



Individual Differences in Personality and Reasoning Traits between Individuals Accused of Murder and those who have not Committed Murder

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Abstract

This article proposes a theoretical-experimental study regarding subjects who have committed murder, for the purpose of identifying the differences in terms of reasoning, cognitive schemas and personality traits. For this, new theoretical-experimental tendencies in humanities, sciences and law have been approached and a study was proposed in the Romanian population, with regard to individual differences in the act of murder.

The study included 492 individuals residing in several cities of Romania. There were two samples: the first included incarcerated subjects and the second included subjects outside the correctional system. The gender distribution was equal (50% women, 50% men), with the average age being 34, and the average education level was 10-12 grades.

A part of the research results confirmed certain study goals, while others had a major impact on outlining the theoretical-experimental descriptions required in this paper.

Keywords

Decision; Murder; Cognitive schemas; Personality

Introduction

Theoretical-experimental approaches

In the conception of Enache and Col [1], the objective manifestations of antisocial behaviour involving individuals are those who are considered immoral, illegal and harm others or to the society.

The first research undergone in the field of decision making determined researchers is to identify a way to optimize or facilitate this process. For instance, normative theories (expected value theory, expected utility theory or game theory) are examples of attempts based on rigorous measuring instruments [2,3].

Gelder et al. [4] bring the most recent research in the field of decision making in criminals. They argue that reasoning in murderers is mediated by several factors. Empirical results obtained entirely change the classic

normative version of the rational, "cost-benefit" type of decision-making process for certain categories, such as terrorists, serial killers and those who have committed murder and attempted murder.

The more recent studies of Cornish and Clarke [5] emphasized a theoretical- experimental eight-step model for profiling a decision maker who commits murder or robbery. For instance, an individual with a psychopathological background (temperament, intelligence, maladaptive cognitive style etc.), who was raised by parents who were criminals or has mental/personality disorders or was raised in a home for orphaned children, being around individuals who promote crime, may manifest, by exposure and vicarious observation, the possibility of satisfying certain physiological and/or social-intellectual needs in a very short time and without much effort, in an aggressive, brutal, harassing manners, with murder attempts or even murder.

The advantage of this theoretical-experimental model is that it can provide a good conceptualization of decision makers who steal or are accused of breaking and entering and other common law infractions, but it offers no empirical support for explaining murderous behaviour or the behaviour of serial or multiple murderers.

Another important approach for our experiment is that if Topalli and Wright [6], which refers to the etiological model of predatory criminality cycle, involving emotional patterns which can mediate the decision making process in criminals. The authors of this models claim that feelings of anger, fear and despair form the information underlying the decisions of criminals convicted of murder. The figure below illustrates a accumulation of pressure from time, fear, anger, liability and other goals pursued by a murderer without using current or future adaptive or time resources in order to reach the best decision in the case of murder (Figures 1-3).

The authors of the paradigm contributed to an improved version regarding visceral factors involved in murder or other type of crime, but it has many limitations in conceptualizing individuals accused of sexual and intellectual (theft of informatics data etc.) psychopathy and terrorists.

The cognitive theory [7] takes into account another version, different from those presented above, following 21 year long research, reaching the conclusion that unconditioned and conditioned early maladaptive cognitive schemas are a key-factor for identifying decisional processes in murder and profiling murderers. Young's studies, carried out between 1991 and 2003, and those of his colleagues, Michel van Vreeswijk and Broersen [8], identified 18 early maladaptive schemas, and have now reached a number of 32 schemas,

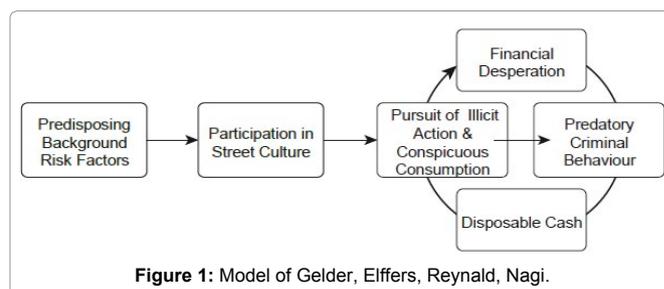


Figure 1: Model of Gelder, Elffers, Reynald, Nagi.

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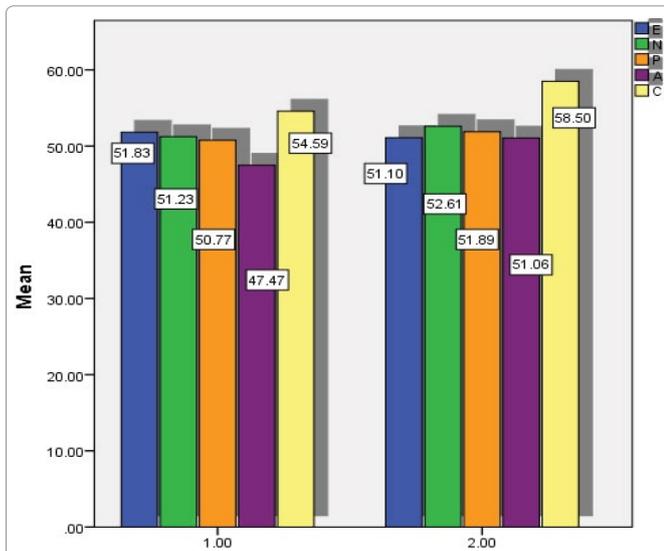


Figure 2: Differences in personality traits between subjects who have committed murder and subjects who have not (1- NP, 2 P).

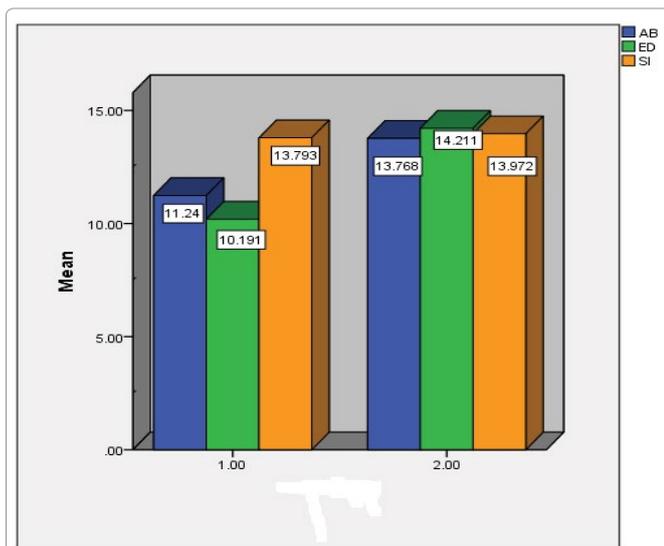


Figure 3: Differences in maladaptive cognitive schemas (Abandonment/instability (AB), Emotional deprivation (ED), Social isolation/ estrangement (SI) between subjects who have committed murder and subjects who had not. (1 NP, 2 P).

grouped into 5 psychopathological style fields for individuals with antisocial personality disorder. For instance, a murderer with a maladaptive thought pattern in the area of separation and rejection may develop a psychopathological conviction and a distorted assumption/perception that one's needs for security, safety, care and empathy will not be met. Bernstein et al. [9] validated a psychiatric medico-legal theoretical model of ST cognitive schemas which refers to certain psychopathological personality features or traits which are seen as risk factors for violence and criminality. In fact, they claim that there are five "judicial schema modes" according to Young's model, but modified: Angry Protector, Bully and Attack, Paranoid Over - Controller, Conning and Manipulative, and Predator Mode.

The first refers to hostility, fury, irritability, escaping responsibility and distancing oneself from the victim; in the case of Bully and

Attack, the criminal uses threats or aggression to intimidate others; the Paranoid Over mode describes a search and control behaviour, with psychopathological hyper-vigilance and suspecting individuals of having hidden purposes and wishing to hurt or humiliate them. In the Conning and Manipulative manifestation mode, the criminal presents a "fake self" by lying, cheating or other manipulation methods, in order to attain a certain criminal purpose. The last mode illustrates the lack of empathy, distancing and merciless attitudes used for punishing victims. This paradigm has the highest empirical validity and good predictability in profiling and outlining a decision maker who commits murder. In relation to the strength of the studies and assessment/testing instruments, with discriminatory power between clinical and non-clinical sample, our studies took into account this paradigm and the instruments which have been adapted and scientifically validated on the Romanian population, in order to identify individual differences in the act of murder.

Research objectives

The research proposed has the goal of defining individual differences in the act of murder, for a better profiling and prediction of those who decide to kill. The general and specific objectives below are all contained in this study.

General objective: Subjects who have been imprisoned for murder have personality traits which are different compared to those of individuals who have not murdered.

Specific objectives:

1. Extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, addiction and criminality are higher in those who have murdered compared to those who have not.
2. Subjects who have been imprisoned for murder have a different reasoning to those who have not committed murder, separated depending on gender.
3. Individuals who have committed murder have high scores in maladaptive cognitive schemas (emotional deprivation, abandonment/instability, mistrust/abuse, social isolation/estrangement and defect/shame) compared to those who have not committed murder.

Method and Procedure

Participants

The sample included in the study consists of 492 (N=492) adult participants. 50% of the participants were male and 50% female, with an average age of 34.14 (SD=10.66, Min 18, Max 68), their education level being 11.28 years (SD=2.01).

The participants will be classified in two major groups: the incarcerated group contains 246 (n=246) participants included in equal gender subgroups, and the control group consists of 246 adult participants (n=246) included in equal gender subgroups.

The incarcerated group

The study sample consists of 246 (N=246) adult participants, 50% males and 50 % females, with the average age of 37.32 (SD=9.93, Min 18, Max 68), and an average education level of 10.93 years (SD=1.82).

The control (non-incarcerated) group

The study sample consists of 246 (N=246) adult participants, 50% males and 50 % females, with the average age of 30.95 (SD=10.42, Min 18, Max 68), and an average education level of 11.63 years (SD=2.13).

Preliminary Results

Demographic differences between the two groups

Preliminary analyses showed that there was a significant age difference ($t(488, 88) = -6.93, p = .000$) between the two groups, the participants who were imprisoned having a significantly higher average age than those outside the correctional system.

In order to determine educational differences, we carried out the t test, which has revealed that there is a significant difference between the education level ($t(478, 44) = .35, p = .00$) of penitentiary and non-penitentiary participants. Non-penitentiary participants had a higher education level than those who were imprisoned.

In our analysis, where we compare penitentiary and non-penitentiary groups, we will use the ANCOVA statistical test, where age and education will be introduced as co-variables, so that the difference will not bias the results.

Instruments

The instruments used in our research were: The Young Cognitive Schema Questionnaire (YCSQ) to assess early maladaptive cognitive schemas, The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R) to assess psychopathological personality traits in adults, and Analytical Reasoning questionnaire (ARQ) to assess and test reasoning and general cognitive abilities.

The questionnaires are adapted and scientifically validated on the Romanian population and approved by the Romanian College of Psychologists with the following license numbers: Series CX No. 1724 and Series P4-00000126.

Data processing

Data collection was followed by their introduction into the database. To establish the differences between the mentioned groups, calculations were performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 20.0.

Results

Testing personality trait differences (extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, addiction and criminality) between subjects who had committed murder and subjects who had not

A One-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine a statistically significant difference between incarcerated and non-incarcerated subjects, with regard to personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, addiction and criminality).

The analyses with ANCOVA showed that there was no significant difference in extraversion between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492) = .267, p = .606$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492) = 1.352, p = .245$.

Our analysis also showed that there was no significant difference in neuroticism between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492) = 2.151, p = .143$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492) = 2.059, p = .152$.

Also, we found no significant differences in psychoticism, between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492) = 1.499, p = .221$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492) = 1.045, p = .307$.

However, our analysis did find significant differences in addictions and criminality as a personality trait between the two samples, penitentiary and outside penitentiary.

The analyses with ANCOVA showed that there was a significant difference in addiction between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492) = 11.087, p = .001$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492) = 10.995, p = .001$. Participants from the penitentiary ($M = 51.05, SD = 10.28$) presented a significantly higher level of addiction compared to non-penitentiary subjects ($M = 47.47, SD = 12.177$).

The analyses with ANCOVA showed that there was a significant difference in criminality between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492) = 7.951, p = .005$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492) = 5.732, p = .017$.

Participants from penitentiary ($M = 58.49, SD = 13.46$) presented a significantly higher level in criminality compared to non-penitentiary subjects ($M = 54.58, SD = 17.58$).

Testing reasoning differences between subjects who have committed murder and subjects who have not

We also analyzed the differences between the averages of the two samples with regard to reasoning. The analyses with ANCOVA showed that there was no significant difference in reasoning between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492) = .076, p = .782$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492) = .870, p = .351$. The results above show that individual reasoning differences do not play an important part, regardless of educational level or general cognitive ability. Manktelow [10] argued that reasoning styles can vary from one individual to another, and laboratory research could not specify whether significant individual differences exist in subjects accused of murder, violence and crime and those who have no such criminal record.

Testing differences in maladaptive cognitive schemas (emotional deprivation, abandonment/instability, mistrust/abuse, social isolation/estrangement and defect/shame) between subjects who have committed murder and subjects who have not

The first field of represented by separation and rejection and it consists of the assumption that one's need for security, safety, care, empathy and acceptance will not be met. This first field is composed of the following schemas: Abandonment/instability (AB), Emotional deprivation (ED), Social isolation/ estrangement (SI).

Our analysis also showed that there was no significant difference in SI between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492) = .091, p = .763$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492) = .521, p = .741$.

But our analysis did find significant differences in AB and ED between the two samples, penitentiary and non-penitentiary.

The analyses with ANCOVA showed that there was significant difference in AB between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492) = 21.415, p = .000$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492) = 17.037, p = .000$. Imprisoned participants ($M = 51, 05, SD = 10, 28$) presented a significantly higher level in the AB compared to non-imprisoned subjects ($M = 47, 47, SD = 12, 177$).

The analyses with ANCOVA showed that there was significant difference in ED between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492)=47.857, p=.000$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492)=35.050, p=.000$. Participants from penitentiary ($M=58, 49, SD=13, 46$) presented a significantly higher level in the ED compared to non-penitentiary subjects ($M=54, 58, SD=17, 58$).

The following field is given by hyper-vigilance and inhibition – spontaneous feelings, impulses, choices are barred from expressing themselves; the individual does not reserve the right to be happy. The schemas are: Negativity/passivity (NP), Unrealistic standards/hypercriticism (US), Punishment (PU).

Our analysis also showed that there was significant difference in PU between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492)=4.773, p=.029$, and we find no significant differences after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492)=2.433, p=.119$. Participants from the penitentiary ($M=43, 77, SD=14, 28$) presented a lower level in the PU compared to non-penitentiary subjects ($M=45, 96, SD=10, 44$).

The analyses with ANCOVA showed that there was no significant difference in NP between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492)=33.520, p=.000$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492)=22.035, p=.000$. Participants from the penitentiary ($M= 43, 77, SD=14, 28$) presented a significantly lower level in the NP compared to non-penitentiary subjects ($M=45, 96, SD=10, 44$).

The analyses with ANCOVA showed that there was no significant difference in US between the two samples after controlling the effect of age, $F(1, 492)=97.552, p=.000$, and after controlling the effect of educational level, $F(1, 492)=64.00, p=.000$. Participants from the penitentiary ($M=31, 07, SD=12, 11$) presented a significantly lower level in the US compared to non-penitentiary subjects ($M=37, 69, SD=15, 17$).

We obtained results which put our initial theoretical propositions into difficulty, but we consider that the responses given by imprisoned subjects had a slightly desirable score compared to the responses given by the non-incarcerated subjects, which is why a lower percentage was obtained when assessing maladaptive schemas.

Discussions and Conclusions

The results of our research have underlined three categories of scores referring to the goals of this paper. All responses in the study had a positive result to our proposal to research in order to identify individual differences involved in murder.

The first category of scores, when assessing differences in maladaptive cognitive schemas (emotional deprivation, abandonment/instability mistrust/abuse, social isolation /estrangement and defect/shame) between subjects who had murdered and those who had not showed very good results in individual differences between imprisoned and non-imprisoned subjects.

The second category presented good results in individual differential assessment of psychopathological personality traits (addiction and criminality) between participants imprisoned for murder and those who had not committed murder.

The last category of scores consists of results (in reasoning and cognitive schemas) which emphasizes two type of responses from

participants: on the one hand, penitentiary and non-penitentiary subjects had different scores in reasoning assessment, due to the significant educational differences between the two groups, and on the other hand, high scores were obtained in maladaptive cognitive schemas (negativity/passivity, unrealistic standards/hypercriticism and punishment) from non-penitentiary subjects, imprisoned subjects obtaining lower scores than non-imprisoned ones due to a slight desirable tendency.

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