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BUILDING MENTALIZING AND EMPATHETIC RELATIONSHIPS OF PROBATION OFFICERS WITH SUPERVISED PERSONS. A PILOT STUDY*

Introduction: Both mentalization and empathy are forms of social cognition. They allow us to understand what is going on inside another person. Empathy is a kind of “gift” in natural resources, the “binder of humanity” that motivates us to fully respect the experiences and attitudes of other people. Empathic and mentalizing resources can be used in education, therapy, social care, and social rehabilitation.

Research Aim: The aim of this article was to determine the level and characteristics of mentalizing in a group of probation officers. This phenomenon makes a “blank spot” to be explored in this professional group. The empathic orientation of probation officers enforcing probation measures was also assessed. The results obtained from probation officers were compared to those obtained from a group of social workers. It was examined how the capability and motivation to mentalize oneself and others were related to emotional-cognitive empathy.

Research Method: The article will describe the results obtained using the Mentalization Scale (MentS) developed by Dimitrijević et al. – in the Polish adaptation by Jańczak. The level of empathy in its global dimension and in the scope of its syndromes reflecting the complexity of the phenomenon were determined using the Empathic Understanding of Other People Questionnaire developed by Węgliński.

Results: No statistically significant correlation was found between the dimensions of mentalization and characteristics of emotional and cognitive empathy. A high level of mentalization and a low level of general and emotional empathy were noted in the probation officers under study.

Conclusion: Obtained results suggest the need for future explorations aimed to use their findings in social rehabilitation.

Keywords: mentalizing capability, empathic potential of probation officers

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INTRODUCTION

As a rule, the relationships between social services workers and persons in conflict with the law are formalised and prescriptive. Meanwhile, any form of support or assistance becomes ineffective when it is driven by force and formal order. For this reason, effective solving of problems of individuals at risk of social isolation or exclusion requires formation of an alliance, entering into an agreement between social services workers and their wards (Rurka et al., 2013).

A probation officer, as a representative of humanitarian social services, must respect the right of the sentenced persons to determine important, meaningful goals and values in their lives, as well as ways of their realisation (Utrat-Milecki, 2010). However, between 2013 and 2016, the relationships between probation officers and sentenced persons were governed by case management principles. In the described strategy, the most important task of probation services is to ensure citizen security by reducing recidivism of sentenced persons (Andrews et al., 1990; Robinson, 2002; Stańdo-Kawecka, 2020). In that manner, the supervised persons are treated as individuals posing different levels of risk to social security, and not as individuals at risk (Kemshall, 2002). In the management-based approach to work pursued by probation officers, communication competences and supporting skills important for the direct relationships, such as mentalizing and empathy, may lose their significance (Raine, 2002; Węgliński, 2021). Therefore, it is well-reasoned to search for an answer to the question whether in striving to prevent recidivism of the convicted individuals there is still some space for personalised contacts between probation officers and wards. Probation officers extend supervision over the convicted persons being at different risk of “recidivism”, and this, on the other hand, translates into the need to reconcile the monitoring and discipline-imposing activities with regular encouragement of the convicts to the building of a pro-social identity. Motivating a supervised individual to implement a constructive and pro-social change in their life requires probation officers to display specific mentalizing and emphatic competences enabling them to aptly anticipate behaviours and attitudes, as well as to discover the perspective from which the ward will approach the emerging stressors or frustration-inducing situations. The analysis of the literature, however, will in fact not provide any information about the mentalizing capabilities of probation officers. Mentalizing is an imaginative mental activity that allows one to interpret human behaviour as mental states, assuming the intentions of an individual in whom a given behaviour is observed. This is a cognitive and affective capability, enabling one to understand one’s own thoughts and feelings, as well as those of other individuals. Owing to mentalizing capability, the behaviour of others may be perceived as making sense and meaning, which allows for a more in-depth analysis and anticipation of further behaviour (Allen et al., 2014). Mentalizing capacity is a form of social cognition consisting in exercising imaginary, mental activity allowing one to treat one’s own behaviour and the

behaviour of others in intentional categories (Fonagy & Luyten, 2009). An important component of mentalizing is the decentering ability, that is the ability to go beyond one's own perspective in order to better understand thoughts, feelings and motivations of our interlocutor. Decentering is the opposite of egocentricity, as an individual using their imagination creates a world conceived by others. This is a point in which the mentalization process meets cognitive empathy which consists in the ability to recognise mental states of others, to understand the circumstances and reasons behind other people's emotions and attribution of mental states. The object of empathy responds to a signal emitted by others and tries to understand the reasons behind the behaviour of the observed individual (Davis, 2001). Mentalizing is the ability to mentally and emotionally fine tune to our interlocutor, and this provides grounds to feeling empathy (Taylor, 2022). Mentalizing capability appears to include some areas of cognitive empathy (emphatic accuracy), that is the ability to take the perspective of another person, to understand their experiences and emotions (Allen et al., 2014). In addition, mentalizing plays a significant role in the regulation of one's own emotional states in relation to other people's emotions, but it is not emotional empathy – that is the ability to sympathise with other people's pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Research has shown that excessive emotional empathy may restrain mentalization (Górska & Marszał, 2014; Szrejder, 2019). Mentalizing has a lot in common with empathy, however besides the ability to “empathize” with another person's reality, an important component of this process is the ability to share the experiences and observations of our interlocutor. In this manner, the emphatic existence with another person, free from any assessment, provides natural grounds for triggering concern for another person found in an emphatic relationship. Building of emphatic relationships at work with supervised individuals protects officers from “hiding behind” the seeming mask of a clerk. Therefore, it will be interesting to identify the mentalizing and empathic potential of probation officers.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

The paper aims to analyse the mentalizing capability and empathy in probation officers responsible for enforcement of decisions in criminal matters, as well as to identify the relationship between mentalization and characteristics of emotional and cognitive empathy. This is the first attempt to determine mentalizing capabilities and relationships between mentalizing orientation and characteristics of empathy in probation officers under study. As regards the analysed mentalizing and empathic capabilities, the following research problems were formulated:

1. What are the characteristics and level of mentalization in probation officers under study?



2. To what extent the respondents' age and length of service as a probation officer determine their level of mentalizing?
3. Are there any differences in the overall level and characteristics of empathy in the responding probation officers when compared to the representative group, as well as in comparison to the group of social workers, and if so, what are they?
4. What are the correlations between the examined mentalizing indicators and characteristics of emotional and cognitive empathy in the group of responding probation officers?

In response to the third research problem, the following working hypothesis was put forward: It should be expected that probation officers shall reveal a statistically significant lower level of emotional empathy in comparison to the representative group and social workers. The above hypothesis stems from research findings showing that probation officers display low levels of empathic sharing of experiences, and of emotional empathy (Grudziowska, 2017; Żytyńska-Chwast, 2017). The remaining questions are of diagnostic and descriptive nature, and they do not require working hypotheses.

RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The authors used a cross-sectional study with diagnostic survey (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2001; Pilch & Bauman, 2001). The paper will provide a description of the results obtained using the Mentalization Scale (MentS) developed by Dimitrijević et al. (2018) – translated into Polish and validated by Jańczak (2021), as well as the Empathic Understanding of Others Questionnaire (Polish acronym: KRE) developed by Węgliński (1983, 2010, 2011).

The sample included randomly selected professional probation officers. The officers received ready-to-complete questionnaires by post or e-mail, or they downloaded a specially designed diagnostic guide during a meeting devoted to assessment of the course of their service and tasks envisaged by the reform of enforcement of probation measures. The paper will describe the results obtained from the group of 40 professional probation officers. Female respondents who accounted for 77% of the sample prevailed in the study group. Mean age of the probation officers under study was 51 years. Vast majority of probation officers were aged between 45 and 55 years (70%). Mean length of service as a probation officer in the described group was 21 years. The largest number of individuals had worked as a probation officer for 16 to 25 years (58%). The respondents had a well-established marital situation (97%). All officers have confirmed their master's degree. Empathy scores obtained from the responding probation officers will be additionally compared with those of a group of social workers of equal size

who failed to differ from the officers in terms of the gender and age structure. Among social workers on the other hand, there prevailed individuals with upper secondary education (78%).

STATISTICAL DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

In statistical analysis of the scores, was used to compare study variables between the groups after checking whether they comply with the *t*-test normal distribution assumption for independent samples, whereas correlations between datasets were calculated using Pearson's *r* test. Statistical analyses were run using the IBM SPSS Statistic software.

RESULTS

Results obtained using the Mentalization Scale (MentS) will be presented first. In order to accurately identify the characteristics of mentalizing orientation, analysed data were divided into high scores confirming mentalizing capabilities (underlined "4" and "5") and low scores meaning absence of mentalizing capabilities (highlighted "1" or "2"). Since MentS features ten diagnostic items with reverse scoring, their substance in the tables was written down in a form indicating the mentalizing capability.

Table 1.

Distribution of characteristics of mentalizing oneself (MentS-S) in the group of responding probation officers

Characteristics	Officers (<i>n</i> = 40)	
	<i>N</i>	%
When I get upset, I am sure whether I am sad, afraid or angry		
low score (1–2 pts)	7	17.5
high score (4–5 pts)	30	75
I can often explain, even to myself, why I did something		
low score (1–2 pts)	3	7.5
high score (4–5 pts)	27	67.5
I do want to find out something about myself that I will not like		
low score (1–2 pts)	3	7.5
high score (4–5 pts)	31	77.5
I find it easy to admit to myself that I am sad, hurt, or afraid		
low score (1–2 pts)	4	10
high score (4–5 pts)	30	75
I do like to think about my problems		

low score (1–2 pts)	8	20
high score (4–5 pts)	17	42.5
I am not confused about my exact feelings		
low score (1–2 pts)	1	2.5
high score (4–5 pts)	30	75
It is easy for me to find adequate words to express my feelings		
low score (1–2 pts)	8	20
high score (4–5 pts)	24	60
While people talk about their feelings and needs, my thoughts never drift away.		
low score (1–2 pts)	2	5.0
high score (4–5 pts)	36	90

Source: Author’s own study.

It turned out that nearly all responding probation officers are interested in feelings and needs of their interlocutors – *While people talk about their feelings and needs, my thoughts never drift away* (90%). On the other hand, 75.5% of the respondents is very willing to find out something about themselves, even things they may not like – *I do want to find out something about myself that I will not like*. What is more, three-quarters of the responding officers believe that in different situations, even when they are upset, they are able to correctly identify their feelings – *I am not confused about my exact feelings* (75%), *When I get upset, I am sure whether I am sad, afraid or angry* (75%). The smallest number of officers, on the other hand, obtained high score in areas that are related to regular observation of the problems experienced – *I do like to think about my problems* (42.5%), or beliefs about verbalising their feelings in a correct manner – *It is easy for me to find adequate words to express my feelings* (60%). In general, the responding probation officers see themselves as having considerable capabilities of mentalizing oneself. Collected data point to exercising imaginative mental activity leading to correct interpretation of one’s own behaviour and mental states, even in stressful situations. It will be interesting on the other hand, to identify the responding probation officers’ capability to mentalize as a form of activity enabling them to understand what is going on inside another person.

Table 2.
Distribution of characteristics of mentalizing others (MentS-O) in the group of responding probation officers

Characteristics	Officers (n = 40)	
	N	%
When I make conclusions about other people’s personality traits, I carefully observe what they say and do		
low score (1–2 pts)	0	0.0
high score (4–5 pts)	37	92.5

I can recognize other people's feelings		
low score (1–2 pts)	1	2.5
high score (4–5 pts)	35	87.5
I can usually recognize what makes people feel uneasy		
low score (1–2 pts)	2	5.0
high score (4–5 pts)	36	90.0
I can sympathize with other people's feelings		
low score (1–2 pts)	1	2.5
high score (4–5 pts)	36	90.0
I can make good predictions of other people's behaviour when I know their beliefs and feelings		
low score (1–2 pts)	5	12.5
high score (4–5 pts)	24	60.0
Sometimes I can understand someone's feelings before s/he tells me anything		
- low score (1 – 2 pts)	5	12.5
- high score (4–5 pts)	25	62.5
I can describe significant traits of people who are close to me with precision and in detail		
low score (1–2 pts)	2	5.0
high score (4–5 pts)	33	82.5
People tell me that I understand them and give them sound advice		
low score (1–2 pts)	4	10.0
high score (4–5 pts)	32	80.0
I can easily describe what I feel		
low score (1–2 pts)	4	10.0
high score (4–5 pts)	25	62.5
One of the most important things that children should learn is to express their feelings and wishes		
low score (1–2 pts)	4	10.0
high score (4–5 pts)	31	77.5

Source: Author's own study.

It can be noticed that the vast majority of probation officers are able to carefully observe their interlocutors, to analyse things being said and recognise other people's personality traits, as the vast majority of probation officers agreed with the statement – *When I make conclusions about other people's personality traits, I carefully observe what they say and do* (92.5%), as well as they can *recognize what makes people feel uneasy* (90%), *recognize other people's feelings* (87.5%) and *sympathise with other people's feelings* (90%), which may mean correct naming of feelings and emotions of their interlocutor, resulting in establishment of in-depth interpersonal relationships. This type of experience occurred in the responding probation officers who confirmed the accuracy of the statement *people tell me that I understand them and give them sound advice* (80%).

Also, it turned out that the responding officers have no problem with *describing significant traits of people who are close to [them] with precision and in detail* (82.5%). However, according to probation officers under study, in the relationships

with other people besides behaviour and appearance, accurate mentalizing is determined by the knowledge of their “beliefs and feelings” (60%). Further in the text, we shall present findings depicting the responding probation officers’ motivation to mentalize.

Table 3.

Distribution of characteristics of the motivation to mentalize (MentS-M) in the group of responding probation officers

Characteristics	Officers (<i>n</i> = 40)	
	<i>N</i>	%
I find it important to understand reasons behind my behaviour		
low score (1–2 pts)	0	0.0
high score (4–5 pts)	39	97.5
I often think about other people and their behaviour		
low score (1–2 pts)	3	7.5
high score (4 – 5 pts)	34	85.0
When someone annoys me, I try to understand why I react in that way		
low score (1 – 2 pts)	1	2.5
high score (4–5 pts)	31	77.5
I like wasting time trying to understand in detail other people’s behaviour		
low score (1–2 pts)	5	12.5
high score (4–5 pts)	29	72.5
I find it important to understand what happens in my relationships with people close to me		
low score (1–2 pts)	3	7.5
high score (4–5 pts)	37	92.5
To understand someone’s behaviour, we need to know her/his thoughts, wishes, and feelings		
low score (1–2 pts)	6	15
high score (4–5 pts)	31	77.5
I often talk about emotions with people that I am close to		
low score (1–2 pts)	6	15.0
high score (4–5 pts)	28	70.0
I like reading books and newspaper articles about psychological subjects		
low score (1–2 pts)	6	15.0
high score (4–5 pts)	32	80.0
I have always been interested in why people behave in certain ways		
low score (1–2 pts)	2	5.0
high score (4–5 pts)	34	85.0
Since we all depend on life circumstances, it makes sense to think of other people’s intentions or wishes		
low score (1–2 pts)	1	2.5
high score (4–5 pts)	37	92.5

Source: Author’s own study.



What follows from the compiled information is that nearly all responding probation officers find it important and meaningful to understand the reasons behind their behaviour (97%), and to be aware of what is going on in their relationships with people they are close to (92.5%). Moreover, the respondents believe that *since we all depend on life circumstances, it makes sense to think of other people's intentions or wishes* (92.5%). The vast majority of responding probation officers declared that they often think about other people and their behaviour (85%), and that they strive to understand the situation and causes or reasons behind someone else's emotions and behaviour, especially when our interlocutor annoys us (77.5%). This is particularly important in working with individuals who committed offences in the past.

The scale used to measure mentalizing capabilities offers no sten scores, therefore, raw scores obtained from the responding probation officers were compared to the study on adults conducted by Jańczak (2021). In the table, next to arithmetic means (M1 and M2), standard deviation values (SD1 and SD2) were calculated. Due to a diversified number of items per specific scales, arithmetic means were divided by the number of the scales and the obtained results were provided in the brackets in M1 and M2 column, which will enable their reference to the five-point scale (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Level of mentalizing capabilities of the responding probation officers vs. adult subjects

Level	Probation officers		Adults (Jańczak, 2021)		M1 - M2
	M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
mentalizing oneself (MentS-S)	33.32 (4.16)	5.11	27.90 (3.49)	5.80	5.42
mentalizing others (MentS-O)	39.70 (3.97)	4.66	38.20 (3.82)	5.60	1.50
motivation to mentalize (MentS-M)	42.40 (4.24)	4.97	38.80 3.88	6.35	3.60
overall level of mentalizing	115.42 (4.12)	11.40	105.00 (3.75)	13.70	10.42

Source: Author's own study.

In view of the above comparisons, it may be noticed that the responding probation officers obtained higher scores than the adult subjects in all aspects of mentalizing. The largest differences were recorded for the indicators – *mentalizing oneself* (M1 - M2 = 5.42) and *motivation to mentalize* (M1 - M2 = 3.60). It should be stressed that in the group of responding probation officers the overall mentalizing indicator was significantly higher than the level of mentalizing recorded in the validation group (M1 - M2 = 10.42). While analysing the means after division by the number of items for individual subscales, it can be observed that the calculated

values are higher or slightly lower than 4 points, which may be interpreted as a high level of the analysed indicators of mentalizing.

In addition, while analysing the overall level of mentalizing in the responding probation officers, two additional variables were taken into account: years of professional experience and age. Respondents who were older and worked longer years as probation officers than the mean values recorded for the entire sample, were included in the group of older officers with more years of professional experience. Obtained results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

The overall level of mentalizing in the responding probation officers in consideration of the variables: years of professional experience and age

Categories		Mentalizing		Student's <i>t</i> -test <i>p</i> <
		<i>M</i>	<i>Sd</i>	
Years of professional experience	short	119.40	8.62	0.01*
	longer	111.45	12.61	
Age	younger	118.75	9.34	0.03*
	older	112.10	12.50	

* $p < 0.05$

Source: Author's own study.

It can be observed that the responding probation officers with fewer years of professional experience had a statistically significant higher belief in their mentalizing capabilities ($p < 0.01$). It turned out that in the group of responding probation officers the overall level of mentalizing capabilities decreases along with gaining of professional experience, which may hinder the establishment of relationships based on recognising the mental states of supervised individuals. What is more, younger probation officers believe to have significantly higher mentalizing capabilities ($p < 0.03$). It may be cautiously assumed that with age and more years of professional experience, mentalizing capabilities of the responding probation officers decrease.

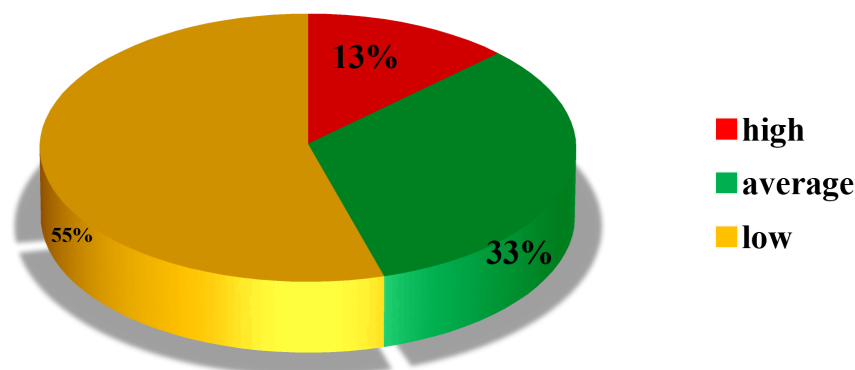
At this point, we shall present information about characteristics and level of emotional and cognitive empathy identified using the Emphatic Understanding of Others Questionnaire (Polish acronym: KRE). At the beginning, raw scores related to overall empathy were converted to sten scores developed for KRE questionnaire, thus demarcating three levels of empathy: high (sten scores 7–10), average (sten scores 5–6); low (sten scores 1–4). Data prepared in this manner are presented in Figure 1.

While analysing data presented in the diagram, it can be immediately observed that the responding group of probation officers predominantly display a low level of emotional and cognitive empathy (55%). Also, it turned out that every third person exercising probation supervision presents an average overall level of empathy (33%) when compared to the validation group. In the entire group of probation officers, only five individuals presented a high level of emotional and cognitive

empathy (12%). Attention should be drawn to the fact that in the study group low and average level of empathy was reported in as many as 88% of the responding probation officers. It can be found that the deficiency in emphatic capabilities is very clear. For this reason, it was decided to run a comparative analysis of emotional and cognitive empathy in the responding probation officers with a group of social workers of equal size.

Figure 1.

Overall level of empathy in the responding probation officers after conversion of raw scores into sten scores



Source: Author's own study.

Besides overall empathy, KRE Questionnaire can also be used to identify its basic components (syndromes). Due to the varied numbers of items in specific subscales of the questionnaire, arithmetic means were divided by the number of the scales and the results were recorded in the brackets in the M1 and M2 column. Participants' responses to individual statements included in the questionnaire were rated using a four-point scale, from "0" to "3". This will enrich the description of scores obtained for specific syndromes. All calculations are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.

Level of emphatic tendencies in the group of responding probation officers and social workers

Variables	Probation officers		Social workers		M-M2
	M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
Sympathizing with other people's experiences (Syndrome-I)	20.23 (2.45)	3.35	21.48 (2.39)	2.97	-1.25 L
Sympathizing with other people's pleasant and unpleasant experiences (Syndrome-II)	8.40 (1.68)	1.99	10.20 (2.04)	2.58	-1.80***
Sensitivity to other people's experiences (Syndrome-III)	12.90 (1.84)	2.69	14.35 (2.05)	3.10	-1.45*

Readiness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others (Syndrome-IV)	10.05 (1.68)	2.80	12.08 (2.01)	2.65	-2.03***
Empathising with other people's mental states and experiences (Syndrome-V)	5.43 (1.81)	1.17	5.48 (1.83)	1.87	-0.05 L
Total empathy	62.65	8.47	63.58	10.07	-0.93 L

* $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Author's own study.

The mean raw score obtained by the responding probation officers in the KRE Questionnaire was 62.65 ($SD = 8.47$), and by the responding social workers 63.58 ($SD = 10.07$). The questionnaire used in the study was composed of 33 items, the maximum number of points for each diagnostic item was 3. In this manner, the overall score ranged from “0” to “99” points, where “0” reflected a lack of empathy, and “99” points determined its maximum level. However, when compared to sten scores developed for KRE questionnaire, it can be observed that the overall level of empathy in the responding probation officers ($M1 = 62.65$) and social workers ($M2 = 63.58$) is demarcated merely by 4 sten, which reflects an average overall level of empathy. In consideration of the calculations compiled in the table, it may be observed that both the responding probation officers and social workers recorded the highest level of empathy for the syndrome: *sympathising with other people's pleasant and unpleasant experiences* ($M1 = 2.45$, $M2 = 2.39$). This means that the respondents primarily display a well-disposed, friendly approach to the wards and clients, and that they are able to empathise with their interlocutor's experiences, their joy, satisfaction, contentment but also sorrows, anxiety, fear or frustration. Sympathising means establishment of a spiritual bond, closeness, sense of community with the object of empathy (Baron-Cohen, 2014).

The values of arithmetic means (above 2 pts) show that both the responding probation officers and social workers display higher than average capability to empathise with the experiences of the object of empathy. However, from the detailed calculations it follows that probation officers when compared to social workers display a statistically significant lower level of empathy for the following syndromes: *sympathising with other people's pleasant and unpleasant experiences* ($p < 0.001$); *readiness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others* ($p < 0.001$); *sensitivity to other people's experiences* ($p < 0.05$). Based on the statistical analysis of differences between the means, it may be found that probation officers, when compared to social workers, display a significantly lower level of empathy with respect to the ability to *sympathise with other people's pleasant and unpleasant experiences* ($p < 0.001$), and *sensitivity to other people's experiences* ($p < 0.05$), that is emotional components of empathy. What is more, individuals extending probationary supervision when compared to social workers, displayed a significantly lower level of *readiness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others* ($p < 0.001$), that is the component associat-

ed with showing empathic concern considering the specific needs of their wards. The key component of empathy is harmony and sympathising with other people's experiences. However, excessive emotional co-resonating with the object of empathy may restrict if not disable mentalizing (Szrejder, 2019). Due to the differences related to empathy and mentalizing referred to above, it will be interesting to learn whether and what kind of relationships occur between the listed capabilities. In looking for the answer to this question, Pearson's r test was conducted, in consideration of the components of mentalizing, as well as of emotional and cognitive empathy under study. The obtained indicators were compiled in Table 7.

Table 7.

Matrix of Pearson's r correlation coefficients for the variables: mentalizing capabilities and emotional and cognitive empathy

Variables		KRE Total	Syndr. I	Syndr. II	Syndr. III	Syndr. IV	Syndr. V
Overall mentalizing	r	-0.08	0.08	-0.17	0.06	-0.06	-0.20
	p	0.638	0.617	0.302	0.705	0.705	0.221
Mentalizing oneself (MentS-S)	r	-0.21	-0.01	-0.19	-0.10	-0.26	-0.27
	p	0.204	0.986	0.240	0.531	0.101	0.090
Mentalizing others (MentS-O)	r	-0.01	0.13	-0.13	0.07	0.01	-0.03
	p	0.977	0.421	0.431	0.690	0.946	0.843
Motivation to mentalize (MentS-M)	r	0.04	0.07	-0.07	0.19	0.12	-0.14
	p	0.809	0.681	0.674	0.251	0.467	0.375

Source: Author's own study.

Based on data compiled in the table, a general statement may be made that no statistically significant correlations were found between the study variables, both in terms of the overall scores and scores for specific characteristics. It is interesting in the first place that a minor but negative relationship was found between the overall level of mentalizing (MentS) and empathy (KRE) ($r = -0.08$). The most significant yet weak relationship occurred between *mentalizing oneself* and *sympathizing with other people's pleasant and unpleasant experiences* ($r = 0.26$) as well as the *ability to empathize with mental states and experiences of other people* ($r = -0.27$), that is emotional aspects of empathy. As expected, the focus on gaining self-knowledge and understanding one's own mental states reduces the respondents' readiness to respond emotionally to other people's experiences and to empathize with their inner selves. However, the relationships listed above failed to prove to be statistically significant. What is more, no statistically significant positive relationship between the *mentalizing oneself* indicator and cognitive components of empathy, e.g. *sympathizing with other people's experiences* ($r = 0.13$) was identified.

DISCUSSION

Absence of any relationship between the identified mentalizing indicators and aspects of emotional and cognitive empathy means that in the responding group of probation officers the described methods of building social relationships, learning about and understanding of mental states and intentions of other people are not linked to empathising with other people's emotions. Mentalizing capability of probation officers co-exists with a lowered or average level of emotional empathy. This is a highly interesting issue that requires a more in-depth examination in empirical studies.

In general, the responding probation officers revealed to have had high belief in their capabilities to mentalize oneself, others and in their motivation to mentalize. What is more, in all aspects of mentalizing, probation officers obtained higher mean scores than adults examined by Jańczak (2021). It was shown that there were statistically significant differences in the degree of mentalizing due to years of professional experience and age of the responding probation officers to the disadvantage of older respondents and those who worked longer years as a probation officer, which reveals a new area for further empirical analyses. In general, the responding probation officers showed the ability to self-reflect, to draw conclusions regarding their own mental states. They are also prepared to mentalize in the interpersonal context.

In the literature, mentalizing is often combined with cognitive empathy which may constitute the major aspect of mentalizing that is direct perception of the mental states of another person, imagining what other people are thinking and by what they are guided in life, therefore realising the mental states of other people (Allen et al., 2014). However, empathy beyond the cognitive aspect that is perspective-taking also includes the emotional component, as well as the executive component in the form of emphatic concern. Therefore, according to Rosenberg (2016), the mere mental understanding of our interlocutor's problems may be an obstacle on the way to manifesting emotional empathy. The responding probation officers have no problems with manifesting cognitive empathy, which enables them to provide intentional help adjusted to the life circumstances of the object of empathy. However, the study identified a lowered level of overall empathy and characteristics of emotional empathy of the responding probation officers. The demonstrated tendency may be the outcome of long-standing experiences in contacting the sentenced persons who are deficient in the field of positive social feelings, and additionally very often present poorly controlled signs of hostility, if not verbal and physical aggression (Janus-Dębska & Gronkiewicz-Ostaszewska, 2016; Węgliński, 2021; Wójcik, 2010). The found significantly lower overall level of empathy, and lowered scores related to the ability to manifest emotional empathy confirm the assumed working hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

The identified “deficits” in emotional empathy may stem from the nature of probation officers’ professional activities. It should be remembered that manifesting emotional empathy in working with sentenced persons is not an easy task, and it requires having specific communication competences, as these individuals reveal significant deficits in positive social emotions. What is more, they poorly control their hostility, if not verbal and physical aggression towards probation officers. The identified difficulties with manifesting emotional empathy in the relationships with other people indicate that especially the probation officers should receive an advanced-level training in acquisition, improving and consolidation of empathic skills and competences.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The basic limitation of the study was a relatively small sample size, and the fact that it proved impossible to compare the characteristics and levels of mentalizing in probation officers with other professional groups representing social services, as it was done in analysing the characteristics of empathy. It should also be borne in mind that it is very hard to recruit professional probation officers to empirical studies, even when the officers participate in direct trainings devoted to implementation of a new managerial and supervisory model based on case management strategy.

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BUDOWANIE MENTALIZACYJNYCH I EMPATYCZNYCH RELACJI SĄDOWYCH KURATORÓW KARNYCH Z OSOBAMI DOZOROWANYMI. BADANIE PILOTAŻOWE

Wprowadzenie: Zarówno mentalizacja jak i empatia to formy poznania społecznego. Pozwalają nam zrozumieć co dzieje się wewnątrz drugiego człowieka. To swoisty „dar” w zasobach naturalnych, „spoiwo człowieczeństwa” motywujące do pełnego szacunku odbioru doświadczeń i postaw drugiego człowieka. Zasoby empatyczne i mentalizacyjne można wykorzystywać w edukacji, terapii, opiece społecznej, i resocjalizacji.

Cel badań: Celem artykułu było określenie cech mentalizacji sądowych kuratorów karnych. Eksploracja tego zjawiska stanowi wręcz „białą plamę” w tej grupie zawodowej. Dokonano także oceny orientacji empatycznej kuratorów sądowych wykonujących środki probacyjne. Wyniki kuratorów dla dorosłych porównano z grupą pracowników socjalnych. Sprawdzono, w jaki sposób zdolność i motywacja do mentalizowania siebie i innych są powiązane z empatią.

Metoda badań: W artykule zostaną opisane wyniki uzyskane na podstawie Skali Mentalizacji (MentS) Dimitrijevića i in. – w adaptacji Jańczak. Poziom empatii w jej wymiarze globalnym oraz w zakresie syndromów, odzwierciedlających złożoność zjawiska, określono za pomocą Kwestionariusza Rozumienia Empatycznego Innych Ludzi (KRE).

Wyniki: Nie stwierdzono istotnej statystycznie zależności pomiędzy wymiarami mentalizacji a cechami empatii emocjonalno-poznawczej. Odnotowano wysoki poziom mentalizacji oraz niski poziom empatii ogólnej i emocjonalnej badanych kuratorów karnych.

Wnioski: Uzyskane wyniki sugerują potrzebę dalszych eksploracji w tym zakresie w celu wykorzystania ich w resocjalizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: zdolność do mentalizacji, potencjał empatyczny sądowych kuratorów karnych