

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL PERSONALITY TENDENCIES AND FEELINGS OF GUILT IN PRISONERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between personality disorder tendencies and the feeling of guilt among incarcerated individuals. The study population includes prisoners from the correctional facilities of Tetovo, Skopje, and Veles. The sample was selected using a non-random (purposive) method, where individuals voluntarily agreed to participate and complete the questionnaire. The total sample consisted of 273 prisoners, 207 males and 66 females with the youngest participant being 21 years old and the oldest 58 years old, and the most represented age being 39 years. Questionnaires were used as measuring instruments to assess both the tendencies of personality disorders and the level of guilt sensitivity. The data were analyzed using SPSS. The results of the analysis revealed that personality tendencies of Cluster B (including antisocial, narcissistic, histrionic, and schizoid traits) are associated with lower levels of guilt compared to tendencies of Cluster C (such as avoidant, obsessive-compulsive, dependent, and borderline traits). Individuals with personality tendencies from Group C showed significantly higher levels of guilt compared to those from Groups B and A, while no significant difference was found between Groups A and B. The findings emphasize the psychological complexity of guilt among prisoners and suggest the need for personalized rehabilitation programs that address emotional and personality factors.

Keywords: Psychopathological personality tendencies, feelings of guilt, prisoners.

INTRODUCTION

Life in prison involves isolation from society, restrictions on personal freedom, disruption of family and interpersonal relationships, and confronting new norms and rules that are often repressive (Colona, et al., 2018). These factors can strongly influence the mental and emotional functioning of the convicted individual (Hassan, 2011). Prison environments constitute a special psychological reality, which often serves as a breeding ground for the emergence or deepening of psychopathological tendencies. Psychopathological personality tendencies refer to stable patterns of thinking, feeling, and behavior, which may be poorly adapted and potentially harmful to the psychosocial functioning of the individual (Ferguson, 2022), which may not reach the level of a genuine diagnosis, but which often constitute the basis for the development of more serious disorders. The DSM-5-TR groups ten types of personality disorders into three groups A (paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal); B (antisocial, borderline, histrionic, narcissistic); C (avoidant, obsessive compulsive, dependent). In prisoners, psychopathological tendencies such as narcissism, antisociality, paranoia and other personality disorders are common and significantly affect the way they perceive themselves, their relationships with others and the experience of guilt for the acts committed. According to Tangney and Stuewig (2010), prisoners who experience internalized guilt are more likely to exhibit reflective, remorseful and rehabilitative behaviors. While those who experience shame or feelings projected outward (e.g., blaming others or the system), are more likely to remain in the pattern of antisocial behaviors. A large study by Blackburn (1998), which included clinical analysis of prisoners in the USA, found that personality disorders, especially

antisocial, narcissistic, paranoid and borderline, were significantly more prevalent in the prison population than in the free population. He argued that these tendencies are not always a direct product of imprisonment, but often reflect previous experiences of trauma, abandonment and negative socialization. According to him, psychopathological tendencies often function as defense mechanisms, which help the individual to cope with the harsh prison environment, but which, in fact, worsen the overall psychological state and hinder the rehabilitation process (Blackburn, 1998).

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to prove the relationship between psychopathological personality tendencies and feelings of guilt in prisoners.

H: Prisoners with Group C psychopathological personality tendencies are expected to experience higher feelings of guilt compared to individuals with Group A and Group B psychopathological personality tendencies.

Population and sampling method

A total of 273 subjects participated in this research, of which 207 (75.8%) are male and 66 (24.2%) are female, all inmates in the prisons of Tetovo, Skopje and Veles. The sample is selected on a non-random (selective) criteria, where individuals who are inmates in the aforementioned prisons are selected based on their desire to participate in the study and fill in the questionnaire. The most represented age is 39 years old; the youngest respondent is 21 years old and the oldest is 58 years old.

Data measurement instruments

The Personality Belief Questionnaire (PBQ) developed by Aaron Temkin Beck and Judith S. Beck (2007) was administered to measure psychopathological personality tendencies (antisocial, narcissistic, histrionic, paranoid, schizoid, borderline, obsessive-compulsive, dependent, avoidant, and passive-aggressive tendencies).

The Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP) test is administered to measure guilt feelings by the group of authors Timothy R. Cohen, Steven T. Wolf, and others in 2011.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the percentage of psychopathological personality tendencies and guilt feelings. Based on the data shown in the table, we can report that the means that exceed the value of more than 80% represent indicators of psychopathological personality tendencies. In this group, the most pronounced are passive aggressive tendencies with a mean of $M=84.29\%$, obsessive-compulsive, $M= 87.44\%$, narcissistic $M= 81.53\%$, schizoid $M= 88.95\%$, while other tendencies appear with mean values up to the borderline level. Regarding the feeling of guilt, the results showed a mean of $M= 22$ points which represents a high value of sensitivity to guilt.

Table 1. Descriptive data for the main variables

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Dependent	55.36	89.29	75.0589
Avoidant	64.29	96.43	81.7896
Passive aggressive	64.29	98.21	84.2949
Obsessive compulsive	67.86	99.11	87.4411
Antisocial	60.71	97.34	81.4887
Narcissistic	60.71	96.43	81.5345
Histrionic	53.57	83.93	69.4139
Schizoid	55.36	98.00	88.9521
Paranoid	55.36	82.14	69.8391
Borderline	57.14	92.86	77.5183
Feelings of guilt	9	28	22.89

From the results in Table 2, we see that there are statistically significant differences in the experience of guilt among prisoners with psychopathological personality tendencies in Group A, Group B, and Group C, the significance value is lower than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$).

This result supports the hypothesis that personality traits influence how individuals experience guilt, with group C showing higher feelings of guilt compared to groups A and B.

Table 2. Results from the Anova analysis of variance for differences between groups A, B and C of psychopathological personality tendencies based on guilt feelings

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group_A	464,680	33	14,081	5,642	.004
Within Groups	2931.240	239	12,265		
Total	3395.919	273			
Group_B	155,317	33	4,707	6,327	.003
Within Groups	909,727	239	3,806		
Total	1065.044	273			
Group_C	215,222	33	6,522	5.219	.017
Within Groups	1181.369	239	4,943		
Total	1396.591	273			

After the ANOVA analysis, which showed significant differences in the feeling of guilt among groups A, B, and C, the post-hoc Tukey HSD test was applied to more clearly identify between which groups these differences occur. In Table 3, we can see that individuals with psychopathological personality tendencies from Group C exhibit a higher sense of guilt compared to individuals in Group B ($M = -4.20$, $p = .003$) and Group A ($M = -3.75$, $p = .017$). Meanwhile, no statistically significant difference was found between Group A and Group B ($M = -0.45$, $p = .690$).

Table 3. Results from post hoc analysis for differences between groups A, B and C based on the experience of guilt

Compared groups	Mean difference	Error Standard	Sig. (p)
Group B – Group C	-4.20	1.25	.003
Group A – Group C	-3.75	1.34	.017
Group A – Group B	-0.45	1.38	.690

DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the statistical analysis of the hypothesis proposed that prisoners with psychopathological tendencies of the Group C personality are expected to experience higher feelings of guilt compared to individuals with psychopathological tendencies of the Group A and Group B personality. Individuals of the Group C are characterized by a strong superego which is often known to be punitive (Mancini et al, 2022) and this makes them analyze themselves more in relation to rules and norms. Moreover, they experience higher levels of anxiety, emotional sensitivity, and self-criticism, elements that are closely related to the experience of guilt and remorse. These individuals often have an excessive tendency to take personal responsibility even for situations that are beyond their control (Beck, Freeman & Davis, 2004), which increases the predisposition to pathological guilt.

Therefore, for prisoners in those environments the feeling of guilt can often serve as a defense mechanism to preserve the sense of humanity and criminal identity (Paraskevi et al, 2024), compared to group B where the feeling of guilt is significantly weaker due to the lack of empathy and moral conscience (Blair, 2005). These results are in line with the existing literature especially with the contribution of Miller (2008) and Blackburn (1998) stating that the psychopathological tendencies of the Group C personality are characterized by deep emotional experience, a high sense of responsibility and increased self-reflection. In contrast, Group A individuals, who are emotionally cold and distant, tend to have lower affective reactivity and, consequently, more limited experience of moral emotions such as guilt (Livesley, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

The results show that individuals with different personality profiles experience guilt in different ways, namely, those with avoidant, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive traits exhibiting higher moral sensitivity, while those with antisocial and narcissistic tendencies have a lower level of internal blame, even though we are talking about people who are in prison for several years.

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