

## Influence of the extreme profile profession on the meaning of death and searches of the meaning of life consciousness

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**Abstract.** The article studies the influence of professional activities of experts of extreme profiles on the semantic sphere of the professional's personality. An empirical study has allowed to reveal the statistically significant differences in the content of personal concept of death and the life-purpose orientations of rescuers and people, whose professional activity is not related to the extreme situations. It is proved that a more acute awareness of his existence finiteness stimulates the rescuer to use the allotted time of life maximally, poses the question about the life comprehension, and the responsibility for its content, about its special value.

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### Introduction

Dichotomy of life and death – is the main existential dichotomy and it consists in the fact that the fact of human death is inevitable, and a person knows about it. However, no knowledge of death will not be able to relieve the person of it and don't cancel that fact that death is not a part of life, and its opposite point [1; p.17]. In this regard, resolving the problem of dichotomy is only possible in the knowledge of it in your life and in the acceptance of this given. This finding gets a special meaning for the rescuers, who are more often than others faced with the extreme situations, associated with the vital threats to the professionals and with the death of participants of any tragic events.

Many authors, both national and foreign Psychology [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11] consider the phenomenon of death as an important determinant of human personality development, where the personality development is understood as a continuous process of creation and destruction of the subjective world vision, during which a person is faced with both acquisitions and losses. No doubt, the experience of confrontation with death is the one situation, in which a person begins to show its activity by realizing the authenticity of his existence, well as is a reason of changing in the ideological position, life-purpose and value orientations. The sense-making values and motives of person are born with the human internal choices and acquire a personal sense in the development process; the criterion of such development is the relationship to death. The death as an inevitable phenomenon gives

plenty of opportunities for a person personality changes. Therefore the study of mindsets in relation to the death may shed some light on the mindsets of people in relation to their lives and to its basic values.

The study subject is the features of death vision (personal concept of death) and life-purpose orientations of rescuers.

120 rescuers (Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk) aged between 21 and 40 years acted as the subjects. The control group consisted of employees of higher and secondary educational institutions aged between 20 and 40 years (120 people). All subjects are males. The study was conducted during 2013.

Hypothesis: extreme situations, in which the rescuer's professional activities are realized more often, make an impact on the content of personal concept of death and contribute to the actualization, more increased consciousness and generation of new meanings of life.

### Empirical data collection methods

- Questionnaires A and B. Questionnaire A was drafted so way as to reveal the actuality of the theme of death, well as to study the relation of each subject to the death. Questionnaire A consists of nine open and closed questions. Questionnaire B consists of fourteen open and closed questions, aimed at studying the meaning of life, attitude toward the past, present and future, and main life values.

- Method of "Non-verbal semantic differential" (P.M. Bentler, A.L. La Voie) is aimed at revealing the perceptions about the expressed

graphically category (in our experiment - the category of "death"). The factorial analysis of representations of death in each group of respondents was held by using five the non-verbal factors of semantic differential, which reflect: "Evaluation" - an emotional relation of the subject to the category under consideration; "Power" - the volitional characteristics of the subject in respect of category under consideration; "Activity" - how the category under consideration causes the activity of the subject; "Ordering" (systematicity) - the internal consistency of described category; "Darkness" (prosocial) - typicality of described category.

- Method of "Incomplete sentences" is a projective method and is aimed at identifying the deep content of term "meaning of life".

- "Life-purpose orientation" Test (LFO) is an adapted version of the "Purpose-in-Life" Test (PIL) by James Crumbo and Leonard Maholik (adaptation of K. Muzdybaeva, ISSI, USSR Academy of Sciences, Leningrad, 1981; D. Leonteva, 1986-1989.) and includes the following scales: 1. Purpose in life; 2. Life process; 3. Effectiveness of life; 4. Locus of control - I am; 5. Locus of control - a life; 6. General life comprehension. This test is aimed at identifying the system of life meanings [12; pp. 9, 13].

- "System of values" Test of M. Rokich is aimed at revealing the hierarchy of basic terminal and instrumental values of the individual.

Along with the primary processing and content analysis of empirical data, the statistical methods have been used in the study. The mathematical treatment was carried out using:  $\varphi^*$  criterion - Fischer's angular transformation; Mann-Whitney U test

## Results and their discussion

Content analysis results of answers to the Questionnaire A:

- Have you ever thought your lifetime is limited by death? The rescuers more often think about the finiteness of their lives, than those surveyed from the control group. In the rescuers' answers the value of human life, which has a clear priority for them, is more often stressed. The education officers more often answered that they thought about the limitation of their lives by death only in that period of their lives, when they directly faced with the death of family members or well familiar people ( $\varphi^*_{emp}=2.63$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ).

- Do the thoughts of death impact on your life? According to respondents, the thought of death allow them to change the view on many things, give a sense to their lives. However, the answers of respondents in the control group more often than the answers of rescuers state that the thought of death

cause worry, despair, fear. At the same time in the answers of rescuers more often the thought of death and the very fact of death are recognized as natural and inevitable ( $\varphi^*_{emp}=2.17$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ).

- Can you imagine your own death? The answers indicate that the thought of your own death, one way or another run through each person's head, but on the personal concept of death formation the experience of confrontation with the death has a special influence. So that the rescuers more likely than those respondents in the control group name a car accident, an accident as the possible causes of their own death ( $\varphi^*_{emp}=2.96$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ).

- Have you had an experience of encounter with death? The majority of the subjects had an experience of confrontation with death. The respondents in the control group more often talked about the fact that such experience has made them to think about their own death, has caused a sense of "value and fragility of life." The rescuers more often note that the experience of confrontation with death increases the value and significance of people around for them, returns them to the thoughts of unspeakable, and undone, fills the life with specific content. In the group of rescuers the answers have the significantly greater number of worldview categories, where the subject is not "I am", but others. ( $\varphi^*_{emp}=2.96$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ).

- How do you think what the death is? Most frequent answers in both groups are as follows: death is seen as a transition from one state into another, transition into the more perfect world; vision of death as the necessity, inevitability, and regularity. The rescuers in contrast to the control group respondents see the value of death in giving the meaning of life. In their opinion, the condition of limited lifetime activates the person, fills his life with meaning ( $\varphi^*_{emp}=1.31$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ).

- Have you ever had a wish to die? In the whole sample only a small number of respondents in both groups answered positively to the question. Among the causes leading to the actualization of wish to own death, the respondents named: personal problem in relations, social problem, and loss of meaning of life ( $\varphi^*_{emp}=1.27$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ).

As a result of factor analysis of primary data collected through the method "non-verbal semantic differential» (P.M Bentler, A.L. La Voie), a group of rescuers and educators found statistically significant differences in factor structures and their filling in relation to the category of "death."

Rescuers' factor structure of death vision includes: 1. Passiveness (factor loading - 2.27 %). Factor filling: slack (0.72); unsociable (0.69); unconfident (0.64); dependent (0.61); weak (0.57); reserved (0.56); 2. Morality (factor loading - 4.04

Factor filling: kind (0.63); hard-hearted (-0.61); hostile (-0.61); just (0.60); stubborn (-0.44); 3. Negative assessment of another person's disorder (loading factor – 3.1 %). Factor filling: disturbed rows (0.71); cloud (0.69); lying (0.52); thin tree (0.53); 4. Passive adaptability (factor loading – 1.51 %). Factor filling: a lot of fish (-0.60); running cat (-0.52); movement (-0.44); lion (-0.44). Thus, at nonverbal level the rescuers' attitude toward death is characterized by individuality, uniqueness, integration in the system of life senses, acceptance as a phenomenon that does not require the definition in terms of morality (good, hostility, hard-heartedness or justice).

Factor structure of death vision in the subjects in the control group includes:

1. Activity (factor loading – 4.04 %). Factor filling: slack (0.71); unsociable (0.69); unconfident (0.76); weak (0.64); reserved (0.58); irresponsible (0.57). 2. Systemacy and adaptability (factor loading – 3.42 %). Factor filling: arrow is up (-0.64); pyramid (-0.63); lion (-0.57); running cat (-0.56); typical (-0.51); strong arm (-0.45). 3. Positive assessment of conformity to the social ideal (factor loading – 5.51 %). Factor filling: lying (0.56); bird (0.56); one man (0.55); thin tree (0.53); smile is down (0.46); rabbit (0.45). 4. Morality (factor loading – 1.26 %). Factor filling: kind (-0.69); just (-0.61); hard-hearted (0.59); honest (-0.55). Thus, at the non-verbal level the attitude of the respondents in the control group to death is characterized by a high degree of conformity to the social norm, which can be regarded as a manifestation of conformism, that is expressed by an effort to avoid thoughts of death, active opposition to injustice, dishonesty, hard-heartedness of the fact of the inevitability of death. Perception of death as something absolutely fatal and as an external set of circumstances reduces the level of responsibility for their lives.

Let's refer to the results of the content analysis of the data obtained using the method of "Incomplete sentences".

"Life has meaning if ..." The content of this sentence actually reflects the position of a person as to what makes life meaningful. 25% of rescuers emphasize the desire to be necessary not only to people you know, but people in general: "Life has meaning if I benefit to people" (E., 25 years old); "... if you benefit" (A., 24 years old; V., 30 years old); "... if people, society need you" (D. 42 years old).

Rescuers are focused on the importance of their existence to someone else, even for the impersonal "society", more than men in the control group. Men in the control group, especially young, are more focused on achievement, results. 6% of rescuers and 8% of men in the control group believe

that their life meaning consists of interesting job. 20% of rescuers believe that the meaning of a person's life is unconditional and infinite.

"Life is meaningless if ...". This formulation brings additional emotional burden in relation to the sentence "Life has meaning if ...". Continuation of these two proposals is not always proved antithetical to each other. Only one of the five responses finds a match with the continuation of the first sentence. "It does not happen", "in everyone's life there is a meaning", - 15% of rescuers and 2% of men in the control group have responded in such a way. "Life is meaningless if there is no goal, dream" - 25% of rescuers and 22% of men in the control group have responded such way, 95% of these responses belong to people under 35 years old. "Life is meaningless if you are lonely, needless" - 21% of rescuers and 15% of men in the control group have such opinion. Rescuers suffer from subjective or hypothetical feeling of "needlessness" more intensely than other men. Other rescuers' answers: "... if life does not bring joy" (D., 38 years old); "... if there is no adventure" (P. 24 years old); "... if there is no risk and excitement" (N., 31 years old); "... if life is empty" (A., 47 years old). There are 15% of rescuers that say about the need to fill your life with bright emotions. These rescuers are of all ages.

"Life is worth living, because ...". "Life is worth living because...it is interesting" - 15% of rescuers and 15% of men in the control group are ready to defend this position. Most of them are 34 years old (in the group of rescuers) and 23 years (the control group). 15% of rescuers and 10% of men in the control group have responded: "Because life is beautiful". Such response belongs to rescuers of all ages and only up to 35 years-old men in the control group. Relatives and friends are the most important stimulus to further life for 14% of rescuers and 5% of men in the control group. It should be noted that men in the control group up to 35 years old were more optimistic in their responses than their older counterparts. They often point to the positive sides of life rather than to the negative side of death. In the group of rescuers age differences have not been found.

20% of rescuers associate the need to live with the plans for the future. "... because there is a lot that is worth living"; "Life is worth living because it is an opportunity to express oneself" (D., 32 years old); "... because I have not done anything yet" (S., 40 years old); "... if it isn't we, then who?" (P., 31 years old).

"The most valuable thing in life is ...". 50% of rescuers and 34% of men in the control group have written that the most valuable thing in life is life itself. Other answers: "The most valuable thing in life

is the desire to live" (M, 21 years old); "... take care of those whom you love and appreciate" (A., 29 years old) "... is health, freedom, clear conscience, friends, family, interesting work" (S., 27 years old).

"What events in your life did you make thinking about the meaning of life?" In contrast to the control group, where the first place among these events was the death of a particular person (usually - the death of a loved one), only a few rescuers gave such straight answers (5%). However, in many other responses theme of death is present. There are four groups of such responses. The first group includes situations involving a serious threat to person's life: the fall in the mountains, getting into the avalanche, critical situation while working on fire, serious illness, concussion, etc. The second group of answers includes terrorist attacks and natural disasters, mainly those in elimination of the consequences of which rescuers were personally involved (the apartment bombings in Moscow, hostage taking in Moscow Dubrovka ("Nord-Ost"), the earthquake in Armenia, aircraft crash). The third group of responses is associated with the participation of the respondents in the military operations, as well as business trips to "flash points". Finally, another 10% of respondents have said that the rescuer's work itself leads to reappraisal of values and makes to think about the meaning of life. We can combine all 4 groups based on the presence of direct or indirect threat to life, "meeting with death". So 45% of rescuers have responded in such a way. A large part of these experiences occur in connection with their professional activities.

For 10% of rescuers event that made a lasting impression led to a reappraisal of values or made them think about the meaning of life was the birth of a child, for 5% it was the process of marriage, including church wedding ceremony [13].

Content analysis results of answers to the Questionnaire B.

Rescuers determine the presence of meaning in life primarily by awareness ("know" and "feel") of their need, importance of their existence to others. For men in the control group main sign of the presence of meaning in life is the availability of achievements. Unconditional meaning of life is recognized by rescuers rather than men in the control group. Family and children are more important category for rescuers than men in the control group. In the control group trend of transition from significance of self-importance to significance of friends and relatives is traced with aging. In the group of rescuers there is no age difference on this issue: relatives, their lives and health are the most valuable thing in life. Rescuers of all ages assess their past, present and future more positive, more

optimistic and more harmonious than men in the control group. In the control group people under 35 years old have more optimistic outlook on life and assess their past and present more positive than older people. The main difference between the answers of control and experimental groups to the question about the goals and aspirations in life is their connection with professional activities. Among rescuers this figure is 30%, among men in the control group it is 2%. In the control group, in contrast to the experimental, the age differences have been found: life goals of the young are more concrete and achievable in the foreseeable future (to get education, good job, start a family); while with aging goals become global and procedural (perfect oneself, to do good, to help children) [14, 15, 16, 17 and 18].

The distribution of values according to the PIL test scales. The results obtained from the use of Mann-Whitney U-test show that statistically significant differences among the groups were found according to such PIL test indicators as: goals in life ( $U_{emp} = 270.0$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), and locus of control "life" ( $U_{emp} = 0.234$   $p \leq 0.05$ ). These data suggest the intensity of goal-setting in the future in a group of rescuers, the need to structure the future more responsible and set some goals. The scale values "locus of control of "life"", which reflect the belief that a person can control life, are significantly reduced. We can say that awareness of incomplete controllability of life in a collision with death most strongly stimulates the responsibility for it. In general, on all scales of PIL test (except the "locus of control "life") significantly higher values have been found in the group of rescuers, indicating a higher level of meaningfulness of life.

According to method of M. Rokich age characteristics during choosing the value orientations in different groups were identified: the higher the age of the respondent, the more increased demands to this person and life in general. So the value orientation of "Service" is more expressed by young rescuers compared with the value orientation "Rest, pleasant pastime": young rescuers prefer qualitative performance of work and consequently expect good reward for their work, while they strive for continuous improvement, building a successful career and becoming a professional. Value orientation "Courage in defending the opinion" is more expressed by young professionals of education system in comparison with the value orientation "Conscientiousness" expressed by senior colleagues [19, 20 and 21].

### Findings

The held empirical study allows us to state that the extreme situations, in which the rescuer's

professional activities is realized most often, determine the specific content of the personal concept of death and contribute to the reevaluation of life values, actualization, awareness and generation of new meanings of life. It is proved that the more acute awareness of the finiteness of your existence, acceptance, reconciliation and finding of positive meaning in your own death stimulates the rescuer to use the allotted to him time of life maximally, raises the question about the life comprehension, responsibility for its content, about its special value. As V. Frankl had it, if a person has a reason "why to live", he will withstand any "how."

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