IDEOMOTORIC TRAINING AS A TOOL FOR PROFESSIONAL RELIABILITY IMPROVEMENT AMONG POLICE OFFICERS

ИДЕОМOTORНАЯ ТРЕНИРОВКА КАК СРЕДСТВО ПОВЫШЕНИЯ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЙ НАДЕЖНОСТИ НАЛИЦИЙСКИХ

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Abstract. Professional activity of police officers is often related to extreme situations stimulating the emergence and development of stress conditions. Police officers, who were not trained in dealing with stress, in extreme situations, can act in a professionally inappropriate manner and put at risk (including risk of death) those involved in a situation, including police officers themselves, and deteriorate the efficiency of resolving the situation of offence. Lack of skills on how to cope with stress significantly undermines normal activity of police officers. The article discusses the theoretical basis of the authors’ developed ideomotoric training program designed for police officers, as well as its validation results. The program aims to decrease the negative consequences of being emotionally involved in stressful situations and to enhance the individual resistance to stress among police officers. The special attention is focused on professional reliability improvement among police officers resulting from participation in the ideomotoric training program.

KEYWORDS: IDEOMOTORIC TRAINING, MENTAL IMAGE, SELF REGULATION, STRESS, STRESS FACTORS, EMOTIONAL REACTION TO STRESS.

1. Introduction

Ensuring collective security is the primary task of police officers, especially taking into account the changing conditions in Europe. The number of situations that, potentially, can be dangerous in terms of provocative actions leading to aggravation of the situation in the region and the confrontation of parties has been increasing. Accordingly, increased the number of emergency situations with the involvement of police officers. Current scientific views indicate [1,2] stress as the main component of extreme police activity. Increased levels of stress accompanied with lack of coping skills endanger normal life of police officers, lead to professional errors and discipline violations, decrease the sense of responsibility, reduce the quality of family life [3], result in negative health conditions [4, 5], can lead to sleep deprivation, alcohol abuse, psychological discomfort (anxiety, frustration, depression), community complaints and dismissals from work [5]. Many of abovementioned facts can be explained by the development of emotional disturbances leading to destructive changes in the personality of a police officer (professional deformation) and efficiency of his/her labour. Among police officers, the following negative emotional responses to stress has been revealed: anger, agitation, recklessness, anxiety, frustration, uncertainty [7]. When blocking an urge to act in a stressful situation, aggressive impulses can result in an unacceptable harmful behaviour towards other people (disciplinary violations and breach of orders) or be projected onto people who are not involved in the situation (colleagues, friends, family members). Frustration and lack of confidence can lead to the learned helplessness development, a condition which is characterized by apathy, detachment and inaction in response to events beyond the control of an individual [6]. Anxiety (constant inner restlessness) can be manifested in reduced concentration abilities, anticipation of negative consequences, uneasiness, irritability, restlessness, increased fatigue levels, which leads to erroneous actions, alcoholism.

Therefore, improving psychological resistance to stress in police officers is professionally important because it is directly related to security safeguarding. For this task, the method of ideomotoric training was chosen among the scope of methods used for learning self-regulation of negative psycho-emotional conditions. The benefits of this method are short implementation period, internal resource management, increased stress resistance, regulation of emotional state, and elimination of negative thoughts.

According to previous research, in an ideomotoric act mind and body are jointly engaged. The physiological mechanism of ideomotoric reactions was first explained by Pavlov, who highlighted the role of language and visual images forming the act. Later, Luriya described the mechanism of conditioned reflex reactions that lead to the desired result by means of re-playing a mental image, while performing conscious muscle relaxation. As a result of this training, in extreme/nonstandard situations motor movements provoke automatic response on the unconscious level. The basis of this approach is a mental repetition of own actions in different situations, thus, it can be suitable in police training.

Modern theory of bioinformatics (Taylor, 1995) focuses on a mental image creation as a self-regulation skill. The self-regulation process involves two components: pre-programming activities and program manifestation in behaviour. Therefore, the mechanisms of an ideomotoric act can be implemented for improving psychological regulation skills. According to Sandomirsky [8], the main conditions for an ideomotoric act are a mental image creation and a minor relaxation. To comply with these conditions in the self-regulation training program for police officers, a reverse mechanism of ideomotoric reactions was implemented, i.e. the execution or simulation of certain simple movements promote generation of individual images and exempt from intrusive thoughts or negative emotions. The exercises implemented in the program consisted of short simple actions performed simultaneously in an individual rhythm. Ideomotoric movements performed in such a mode result in relaxation, which enables activation of mental images and set ups. Before the start of the training, each participant reported which would be the desired state or feeling when exposed to an extreme situation. It was required in order to create an accurate image of the desired psychophysiological state. As a result, in a stressful situation, the activation of a dominant mental image leads to desired physiological conditions and emotional reactions on the automaticity level. The following patterns of the ideomotoric training were taken into account during the training program implementation: participants’ motivation and systematic and distinct sequence of the exercises. When analysing the results of the ideomotoric training its delayed effect was considered as a pattern: for each individual the effect of the training can be manifested after different time periods.
2. Method

The current research is a pilot study aiming to analyse the efficiency of the ideomotoric training method.

The main hypothesis: there is a difference in the modality of emotional responses to stress in a group of police officers who underwent the ideomotoric training and those who did not participate in the training.

Participants: Thirty police officers employed by the State Police, all men. Participation was voluntary. Sample type – a convenience sample. Participants were divided into two groups: experimental (ideomotoric training, N = 15), and control (N = 15). Participants' mean age in the experimental group M = 34.5, in control group M = 34.4.

Measures: Emotional Stress Reaction Questionnaire (ESRQ) developed by Larsson [9].

Training instrument: Ideomotoric training program.

Procedure: The study was run from January to March 2016. Before the ideomotoric training, a pre-test (ESRQ) was administered in both groups to evaluate the dominant emotional reaction to stress - positive or negative. The test was used retrospectively. Previously, it was revealed that contacts with people in a state of panic and contacts with aggressive-minded people are the situations treated by the police officers as the most extreme and stressful, potentially leading to losses, very dangerous and demanding large energy inputs. The most often mentioned situation, a contact with aggressive-minded people, was selected to assess the emotional response to stress. After the evaluation, participants assigned to the experimental group participated in a 10-session ideomotoric training. Total training time - 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 min). After the ideomotoric training, a post-test was administered to both groups (ESRQ) to evaluate the dominant emotional reaction to stress after the ideomotoric training in the experimental group and without training in the control group.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the pre-test results obtained with the ESRQ questionnaire revealed heterogeneity of the emotional response to stress in the experimental and control groups (Fig.1). In both groups, the reaction to stress was negative, however, in the experimental group the performance was slightly worse. The range of indicators in the post-test condition was substantial in both groups. The post-test revealed that after the ideomotoric training in the experimental group the reaction to stress improved and became positive, whereas, in the control group the indices did not change demonstrating that emotional reaction to stress remained at the same negative level.

Table 1 shows mean ranks in experimental and control groups before and after the ideomotoric training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.17</td>
<td>182.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18.83</td>
<td>282.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Training</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>345.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>120.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 demonstrates the U-criterion values and probabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before Training</th>
<th>After Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>62.50</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>182.50</td>
<td>120.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-2.090</td>
<td>-4.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data analysis revealed that there were statistically significant differences in emotional responses to stress in the experimental and control groups. Before the ideomotoric training, the negative stress response was more pronounced in the experimental group (Mdn = -10), than in the control group (Mdn = -9), U = 62.5, p = .034. However, after the ideomotoric training conducted in the experimental group, the emotional response to stress in this group become positive (Mdn = 4), in contrast to the control group (Mdn = -9), U = 0, p < .001.

According to Larsson [9], positive emotional reaction to stress indicated by the scale points out that the subject perceives one’s condition after a stressful situation as an active. Thus, police officers see themselves in a state of alert, indicating tranquillity, activity, concentration and focus. Negative responses to stress are associated with a sense of threat, indifference, sense of uncertainty and anxiety, anger, uncontrolled aggression. The results of the study revealed the effectiveness of ideomotoric training in the experimental group, despite the short duration of its implementation.

4. Conclusions

The results of this study allow to draw the following conclusions:
- The main operation hypothesis, that there is a difference in the modality of emotional responses to stress in a group of police officers who underwent the ideomotoric training and those who did not participate in the training, has been confirmed.
- Statistically significant differences in emotional responses to stress in the experimental and control groups revealed.
- The obtained results indicate the effectiveness of the ideomotoric training, despite screening conditions.
- The ideomotoric training allows to change the psycho-physiological and emotional state of police officers exposed to stressful situations.

5. References


