Personality correlates of criminals: A comparative study between normal controls and criminals

Sudhinta Sinha
Department of Psychology, S.S.L.N.T. Women’s College, Dhanbad, Jharkhand, India

Address for correspondence:
Dr. Sudhinta Sinha,
2nd Floor, "Janki Niwas," Dhaiya New Colony (Near Dhaiya Durga Mandir), P.O. Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad - 826 004, Jharkhand, India.
E-mail: sudhintasinha@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Background: Personality is a major factor in many kinds of behavior, one of which is criminal behavior. To determine what makes a criminal “a criminal,” we must understand his/her personality. This study tries to identify different personality traits which link criminals to their personality. Materials and Methods: In the present study, 37 male criminals of district jail of Dhanbad (Jharkhand) and 36 normal controls were included on a purposive sampling basis. Each criminal was given a personal datasheet and Cattel’s 16 personality factors (PFs) scale for assessing their sociodemographic variables and different personality traits. Objective: The objective of this study was to examine the relation between personality traits and criminal behavior, and to determine whether such factors are predictive of future recidivism. Results: Results indicated high scores on intelligence, impulsiveness, suspicion, self-sufficient, spontaneity, self-concept control factors, and very low scores on emotionally less stable on Cattel’s 16 PFs scale in criminals as compared with normal. Conclusion: Criminals differ from general population or non criminals in terms of personality traits.

Keywords: Crime, criminal behavior, neuroticism, personality traits, psychoticism

Are criminals born or made? This question has baffled psychologists, sociologists, and criminologists for many years, and efforts have been made to establish the nature of criminality. The born or made argument, known as the “nature versus nurture” debate, arises the question, whether criminality is due to genetic factors, and therefore unavoidable, or whether it is the product of social, situational, environmental surroundings, and other external factors.[1]

In the 1950s, it was thought that home life, upbringing, inconsistent affection, physical abuse, and inconsistent discipline could result in criminality. Another area that may suggest an individual’s personality is likely to cause criminal behavior is that of psychopathy.[2]

The term “psychopathy” is used to describe people who display what is considered to be antisocial behavior, and this term is frequently mixed up with terms such as sociopath or antisocial personality.[3] Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Third Edition-Revised (DSM III-R) defines antisocial personality as follows:

“… Individuals, who are basically unsocialised and whose behavior patterns bring them into conflict with society. They are incapable of loyalty to individuals, groups, or social values. They are grossly selfish, callous, irresponsible, impulsive, and unable to feel guilt or to learn from experience…”[3]

DSM-V defines antisocial personality as “antisocial personality disorder characterized by long-standing patterns of a disregard for other people’s right. It usually begins in childhood or as teen and continues into their adult life.”

Antisocial personality disorder is often referred to as psychopathy or sociopathy in popular culture.[4]

Cleckley (1976) suggests that psychopathy is distinctively different from criminality in that, “… the majority of

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as the author is credited and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

For reprints contact: reprints@medknow.com

How to cite this article: Sinha S. Personality correlates of criminals: A comparative study between normal controls and criminals. Ind Psychiatry J 2016;25:41-6.
psychopaths are not criminal, and the majority of criminals are not psychopaths ...[14,15]}

This study also indicates that there are debates that try to relate or predict criminality by looking at the factors of an individual's personality.[6] If we scrutinize the life histories of people who commit and are convicted of real, or victimizing, crimes, especially the histories of recidivist criminals, we find that the criminal's personality has become organized around the principle of attacking, going against, and taking from people as his/her way of relating to them. Early in life, he/she learned to take what he/she wanted. Once the personality is so organized, he/she repeatedly commits crime, and he/she does so compulsively.[7,8]

The criminal, or the crime-prone personality, sees events as external forces and connections, not according to his/her or its own or another’s feelings, thoughts, or inner forces. He/she sees people as entities pushed around by forces or who push one another around, in contrast to seeing people as driven to action by their thoughts, as expressing their feelings, or as internally directed.[7,9] Instead of continuing to believe that criminals experience a lapse in their will power, make mistakes, yield to temptation, or steal simply to get food, we need to consider that their behavior is the result of their crime-prone personalities.[7,9]

Behavior is largely a result of the way a person thinks. A personality is what makes a person. Even though a person might have the look of a criminal, the thought patterns of that person are what make them a criminal. The criminal's decisions to commit crimes come from abnormal thinking patterns, says a psychoanalyst from St. Elizabeth’s Hospital. Researchers Yocheleson and Samenow identify similar patterns, says a psychoanalyst from St. Elizabeth’s Hospital. Researchers Yocheleson and Samenow identify similar thought patterns found in criminals, which include constant lying, fail to develop empathy, expect their desires to be catered to them, loving someone for doing what they want, black and white thinkers (no middle ground or moderation), and blame others. Criminals who have been tested are proved to be less responsible, intolerant, and deficient in self-control, according to the California Psychological Inventory.[7,9]

Some of the most studied researches into the origins of crime and personality have been done by Professor Hans Eysenck, who spent years defining whether criminal behavior had any relationship with personality. He identified that personalities have three dimensions. First, psychoticism describes people as being aggressive, egocentric, and impulsive. Second, neuroticism describes people with low self-esteem, anxiety, and wide mood swings. The third is extroversion, which describes the personality of an individual who is sensation-seeking, dominant, and assertive. A majority of these traits are found in criminals, which have been studied and classified.[11-13]

A study was conducted by Cauffman on personality traits in a consecutive series of 130 male prisoners in Swedish jails sentenced for serious criminality. The investigation included a psychiatric examination by means of the Structured Clinical Interview as well as information taken from criminal records. Personality assessments were made by self-reported questionnaires, the Karolinska Scales of Personality (KSP). In the KSP, high scores were found in scales related to impulsiveness, sensation-seeking, nervous tension and distress, cognitive-social anxiety, hostility, and aggression. Very low scores were found in the socialization scale, reflecting a high degree of psychopathy-related personality traits. Furthermore, psychopathy-related personality traits were common.[14]

In the relation between personality traits and crime, two studies were conducted by Krueger et al., one in New Zealand, on 18-year-old males and females from an entire birth cohort and second, in Pittsburgh, on an ethnically diverse group of 12- and 13-year-old boys. In both the studies, they found multiple and independent measures of personality and delinquent involvement. The personality correlates of delinquency were robust in different nations, in different age cohorts, across gender, and across race. Greater delinquent participation was associated with a personality configuration characterized by high-negative emotionality (the tendency to experience aversive affective states) and weak constraint (difficulty in impulse control).[15] A similar study was conducted by Steiner et al. on a sample of 481 incarcerated males. They were asked to complete questionnaires, assessing distress and restraint relating to personality characteristics. Results indicate a significant association between self-reported levels of distress and restraint prior to criminal behavior as well as behavior during incarceration.[14]

In a study of criminals by Bhojak, et al. (1998), murderers scored significantly higher on stressful life events and public anxiety measures and on obsessive and psychopathic traits. Weak ego strength was noted among juvenile delinquents (Dhila and Yagnik, 1998)[16] and criminals (Bhardwaj, 1995).[17] Criminals in prison and drug-dependent persons showed a weak social identity (Kondandaram, 1997).[17] Higher death anxiety and less emotional stability were reported among the suicide attempters (Yagnik and Dhila, 2001).[17] Using SIS-II, Singh et al. (2000)[17] found that murderers were low on productivity, imaginative capacity, intellectual ability, emotional control, and interpersonal relationships. Dayal, et al. (1994)[17] examined the association between crime and personality and reported that criminals differ from noncriminals on 12 personality factors (PFs) of the 16 PF.[17] Singh studied on 75 female prisoners convicted from murder and equal number of female prisoners...
convicted for other petty crimes and found that criminals are significantly different from noncriminals. He described that criminals had a lower self-esteem and social esteem indicating a lack of self-regard, thus exhibit neurotic traits such as anxiety, irritability, hostility, maladjustment, and insecurity.\[19\] Sanyal conducted a study on 25 women convicted of murder of “Nari Bandi Niketan” in Lucknow. He reported considerable depression among married female prisoners. He found that female convicts were suffering from feelings of anxiety, guilt, insecurity, and low self-esteem.\[19\]

A study conducted by Bhosle on a sample of 69 female convicts revealed that the inmates were found to be maladjusted in marital life and relations.\[20\] Sharma et al. studied a sample of 202 participants, in which 101 were convicted offenders and 101 were matched normal controls. Offenders group comprised convicted prisoners for different crimes such as murder, rape, and robbery, selected from Birsa Munda Central Jail, Hotwar, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India, based on a purposive sampling. The convicted offenders group obtained significantly lower scores on EI compared to normal controls.\[21\] Aggarwal et al. studied on fifty consecutive participants diagnosed as per the International Classification of Diseases-10 criteria for substance abuse to find the relationship between personality characteristics and criminal behavior in the substance abusers. The role of various sociodemographic variables in substance abusers, which affected their criminal behavior, was also studied and it was found that personality characteristics of the substance abusers differed significantly from the normal controls, and the number of variables including occupational status, socioeconomic status, family history of substance use, and type of substance abuse significantly correlated with the criminal behavior in the substance abusers.\[22\] Kamaluddin et al. reviewed four psychological traits on the basis of an archival research methodology. Results indicated that four psychological traits: Personality traits, low self-control, aggressive behavior, and cognitive distortion act as the major psychological factor underlying criminal behavior within an individual.\[23\]

Crimes vary in degree of severity according to the severity of the punishment. Crimes are generally graded into three categories: (a) Summary - It is relatively minor crime. Punishment is usually a monetary fine and short period of jail time (a few days up to a few months) (b) Misdemeanors - It is less serious crime, lower level of intent to kill or harm to any specific victim or society, punishable by jail (time of 1 year or less). (c) Felonies - It is the most serious crime, highest intent to kill, accompanied by an extremely serious result, loss of life grievous injury, destruction of property, and may result in a person being sentenced to more than a year in prison. The fundamental distinction between felonies and misdemeanors depends on the penalty and the power of imprisonment. Here, in the present study, criminals from the last two categories were included.

**Aims and objective**

The aim and objective of this study was to examine the relation between personality traits and criminal behavior, and to determine whether such personality traits are predictive of future recidivism.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Sample**

A sample of 37 male, convicted criminals of district jail of Dhanbad (Jharkhand) was included in this study on a purposive sampling basis. Their crimes were of different kinds such as murder, rape, theft, kidnapping, forgery, dowry death, and dacoity as per the Indian Penal Code. The age ranges from 20 to 65 years (mean age – 36.7 years). In socioeconomics, three categories, i.e., family income up to Rs. 5000/10,000 and above 10,000 were taken into consideration for the criminals. The average family income of the 37 criminals was Rs. 9270/month. Criminals having addiction to alcohol, any psychiatric illness, and <2 years of imprisonment were excluded from the study. In control group, 37 normal controls were taken from the general population (noncriminal).

**Tools**

Two tests were used in this study.

**Personal datasheet**

A designed pro forma was used to collect sociodemographic variables.

**The 16 personality factor questionnaire**

It is an objective scorable test devised by Cattel in 1973.\[24\] Its reliability and validity coefficient for the full scale is exceptionally high. It measures the 16 dimensions of the personality, and all the 16 factors are bipolar.

**Procedure**

After obtaining permission from the concerned authorities, the criminals were interviewed and the tests were administered after establishing a good rapport with them.

**RESULTS**

The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2 and further it is also analyzed through graphic representation in Figure 1.
Studies from outside of India strongly suggest how personality influences criminal activity. In this connection, we can quote the study of Lombroso (1836–1909), who is regarded as the father of criminology, developed a theory that some people are genetically closer to their primate ancestors than others; he proposed that some people are born with an innate predisposition to criminality and antisocial behavior. He believed on the basis of his study that criminals are a separate species who had not evolved in the same way as “normal” humans. Further, he concluded that criminals had distinguishing physical features that set them apart from noncriminal population. In continuation with these studies, the results of the present study also found consistent, which are as follows:

- Results show the mean and SD of the Sten score of criminals and normal controls for 16 personality dimensions on which criminals score were high on PF, H, I, L, Q2, and Q3 [Table 1]
- High score on H factor indicates criminals’ thick skinliness that enables them to face wear and tear in dealing with people and grueling emotional situations, carelessness, have a tendency to ignore danger signals, actively interested in the opposite sex, always ready to try new things, and abundant in emotional response [Table 1]
- High score on I factor indicates that criminals have a tendency to be tender minded, daydreaming, sensitive, sometimes demanding of attention and help, and impractical [Table 1]
- High score on L factor indicates the criminals’ tendency to be mistrusting and doubtful, usually deliberate in his/her actions, unconcerned about other people [Table 1]
- High score on Q2 factor shows temperamentally independent, accustomed to going his/her own way, making decisions and taking action on his/her own [Table 1]
- Again high score on Q3 factor shows criminals tend to have strong control of their emotions, and the general behavior is inclined to be socially aware and careful [Table 1]
- Low score on B, F, N, and Q4 factors revealed their below average level of intelligence, restrained tendency, unsophisticated, sentimental, sometimes crude and awkward behavior, and tends to be relaxed and satisfied [Table 1]
- Although criminals did not differ much from normal controls on factor C, their low score on this scale revealed their tendency to be emotionally less stable [Table 1].

These findings can also be seen at a glance in the graph [Figure 1].

Further, “t” ratio was calculated between the mean of criminals and normal controls for 16 personality dimensions, in which values for factors H and Q3 were found significant at 0.05 level, and “t” value for factors I and Q4 was also found to be significant at both the levels, i.e., 0.05 and 0.01 levels, which indicates that both the groups differ significantly on personality dimensions such as H, I, Q3, and Q4 [Table 2].

Considering all the findings, it can be said that criminals have a tendency to be independent, careless, sentimental, suspicious, mistrustful, thick skinned, demanding attention, unconcerned, making decision by his/her own, and posses below average intelligence as compared to normal or noncriminal. This finding is consistent with

| 16 personality dimensions | Criminals | Normal controls |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------------|
|                          | Mean     | SD              | Mean | SD  |
| A                        | 6.4      | 1.69            | 6.5  | 1.76|
| B                        | 4.3      | 2.24            | 4.7  | 2.66|
| C                        | 4.0      | 1.86            | 3.6  | 1.46|
| E                        | 4.5      | 1.95            | 4.7  | 1.61|
| F                        | 4.8      | 2.09            | 5.6  | 2.42|
| G                        | 5.1      | 1.93            | 5.0  | 0.98|
| H                        | 5.7      | 1.77            | 4.8  | 1.75|
| I                        | 6.2      | 1.60            | 4.9  | 1.67|
| L                        | 6.5      | 1.67            | 6.1  | 1.89|
| M                        | 4.8      | 1.78            | 4.8  | 1.06|
| N                        | 5.0      | 1.82            | 5.4  | 2.53|
| O                        | 6.0      | 1.73            | 6.3  | 2.75|
| Q1                       | 5.8      | 1.76            | 6.1  | 1.34|
| Q2                       | 6.0      | 1.77            | 5.8  | 1.47|
| Q3                       | 5.6      | 2.02            | 4.7  | 2.13|
| Q4                       | 5.2      | 2.04            | 6.3  | 1.28|

SD – Standard deviation

Figure 1: Graphical representation of 16 personality factors
the previous studies that were done by Caspi et al. and Steiner et al.[15,16]

Only factor Q3 on which criminals scored higher than normal controls indicates their strong control in emotion which was not consistent with the findings of the previous study [Table 1]. Although the criminal scores on Q3 factor were higher than normal, it was within average range, as the mean score was 5.6. It may be due to the fact that today the nature and technique of crime is changing rapidly from earlier. Not only that, new and advanced technology is also being used in committing crime, which requires enough control in using them.

CONCLUSION

The results support the view that criminals differ from general population or non-criminals in terms of personality features. These traits have also discriminant and predictive validity for future recidivism. However, there is a dearth of literature in this field. Hence, there is a considerable gap in this area, and it is suggested that more research is needed.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank Mr. Hamid Akhtar, Jail Superintendent, District Jail, Dhanbad - 826 001, Jharkhand, India, for his help.

Financial support and sponsorship
Nil.

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Eysenck HJ, Gedjonsson GH. The Causes and Cures of Criminality. New York: Plenum Press; 1989.
2. Blaszczynski A, Mc Conaghy N, Frankova A. Crime, antisocial personality and pathological gambling. J Gambl Behav 1989;5:137-52.
3. James SW. The criminal personality as a DSM-III-R antisocial, narcissistic, borderline and, histrionic personality disorder. Int J Offender Ther Comp Criminol 1988;32:185-99.
4. Krueger RF, Markon KE, Patrick CJ, Iacono WG. Externalizing psychopathology in adulthood: A dimensional-spectrum conceptualization and its implications for DSM-V. J Abnorm Psychol 2005;114:537-50.
5. Mire S, Roberson C. The Study of Violent Crime: It’s Correlates and Concerns. New York: CRC Press; 2011.
6. Reid JA. Crime and Personality: Personality Theory and Criminality Examined. Student Pulse Academic Journal 2011;3:1-4.
7. James MM. Criminal Personality Relates to others by Attacking and Taking. Published on September 03, 1989 in The New York Times: Opinion. Available from: http://www.nytimes.com/1989/09/03/opinion/1-criminal-personality-relates-to-others-by-attacking-and-taking-611989.html#. [Last accessed on 2015 Oct 9].
8. Schuessler KF, Cressey DR. Personality characteristics of criminals. Am J Sociol 1950;55:476-84.
9. Krueger RF, Schmutte PS, Caspi A, Moffitt TE, Campbell K, Silva PA. Personality traits are linked to crime among men and women: Evidence from a birth cohort. J Abnorm Psychol 1994;103:328-38.
10. Yochelson S, Samenow SE. The Criminal Personality: A Profile for Change. United State of America: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers; 1979. p. 538.
11. Eysenck SB, Eysenck HJ. Crime and personality: Item analysis of questionnaire responses. Br J Criminol 1971;11:49-62.
12. Eysenck HJ. Crime and Personality. 3rd ed. London: Routledge & Keganpaul; 1977. p. 222.
13. Sammons A. Eysenck’s theory of the criminal personality. In: Eysenck’s Personality Theory of Offending. Criminological Psychology. Available from: http://www.psychlotron.org.uk/newresources/criminological/AZ_AQB-Crim-EysenckTheory.pdf.
14. Longato-Stadler E, von Knorring L, Hallman J. Mental and personality disorders as well as personality traits in a Swedish male criminal population. Nord J Psychiatry 2002;56:137-44.
15. Caspi A, Moffitt TE, Silva PA, Loebcr MS, Krueger RF, Schmutte PS. Are some people crime prone? Replication of the personality- crime relationship across countries, gender, races and methods. Criminology 2006;32:163-96.
16. Steiner H, Cauffman E, Duxbury E. Personality traits in juvenile delinquents: Relation to criminal behavior and recidivism: Violence and related psychopathology. J Am Acad Child Adolesec Psychiatry 1999;38:256-62.
17. Jerath JM, Sibia A. Trends in personality research: An overview. In: Mishra G, editor. Psychology in India: Basic Psychological Process and Human Development (ICSSR Survey of Advance Research), First Edition. Vol. 1. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd.; 2009. p. 285-7.
18. Singh A. Personality of female murderer’s. Int J Criminal 1981;9:156-66.
19. Sanyal S. Female Criminals in India. New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House; 1986.
20. Bhosle SA. Female Crime in India and Theoretical Perspective of Crime. New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, Gyan Publishing House; 2009. p. 73-4.
21. Sharma N, Prakash O, Sengar KS, Chaudhury S, Singh AR. The relation between emotional intelligence and criminal behavior: A study among convicted criminals. Ind Psychiatry J 2015;24:54-8.
22. Aggarwal A, Vaish S, Sharma DK, Sushil CS, Usman N, Sudarsanan S. A Study of personality profile and criminal behavior in substance abusers. Ind Psychiatry J 2015;24:35-9.
23. Kamaluddin MR, Shariff NS, Othman A, Ismail KH, Saat GA. Linking psychological traits with criminal behaviour: A review. Asean J Psychiatry 2015;16:135-47.
24. Cattle RB. Manual for the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16 PF). New Delhi: The Psycho- Centre; 1982.
25. Lombroso C. Illustrative studies in criminal anthropology. In: Moyer IL, editor. Criminological Theories: Traditional and Non-traditional Voices and Themes. The Monist. Vol. 1. New Delhi: Sage Publication, Indian University of Pennsylvania; 1890. p. 32-9.

Author Help: Online submission of the manuscripts

Articles can be submitted online from http://www.journalonweb.com. For online submission, the articles should be prepared in two files (first page file and article file). Images should be submitted separately.

1) First Page File:
Prepare the title page, covering letter, acknowledgement etc. using a word processor program. All information related to your identity should be included here. Use text/rtf/doc/pdf files. Do not zip the files.

2) Article File:
The main text of the article, beginning with the Abstract to References (including tables) should be in this file. Do not include any information (such as acknowledgement, your names in page headers etc.) in this file. Use text/rtf/doc/pdf files. Do not zip the files. Limit the file size to 1 MB. Do not incorporate images in the file. If file size is large, graphs can be submitted separately as images, without their being incorporated in the article file. This will reduce the size of the file.

3) Images:
Submit good quality color images. Each image should be less than 4096 kb (4 MB) in size. The size of the image can be reduced by decreasing the actual height and width of the images (keep up to about 6 inches and up to about 1800 x 1200 pixels). JPEG is the most suitable file format. The image quality should be good enough to judge the scientific value of the image. For the purpose of printing, always retain a good quality, high resolution image. This high resolution image should be sent to the editorial office at the time of sending a revised article.

4) Legends:
Legends for the figures/images should be included at the end of the article file.