

EXTRAVERSION AND AGREEABLENESS – THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS IN THE CRIMINAL ACT

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Abstract

This paper aims to present an overview of the personality profile of the offender, from the perspective of two component dimensions of the Big Five model - extraversion and agreeableness as well as by reference to the specifics of the deed and recidivism, in order to draw up a joint intervention plan. The literature review highlighted a lower level of agreeableness and a higher level of extraversion among young people and adults at risk of committing illegal acts. An exception was observed in the case of persons convicted of sexual assault on children, some of them being less extroverted, depending on the degree of kinship with the victim. Regarding the specificity of the crime, those who presented a lower level of agreeableness were the violent criminals, those accused of theft, and the smugglers. A higher level of extraversion has been associated with theft, smuggling, and illegal alcohol and drug use. However, not all studies have shown significant differences between offenders and the normal population. Some showed that the inmates were more extroverted and agreeable compared to the ordinary population, others showed the opposite. For this reason, it is necessary to develop knowledge of the criminal field by conducting additional research to cover existing gaps. However, the current results highlight the importance of orienting the process of social reintegration of persons deprived of liberty towards acquiring a balance between being expansive – being reserved and understanding the usefulness of agreeableness in the process of adaptation to society in which the person in prison is to return.

Cuvinte-cheie: personalitate, extraversiune, agreabilitate, delincvență, infracțiune.

Keywords: personality, extraversion, agreeableness, delinquency, crime.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of crime generates a continuous concern, not only for researchers, but also for society as a whole, due to the costs it entails. According to the latest reports available in 2021, approximately 10,769,534 people were

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populating prisons around the world (World Prison Brief, n.d.). The United States of America (USA) ranks first in the ranking of countries based on population incarceration rates, with 2,068,800 people sentenced to prison, and in last place is San Marino, having no one to serve the sentence in the penitentiary (World Prison Brief, n.d.). In this ranking, Romania is in the 61st place (World Prison Brief, n.d.), at the end of September 2021 totaling 22,920 citizens serving the sentence of deprivation of liberty (National Administration of Penitentiaries [NAP], 2021). Out of the total number of persons in custody in the units subordinated to the NAP, 829 were young people between 18 and 21 years old, and 259 were minors. However, these data only represent the picture of known crimes, for which the prison sentence was applied according to a criminal sentence. It should be borne in mind that in addition to the crimes known by reporting the number of people in penitentiary institutions, there are also criminal cases in progress. They are also joined by the number of crimes committed, but unknown for various reasons, which are called the “dark figure of crime” (Varvarici, 2018).

Deviant behavior has been the study subject of scientists for centuries, and there are a variety of theories about the causes of its occurrence (Turliuc, 2007). What continues to attract attention is the role that personality superfactors play in the criminal act. Explaining the five-factor theory, McCrae and Löckenhoff (2010) stated that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness are mostly heritable, manifesting themselves in the life of each person in the form of characteristic adaptations, to which is added the influence of the environment and the emotions experienced. Their importance in the study of crime is reflected in the numerous comparative investigations carried out, involving either persons deprived of liberty and persons who were not in the records of the criminal justice system or persons belonging to only one of the two groups, in which case intragroup variability was pursued.

This paper aims to identify, by reference to two of the five great dimensions of personality (extraversion and agreeableness) and to major age groups discussed in criminal justice (juveniles and adults), the common elements between the criminal profile of young people and that of adults, in order to approach the criminal phenomenon in a unitary manner. Also, for this scientific approach to find its usefulness in practice, the main objective of the paper is to develop an intervention program, whose activities, methods, and tools contribute to the prevention of both juvenile delinquency and recidivism of people in custody of the penitentiary system. Therefore, this article aims to make a methodological contribution in working with persons deprived of their liberty, young people or adults, but also in the process of orienting future generations towards the acquisition of prosocial attitudes.

2. CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS

Of the five factors of the Big Five model, extraversion and agreeableness represent the object of this paper, being analyzed in a criminal context. Extraversion indicates the person's inclination towards relating to others (Nedelcea, 2015; VandenBos, 2013/2020a). According to the American Psychological Association (APA) "extroverts are relatively more expansive, gregarious, sociable, and openly expressive" (VandenBos, 2013/2020a). Agreeableness, also known as kindness (in the Five-Factor Personality Questionnaire [CP5F], a local instrument developed by Albu, 2008, as cited in Albu & Porumb, 2009) informs about how a person adapts socially (Nedelcea, 2015). APA has defined this dimension as a "tendency to act in a cooperative manner, devoid of selfishness" (VandenBos, 2013/2020b).

3. LITERATURE SEARCH PROCEDURE

To identify the literature relevant to the research purpose, the classical review method was used, according to the guide developed by Knopf (2006). It has been chosen for the classical review because it intended to build an overall framework image, which would be a first step in drawing some practical guidelines.

Using the Google and Google Scholar search engines, papers that assessed the association between juvenile delinquency, respectively crime among the adult population and the two dimensions of personality (extraversion and agreeableness) were selected. English and Romanian word combinations were used for the search, as follows: "Big Five and delinquency", "Big Five and inmates", "Big Five și deținuți" etc. It was intended that the personality be evaluated through questionnaires built on the basis of the Big Five model, such as *Big Five Inventory* (BFI), *Short Big Five Questionnaire*, *NEO Personality Inventory-Revised* (NEO PI-R) etc. It was also taken into account that the papers should be original articles, published in prestigious journals in the field of psychology or represent scientific studies in the form of dissertation or doctoral theses.

4. THE ROLE OF EXTRAVERSION AND AGREEABLENESS IN CRIMINAL CONDUCT

4.1. EXTRAVERSION, AGREEABLENESS – JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

The results obtained by Corff and Toupin (2009) in a longitudinal study for comparison between a group of 48 boys aged 15–20 from Quebec youth care social services and a group of 48 boys aged 16–20 recruited from high schools showed that those who persisted in delinquent conduct presented lower levels of agreeableness. For extraversion, they did not achieve significant differences between the two groups. Nicolaescu (2017) obtained a similar result in Romania when she compared 102 adolescents between 14 and 17 years old investigated for theft, robbery, rape, and murder with 108 non-delinquent high school students.

In contrast, ter Laak *et al.* (2003) observed that neither extraversion nor agreeableness correlated significantly with self-reported delinquency in a sample of 33 girls aged 12–18 incarcerated in a correctional institution in the Netherlands. But also in the Netherlands, when 96 boys between 13 and 25 years old from a detention center in Nijmegen (36% evaluated during detention, 64% evaluated after release) and 204 boys between 15 and 24 years old were investigated, students of some vocational training colleges in the same city, the two samples differed from the perspective of the scores obtained on the agreeableness scale, the adolescents in detention obtaining lower scores (van Dam, Janssens, & De Bruyn, 2005). The result of van Dam *et al.* (2005) is supported by that obtained by Ardalán, Iravani, and Sobhi-Gharamaleki (2010), who, comparing two groups of 50 participants between 15 and 18 years old from Tehran (50% boys and 50% girls), did not notice significant differences between the group of adolescent offenders in correctional centers and the group of non-offenders in high schools in terms of scores obtained on the extraversion scale. Instead, their results indicated that the two groups differed in terms of the scores obtained for agreeableness, which were lower for the group in the correctional centers.

However, evidence of the relationship between extraversion and crime exists. Jouhki (2015) observed a positive association between extraversion and criminal behavior in a sample of 4,855 students in the ninth grade in Finland. She also pointed out that agreeableness was negatively associated with crime in their case. In Romania, too, it was found that 130 adolescents with delinquent behavior in a placement center obtained significantly lower scores for agreeableness and higher for extraversion than 136 students enrolled in five schools in the same county (Popovici [Chisăliță], 2013).

Regarding recidivism among young offenders, it was found that agreeableness is a consistent predictor. As van Dam *et al.* (2005) showed, recidivists in a Dutch detention center scored significantly lower for agreeableness. Walters (2018) also analyzed data obtained in a longitudinal study involving 1,126 boys who were delinquents tried or convicted of a crime in the USA when they were 14–17 years old and whose personality was assessed between 16–21 years old. Desistance (meaning refraining from committing a new crime – Kazemian, 2017) was assessed six times, between six and 60 months from the time of the personality assessment, agreeableness being the only one of the five dimensions of personality that was a predictor of desistance at each of the six reassessments, including when the initial offense was controlled.

4.2. EXTRAVERSION, AGREEABLENESS – CRIME IN ADULT

Shimotsukasaa *et al.* (2019) compared 645 inmates in 77 prisons in Japan (504 men and 141 women aged 20–69) with 4,546 adults in the regular population (2660 men and 1886 women aged 18–71), selected from the database of a previously conducted project. They ascertained that the persons in the penitentiary obtained higher scores on the extraversion and agreeableness scales. Another study

carried out in Sweden, involving 46 men in a prison with an average age of 34.6 years, a normative group of 800 men (about 29.8 years), a control group consisting of 45 prison guards (28 men – 37.8 years, 17 women – 39.9 years), and a group of 36 students at the university (7 men – 24.8 years, 25 women – 26.5 years old) (Eriksson, Masche-No, & Dåderman, 2017), showed, however, the opposite. The results indicated that the scores obtained by the inmates for extraversion and agreeableness were lower than those of the normative sample, the students, and the guards. Regarding agreeableness, including Dam *et al.* (2018) observed that the group of 40 men aged 19–59 made up of persons deprived of their liberty with a history of violent and impulsive crimes in two penitentiaries in Denmark obtained lower scores on the agreeableness scale compared to the control group made up of 40 men aged 18–54 who were not criminals.

In the case of criminal recidivism in adults, there is little evidence of the implications of extraversion and agreeableness. While one study showed that there is no significant link between the two dimensions of personality and recidivism, another indicated that only one of the two traits exerts an effect, but reduced. Thus, in the case of 51 adults in a correctional center in the USA, whose number of arrests varied between 1 and 37, the criminal recidivism was not associated with either of the two personality dimensions (Clower & Bothwell, 2001). However, Ahmed (2019), analyzing the data collected from 256 people in Kano, Nigeria, released from prison, most of whom were between 18 and 34 years old, 90% being men, noted that agreeableness mediated the relationship between the prison experience and recidivism, but its effect was low.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF EXTRAVERSION AND AGREEABLENESS IN COMMITTING SPECIFIC OFFENSES

5.1. RESULTS OBTAINED FROM SAMPLES MADE UP OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Turner (2014) observed in the case of 357 students in a commercial accounting course at a university in Australia ($M = 20.42$ years, 50.7% male) that those who scored lower on the agreeableness scale were more inclined to commit white collar-specific offences. The association of agreeableness with the increased likelihood of committing the deed was stronger in the event that there was no chance of being discovered than if there was a 10% chance of being caught. With regard to extraversion, given that there was no chance of being caught, it was positively associated with the likelihood of committing the crime, but the association became negative when the context assumed a 10% chance of being caught.

Jouhki (2015), investigating data obtained by the National Research Institute of Legal Policy (Finland) from 4,855 students in the ninth grade, highlighted that the risk for alcohol and drug use increases with the increase in extraversion, while the risk for violent crime amplifies with the decrease in the level of agreeableness. The result was similar in the case of 216 high school students between 16 and

19 years old (108 girls and 106 boys) who were attending a Catholic school in New South Wales, identifying a significant negative correlation between agreeableness and interpersonal violence (for both sexes), and in the case of boys, a significant negative correlation was also highlighted between agreeableness and vandalism/theft (Heaven, 1996).

Nederlof *et al.* (2010) however, assessing the relationship between personality, the type of charges (crime against morality/against life/violent/violent with property/property), and the severity of the crime in a sample of 108 boys between 12–21 years old in custody in a detention center in the Netherlands, remanded in custody or sentenced to detention without compulsory treatment, showed that none of the five personality dimensions was significantly associated with the type or severity of the offense.

5.2. RESULTS OBTAINED FROM SAMPLES MADE UP OF ADULTS

Gul and Jabeen (2015), investigating 50 prison smugglers from the Hazara division and another 50 people convicted of acts that did not involve smuggling, found that smuggling criminals scored lower for agreeableness and were more extroverted compared to the other offenders. Shimotsukasaa *et al.* (2019) showed that violent offenders in Japanese prisons scored higher on the extraversion scale and lower on the agreeableness scale compared to the other offenders, while people convicted of illegal drug use scored higher on the extraversion scale. As for the crime of theft, a study of 406 persons deprived of their liberty in Nigeria, about three-quarters of them aged between 21 and 40 years (98.8% men), revealed that those convicted of this deed showed higher scores for extraversion, and agreeableness was showed to have a higher level among those convicted of murder (Mosaku *et al.*, 2013).

There are also studies that have grouped the investigated crimes into larger classes, according to their common elements. For example, Pedaran and Arefi (2015) divided the 117 men imprisoned in Isfahan into two categories, depending on the specifics of the crimes committed: white-collar inmates and blue-collar inmates. They found that white-collar offenders were more extroverted, but found no intergroup differences in terms of agreeableness.

A complex situation was noted in the case of the crime of sexual abuse. Comparing male persons, 26 non-convicted students who reported sexual abuse against women ($M = 22.73$ years), 32 persons convicted of rape ($M = 33.87$ years), and 33 convicted persons who sexually molested children ($M = 38.51$ years), Carvalho and Nobre (2019) observed that the three groups did not differ from each other in terms of extraversion and agreeableness, although intergroup differences resulted for all three other dimensions (neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness). In contrast, Dennison, Stough, and Birgden (2001), comparing a group of 64 men ($M = 47$ years old) in two prisons in Victoria, Australia for child sexual offenses with a group of 33 men ($M = 39$ years) with no history of sexual offenses, showed

that those who committed incest in the family of origin and those who had sexual relations with children outside the family group were less extroverted than the persons in the control group. However, in this case, too, no intergroup differences in agreeableness were identified.

6. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The role of agreeableness in both crime prediction and recidivism prediction is better supported by existing research than that of extraversion, in which case a negative association is indicated. However, several of the studies in which a link between extraversion and crime was identified showed that the level of extraversion was higher for those with a criminal history.

Both young people and adults at risk of committing violent crimes appear to have a lower level of agreeableness. However, the interpretation of these results requires caution in the context of juvenile delinquency, since significant correlations between agreeableness and the risk of committing violent acts resulted only in the context of the evaluation of samples made up of high school students. Further studies are needed to investigate the link between agreeableness and violence in the case of young people deprived of their liberty. Then, referring to a specific type of violent crime – the sexual abuse of a minor – extraversion was the one that differentiated between groups of adults convicted of various forms of committing this deed. As only two studies have been identified on the crime of sexual abuse, and one did not highlight the particularities of those convicted of sexual abuse of children from the perspective of extraversion and agreeableness, it is recommended to develop research projects involving the study of sexual aggressors.

One of the limitations of this study is also the fact that the analyzed papers reported data on a small number of crimes. Results obtained for smuggling offenses, crimes against life, bodily integrity or health, against sexual freedom and integrity, against public health and property have been compared, while the criminal typology is much broader. In addition to the offenses discussed in this paper, there can also be mentioned the crimes against traffic safety on public roads, those against public order and peace, those aimed at religious freedom and respect due to deceased persons etc. (Codul penal și Codul de procedură penală: actualizat octombrie 2020 [Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure: updated October 2020]).

Beyond these limits, this paper has a strong advantage, namely the cultural diversity taken into account in the selection of studies analyzed, which allows a deeper understanding of the criminal phenomenon from the perspective of the particularities of each country. Thus, it can be seen that research conducted in different states, with different legislative systems and different cultural values, has led to similar results. Specifically, young people with delinquent behavior scored lower than young non-delinquents for agreeableness, both in North America and in

Europe, and Asia. The conclusions are more nuanced, however, in the case of adult detainees. In this respect, the fact that those sentenced to imprisonment in Japan were more agreeable than the control group, which contrasts with the results obtained for Sweden and Denmark, may be an indicator of the process of social reintegration in prisons, which can, in turn, reflect the collectivist culture of the Japanese people (the common good before the individual one) (IBM Database Plus Extensions, n.d., as cited in Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Although psychosocial studies have been carried out on criminal risk behaviors, both in the normal population (e.g. Rada, 2014) and in the Romanian penitentiaries and probation system (e.g. Mihai, Robu, & Chiriță, 2016; Micle, Săucan, & Liiceanu, 2010), those that approached the personality issue based on the Big Five model are few and do not discriminate between the types of crimes and the number of convictions (e.g. Ardelean, 2010; Ciorbea & Șotoreanu, 2017). Therefore, there is a need to continue investigating the criminal phenomenon in Romania in relation to the five personality dimensions – extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness.

In order to reduce the criminal risk, it is necessary, taking into account the current state of knowledge, to design programs to cultivate agreeableness even during primary schooling. Equally important is the acquisition of a healthy way of orientation towards the outside world, which should also ensure the maintenance of the connection with the inner universe – with personal values, with assimilated moral norms, etc. The development of agreeableness and extraversion since compulsory general school is a desideratum, as the maximum age that students in different countries of the world have at the end of compulsory education varies between 12–13 years (for some Latin American countries) and 18–19 years (in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands etc.) (UNICEF, n.d.; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018), which means that the intervention would take place until the second stage of adolescence. This would mean shaping students' personalities in the favorable direction, giving them a solid foundation for building the future adult's personality.

Also, the development of a balance between being expansive – being reserved and understanding the usefulness of agreeableness in the process of adapting to the society in which the person in the penitentiary is to return – is a priority in the social reintegration of persons deprived of their liberty, the purpose being to reduce the risk of recidivism.

Considering the specialized literature on psychotherapeutic intervention techniques, as well as those of counseling and personal development (Schaller, 2021; Durnescu, 2020; Institutul Român de Training & Training Café, 2018; Department of Education Republic of the Philippines, 2016), the following action plan can be outlined. It can contribute both to the harmonious formation of the students' personality, in order to prevent the adoption of delinquent trajectories, and to the completion of the social reintegration efforts carried out in the penitentiary units. It is a general framework, which can be adapted according to

age, the particularities of each class of students or each group of detainees (number of participants, cultural background, criminal specificity, etc.), and the time available for carrying out each activity.

1. Developing interpersonal skills by practicing agreeable interaction

Objectives – the trainer will be able to observe the reporting patterns of the participants to those around them, having the possibility to identify and restructure the dysfunctional (disagreeable) behavioral models.

Method – simulation, with the theme of everyday situations that involve social interaction in various contexts.

Applications – participants will work in pairs of two. A representative of each pair will extract a piece of paper on which the trainer noted a problematic situation that they may encounter daily. The pairs will take turns in front of the class, staging the assigned situation. After each presentation, time will be allocated for the analysis of the behavior of the two protagonists. The behavior will be appreciated, not the person.

2. Managing conflict situations in an agreeable manner

Objectives – stimulating the agreeableness of the participants in the negotiation, helping them to cope in situations with criminogenic potential.

Method – role play, with a central theme of conflict situations between groups with different opinions and needs.

Applications – participants will be divided into two groups, randomly (e.g. two rival gangs of teenagers, a gang of teenagers and the community of adults in a neighborhood, supporters of a football team and a troupe of gendarmes). The trainer will read them a case that assumes that the two groups are in a conflict situation, as they have different requests, and their task will be to negotiate peacefully, showing amiability.

3. Guiding participants towards finding a balance between expansiveness and reservation

Objectives – the trainer will have the opportunity to identify the negative consequences of orienting the extraversion of the participants in the wrong direction and to instruct them on the fructification of this trait in desirable contexts from a social perspective.

Method – case study.

Applications – the participants will work individually, their task being to identify and note situations in which their own expansiveness has brought them benefits and situations in which the specific behaviors of extraversion have disadvantaged them. Each participant will present their own case study, which will be analyzed at the large group level. The trainer will guide the participants to find behavioral alternatives in cases where an extroverted attitude has disadvantaged them.

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REZUMAT

Această lucrare are scopul de a prezenta o imagine de ansamblu asupra profilului de personalitate al infractorului, din perspectiva a două dimensiuni componente ale modelului Big Five – extraversiune și agreabilitate –, cât și prin raportare la specificul faptei și la recidivă, în vederea elaborării unui plan de intervenție comun. Revizia literaturii de specialitate a evidențiat un nivel mai scăzut al agreabilității și un nivel mai înalt al extraversiunii în rândul tinerilor și adulților cu risc la comiterea de fapte ilegale. O excepție a fost observată în cazul persoanelor condamnate pentru agresiune sexuală asupra copiilor, unele dintre acestea fiind mai puțin extravertite, în funcție de gradul de rudenie cu victima. Referitor la specificul infracțional, cei care au prezentat un nivel mai redus al agreabilității au fost infractorii violenți, cei acuzați de furt și contrabandiștii. Un nivel mai înalt al extraversiunii s-a asociat cu furtul, contrabanda și consumul ilegal de alcool și droguri. Nu toate studiile au indicat însă diferențe semnificative între infractori și populația normală. Unele au arătat că deținuții au fost mai extravertiți și mai agreabili în comparație cu populația obișnuită, altele au arătat opusul. Din acest motiv, este necesară dezvoltarea cunoașterii domeniului infracțional prin derularea unor cercetări suplimentare, care să acopere lacunele existente. Totuși, rezultatele actuale evidențiază importanța orientării procesului de reintegrare socială a persoanelor private de libertate spre dobândirea unui echilibru între a fi expansiv – a fi rezervat și înțelegerea utilității agreabilității în procesul de adaptare la societatea în care persoana aflată în penitenciar urmează să revină.