Graphically, the results of the testing are shown in Fig. 2.

It should be noted that professionals with high empathy values are respected by clients, management, and colleagues, they are often asked for help or advice, which greatly contributes to the implementation of effective pharmaceutical care.

On the contrary, specialists with insufficient empathy values usually demonstrate ineffective behavioral strategies in interpersonal interaction, which may be a consequence of personal characteristics or evidence of ignorance of active forms of participation in the lives of other people.

The next psychological test that we used in the experiment was the M. Davis' multifactorial questionnaire in the adaptation of T.D. Karyagina, N.A. Budagovskaya, S.V. Dubrovskaya, which allows to analyze the phenomenon of empathy as the highest human mental function^(13,14,15).

This questionnaire facilitates the characterization of the phenomenon of empathy in a broader sense, that is, as an appropriate reaction of the subject to the experience of another person. It consists of 28 items, divided into 4 scales (Figure 3).

During the testing, respondents answered the test questions regarding their agreement or disagreement to a certain extent according to the proposed scale rating, the range of which varies from 1 - "completely disagree" to 5 - "completely agree". The points were calculated for each studied scale in accordance with the methodology key. The total empathy index is not calculated.

Thus, the above-mentioned psychological questionnaire is based on a multifactorial approach to the study of empathy and examines it as a series of interconnected components, which work in one

bundle and at the same time are different from each other. At the same time, we analyzed the structural elements of the respondents' empathy from the perspective of the obtained indicators of their empathy level: high, medium and low.

The results of the obtained values on the scale of the questionnaire "Decentration" made it possible to establish that, in general, all the respondents under study adequately assess the tendency of perception, understanding, and consideration of the views and experiences of others. This trend is associated with the success of social functioning and self-esteem. Thus, the average indicators of professionals with high, medium, and low levels of empathy are within the average values on this scale (12-21 points). However, at the same time, respondents with high empathy assess their tendency to take into account the opinion of others to a greater extent, and specialists with a reduced level of empathy – to a lesser extent (Figure 4) Low and high scores on this scale (0-11 points and 22-28 points, respectively) were not detected.

The results of the analysis of indicators on the Compassion scale showed that the values obtained in professionals with different levels of empathy are also within the norms (15-26 points – average values). However, highly empathetic professionals are also more prone to compassion. At the same time, there are no low and high values on this scale (0-14 points and 27-28 points) – Fig. 5.

The value according to the scale of Empathic Care technique, which is shown in Fig. 6, allows us to assess the tendencies of the professionals regarding the feeling of warmth, compassion, and concern for people and allows identifying their general attitude and sympathy for the feelings of others.

Thus, it was found that professionals with high empathy scores have high values on the above scale (23-28 points). They are sufficiently open to express sympathy and compassion for the troubles of other people, as well as being able to sincerely and openly express a desire to help. It should be noted that the above feelings should be differentiated from simple emotional sensitivity and susceptibility to the problems of others, emphasizing primarily

their ethical aspect.

Average values on the Emotional Care scale (13-22 points) are inherent in respondents with medium and reduced levels of empathy. At the same time, professionals with reduced empathy to a lesser extent are able to assess feelings aimed at others: their scores are close to low (0-12 points on the scale).

Finally, the results of the obtained indicators on the Empathic Distress scale are very informative – Figure 7.

It was found that feelings of inconvenience and discomfort, which are a response to the emotions of others, are in the average range of norms (9-18 points) for all respondents with different values of empathy. At the same time, to a lesser extent, this feeling is inherent in professionals with reduced values of empathy. In tense situations of interpersonal interaction, these specialists may experience irritation that arises in connection with the experiences of another person, which leads to the desire to get rid of this feeling in any way and can be characterized both by partial ignoring the feelings of others and providing them with appropriate assistance not for the sake of their well-being, but for the sake of maintaining own peace. At the same time, there were no low scores (0-8 points) and high scores (19-28 points) on this scale.

Thus, the results of the study showed that the ability to sincerely empathize is a very valuable quality that should be sufficiently developed in pharmacy professionals as representatives of a socially significant profession. At the same time, it should be remembered that due to a very developed empathy, emotional dependence on others can be formed, that is, psychological vulnerability, which can lead to a complication of effective socialization and even lead to the emergence of various psychosomatic diseases.

4. Conclusions.

The analysis of literature sources on the issue under study allows us to emphasize that empathy in the pharmaceutical field helps to achieve maxi-

mum understanding in the pharmacist-visitor system, which contributes to the qualitative provision of pharmaceutical care by professionals within the framework of pharmaceutical care, which is an unconditional component of humanization in the healthcare system. At the same time, it should be remembered that a person who is too empathic is also more emotionally vulnerable, which can have negative consequences for own emotional state.

Indicators of the level of empathy of pharmacy professionals were identified and analyzed and its structural elements were investigated. It was found that the majority of the surveyed specialists have high and average empathy scores – 40.3% and

46.3%, respectively. Most of the structural elements of empathy of these subjects are within the optimal limits of the values of the established norms, which indicates the optimal level of their psychological adaptation to the probable complications of interpersonal cooperation associated with the psycho-emotional state of opponents.

At the same time, professionals with insufficient empathy should remember the possibility of developing empathy abilities, which can be achieved on their own in the process of personal growth and the desire for self-actualization, as well as optimized by engaging appropriate specialists - practical psychologists - for this purpose. □

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