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Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENTS CONVICTED FOR SEXUAL ASSAULTS IN RUSSIA

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of specific personality characteristics of young criminals convicted for sexual assaults in Russia. The results of the study revealed that juveniles committed sexual assault differ in following personality categories: being impulsive, undisciplined and having low self-control. In majority of cases psychological defense mechanisms and coping behaviors demonstrated by these juveniles intensify the influence and duration of adverse negative social environments. The juveniles also have a disturbed sovereignty of psychological space which means a disturbed ability to keep the integrity of psychological boundaries and stability under the influence of external factors. Juvenile crime is an urgent issue and social problem particularly due to the high probability of recidivism in Russia. Therefore, psychological work with convicted juveniles is undoubtedly relevant to ensure their re-socialization and integration in society. Conducted study provided important data on “targets” for prevention and correction psychological counseling of juveniles with deviant behaviors.

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Keywords: Convicted juveniles, coping behavior, personality traits, sexual assault.



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1. Introduction

The study of personality characteristics as correlates of different behaviors is one of the major topics of interest in Russian psychology. Personality traits of criminals is of particular importance and scientific interest. According to well-known Russian legal psychologists Vasiliev (2016), Eminov and Antonyan (2015) a criminal person differs from a person with normative behavior not in a certain traits, but in a complex of such traits. These traits determine the stable behavior of the personality and the interaction with situational and personality factors. Crime situations could be considered as triggers for long-established personality tendencies. Such tendencies are include sexual aggression and deviant behavior in intimate relationships. In our opinion, there are correlates of sexual crime behavior which could include specific personality traits and traits of character, features of psychological defense mechanisms and coping behavior, specific values and motives and the system of meaningful relationship.

Juvenile sexual delinquency is still a serious scientific question and social problem in many countries including Russia. What kind of personality characteristics or specific behavioral patterns could induce criminal behavior in juveniles related to sexual sphere? To answer this question we studied the personality characteristics of juveniles convicted for serious sexual assaults (rape; an act in which a person intentionally sexually touches another person without that person's consent; coerces or physically forces a person to engage in a sexual act against their will; groping, child sexual abuse) and normative adolescents in Russia using comparative analysis. Total sample size of 220 juveniles aged 16 – 17 included – 102 adolescents convicted for sexual assault and serving sentences in young offenders' institution (term of deprivation $M \pm SD = 4$ years and 7 months) and 118 school children who didn't commit crimes.

2. Problem Statement

Personality is one of the major topics of research in psychological science in general. Currently numerous personality theories exist which could be divided in four major ones. Each of these theories attempts to describe different patterns in personality, differences between humans on an individual level.

The variety of popular foreign psychological models of personality are based on the idea that there are number of stable characteristics, or traits, that cause a person to act in a certain way (Hans Eysenck, Raymond Cattell, Robert McCrae and Paul Costa). These traits are the blueprint for how humans behave (such as, introversion, sociability, aggressiveness, submissiveness, loyalty and ambition). Another group of theories views personality through the lens of social interactions (the Social Cognition Theory, Albert Bandura et al.). This assumption gives a much clearer view on the role of other people behavior on our own personalities. Psychoanalytic theories of personality emphasize the importance of early childhood experiences and the unconscious mind (Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and Karen Horney). Humanistic theories of personality focus on psychological growth, free will, and personal awareness. It takes a more positive outlook on human nature and is centered on how each person can achieve their individual potential (Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow).

The majority of authors and psychological theories in Russian psychology have something in common in determining personality. In particular definition of personality as a member of society, a subject of social behavior and communication is combined in Russian psychology (Igor Con, Boris Ananyev). The

main indicators in determining personality are activity, responsibility, ability to regulate own life and resolve life contradictions. Of particular importance are social relations, communication, activity and behavior (Xenia Abulkhanova, Vladimir Gansen). Personality as a conjunction of individual psychological traits determining a person's attitude to themselves, society and the world around that person formed during their life (Yuriy Shcherbatykh).

But can we attribute these approaches and definitions of personality to a criminal personality and behaviours? Or does a criminal personality have its own characteristics and features? A number of studies in Russia and abroad are devoted to these research questions. In particular, the studies of the criminal personality developing: Antonyan and Konovalova (2017), Dozortseva (2004), Sarkisyan (2018), personality traits of adolescents: Ryan et al. (2012), Seto and Lalumiere (2010), Shaikova (2015), Vartanyan and Gorbatov (2017) and other aspects of the personality characteristics of adolescent offenders: Delibalt et al. (2017), Frick (2016), Pechorro et al. (2019) etc. What features does a criminal personality have, in particular, the personality of juveniles convicted for sexual assault? We also tried to find an answer to this question.

3. Research Questions

- Does a criminal personality have their specific characteristic and features?
- What specific features does the personality of adolescents convicted for sexual assault have?

4. Purpose of the Study

The research aim was to study the variety of personality characteristics of juveniles convicted for sexual assault, such as:

- Personality traits and traits of character
- Psychological defense mechanisms and coping behaviors.
- The values and specific of motivational' sphere and the system of meaningful relationships.

5. Research Methods

The study utilized three groups of methods including standardised techniques, projective techniques, and mathematical methods of data analysis:

5.1. Standardized psychometric tests:

- a) Raymond Cattell's 16 Personality Factors Questionnaire (Form C), aimed to explore the individual psychological peculiarities of a person;
- b) the Pathocharacterological Diagnostic Questionnaire developed by Lichko and Ivanov, designed to identify the accentuations of juveniles' character and their disposition to psychopathy;
- c) Test "Life Style Index", LSI (R. Plutchik, H. Kellerman, H. R. Conte).
- d) Coping Strategies Questionnaire, WCQ (R. Lazarus & S. Folkman).
- e) «COPE» (C.S. Carver, M.F. Scheier, J.K. Weintraub).
- f) Purpose-in-Life Test, PIL (Crumbaugh, Maholick, adapt. Leontiev).

- g) Questionnaire «The sovereignty of psychological space» (S.K.Nartova-Bochaver).
- j) Timothy Leary’s Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality, for studying the preferred style of interpersonal relations.

5.2. Projective test “Hand Test” by Edwin E. Wagner.

5.3. Mathematical methods of data analysis:

- a) Basic descriptive statistics;
- b) The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test (Z value)
- c) Student's t-distribution
- d) r-Pirson.

6. Findings

6.1. Personality traits and traits of character of juveniles convicted for sexual assaults

Result 1. Measuring the essence of personality we got statistically significant differences between groups of juveniles on the these scales: “Warm/Reserved” (A), “Trusting/Vigilant” (L), “Expedient/Rule-Conscious” (G), (either $p \leq 0.05$), also “Tolerates Disorder/Perfectionistic” (Q3), “Private/Forthright” (N), “Deferential/Dominant” (E), “Self-Reliant/Group-Oriented” (Q2), “Shy/Bold” (H), “Problem-Solving” (B), “Traditional/Open-to-Change” (Q1) (either $p \leq 0.01$).

According to the data, juveniles convicted for sexual assault characterized as undisciplined, impulsive and careless of social rules, also self-conflict and having low self-control. In communication they avoid conflict, are submissive, easily led, cooperative and accommodating. A convicted juvenile is characterized as a deferential and humble person in communication. They also differ from normative schoolchildren in intellectual activity characterised by prevalence of concrete-thinking, less intelligence, lower general mental capacity, and inability to handle abstract tasks.

Result 2. As is well known one of the central factors determining the risk of the formation of deviant behaviour of juveniles is accentuation of psychological type. And in adolescences typological variants of the norm are most pronounced. Therefore, it was important for us also to study the prevailing accentuation of psychological type in juveniles committed sexual crimes.

Collected data on on the accentuation of personality traits and disposition to psychopathy revealed that convicted juveniles are characterised by the epileptoid psychological type, and schoolchildren are characterised by the psychastenic psychological type (Table 1).

Table 01. The Results of Comparison between the Groups’ Values Obtained Using the Questionnaire by Lichko and Ivanov (M, SD)

Group of juveniles	Epileptoid psychological type*		Psychastenic psychological type **	
	M	SD	M	SD
Group 1	8.5	1.97	5.0	2.12
Group 2	6.6	2.10	8.7	2.03

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. Group 1 – convicted juveniles Group 2 – schoolchildren with normative behavior

The juveniles with an epileptoid psychological type are characterized by a peculiarity that is manifested

in the inclination to being angry and melancholy states of mood and search for an object to vent their anger on. In an interpersonal relations they show great jealousy towards their partner. Leadership is expressed in the striving for ruling over others. Such juveniles adapt well under strict disciplinary regimes, where they seek to fawn on authorities by giving an appearance of industrious workers and to acquire a status that enables controlling other adolescents. The processes in their nervous system are characterised by inertness, stiffness, and ‘viscosity’, which in turn leaves an imprint on the entire psyche – from movements and emotions to thinking and personal values. They like developing their physical strength. Such juveniles make decisions without haste and in rather a prudent manner. This is why they sometimes miss an opportunity requiring quick action. However, their sluggishness disappears in an affective state. For this reason, they easily lose control of themselves, and act on impulse. Adolescents are very vindictive and inventive in methods of their revenge. Carefulness in details, scrupulousness, meticulous abidance by any rules, even to the detriment of business, and annoying pedantry are considered a compensation for one’s own inertness (Ivanov & Lichko 1995).

The control group of juveniles with an psychastenic psychological type are characterized as an indecisive, mistrustful, inclined to self-analysis, and subject to fixed ideas. They often find it the most difficult task to be responsible for themselves and particularly for others. Imaginary objects and invented rituals help alleviate their constant anxiety about chimerical troubles and misfortunes. They become more indecisive when it comes to making an independent decision on insignificant everyday problems. Serious issues having a marked effect on the future are, on the contrary, often tackled with surprising hastiness. They are excessively pedantic and committed to principles even in terms of minor issues, sometimes becoming despotic. As a result, they are rarely compatible with representatives of almost all other accentuations of character. Psychasthenics’ pedantry is also considered to calm their fears for the future (Ivanov & Lichko 1995).

We also have got results on analysis of deviant forms behaviour of juveniles (Table 2).

Table 02. The Results of the Analysis of Deviant Forms of Juveniles Behaviour Using Special and Additional Scales of the Questionnaire by Lichko and Ivanov (χ^2 ; p)

Special Additional Scales	χ^2
Character dissimulation	31.2**
Frankness	17.1**
Personality traits in organic psychopathy	20.6**
Emancipation reaction in self-esteem	11.1*
Masculinity in self-other system	33.5**
Femininity in self-other system	21.0**
Alcohol addiction	11.0*

Note: *p<0.01; ** p<0.001.

Table 2 demonstrates that convicted juveniles characterized by elevated frankness and at the same time they look for not revealing their character traits. In self-other system they differ in prevalence of masculinity. Such juveniles also look to free themselves from paternalism and control of elders. In addition they differ in being prone to alcohol addiction and personality traits in organic psychopathy. It is worth noting a high indicator of the possible organic nature of the formation of psychopathy and character accentuation is often found in the epileptoid psychological type, as noted by Lichko (2009).

Result 3. According to Vasiliev (2016), aggressive tendencies are common among young rapists. But which exactly? And how do aggressive tendencies manifest themselves? To investigate the tendencies of activity (aggressiveness) of juveniles, we used a “Hand-test”. So studying the action tendencies - acting-out and aggressive behavior - revealed aggressive behavior in both groups of juveniles: 83.0 % of convicted juveniles (M=0.7; SD=0.39) and 78.0 % of schoolchildren (M=0.6; SD=0.25). We suppose this data may not indicate aggressiveness as a personality trait, but may be due to psychological characteristics of the age period.

Collected data showed statistically significant differences between groups of juveniles on the scales presented in table 3.

Table 03. Indicators of aggressive behavior of groups of juveniles Using “Hand Test” by Edwin E. Wagner (χ^2 ; p)

Aggressive	Affection	Exhibition	Active	Passive	Description
17.3***	6.0*	9.6**	11.6**	12.1**	9.7**

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The most pronounced categories of responses from convicted juveniles were such categories as: “Active” (M=16.60; SD=1.35), “Affection” (M=8.60; SD=1.54), “Crippled”(M=8.00; SD=1.56) and “Exhibition” (M=7.50; SD=1.26).

The answers of the categories “Active” and “Affection” reflect the tendency of convicted juveniles to acting-out aimed at adapting to the environment, however, the effect on the aggressiveness of the behavior of this category of answers is ambiguous. The answers of the categories “Crippled” and “Exhibition” are not take account of assuming the probability of aggressive behavior, but it can specify motives of such behavior. Thus, the identified aggressiveness and high scores in the specified categories (compared to scores in other categories) can indicate the determination of aggressive behavior of convicted juveniles by the desire to flaunt oneself, on the one hand, and a feeling of inability to act, on the other hand.

Imagine the difficulties in convicted juveniles in testing this technique. Difficulties were expressed in the length of reflection on answers, brevity (one or two options), and the frequency of responses. This data allows to identify the low level of visual thinking, difficulties in solving abstract tasks, reduced efficiency of thinking, lower general mental capacity of juveniles convicted of sexual assault. These difficulties become especially obvious in comparing the speed and results of passing this test by other groups of juveniles including normative schoolchildren (from the personal experience of the authors).

Therefore, juveniles convicted for sexual assault differ in impulsiveness, undisciplined behavior and low self-control. Their aggressive behavior is a tendency to acting-out aimed at adapting to the environment. Aggressive behavior of convicted juveniles can be determinate by the desire to flaunt oneself, on the one hand, and a feeling of inability to act, on the other hand. In addition, their intellectual activity characterised by prevalence of concrete-thinking, lower general mental capacity, and inability to handle abstract tasks.

6.2. Psychological defense mechanisms and coping behaviors of the juveniles convicted for sexual assault

Stressful and frustrating situations happen in everyone's life. In that periods strong, but opposite motivations can arise forming an intrapersonal conflict. Psychological defense mechanisms allow to stabilize this condition. Social behavior, called coping behavior allows to overcome a difficult situation. Coping behavior is important for a person's social adaptation. However, not all people form such a set of coping strategies that would effectively cope with stressors. Therefore, the study of coping behavior, as well as the psychological defense mechanisms of convicted juveniles are significant for understanding their personality.

The data on coping behaviours showed that juveniles convicted for sexual assault more often than schoolchildren use the "Distancing" coping strategy ($\chi^2=10.659$; $p<0.01$). The prevailing psychological defense mechanisms of criminal juveniles are such mechanisms as "reaction formation" ($p<0.046$), "repression" ($p<0.020$) and "displacement" ($p<0.036$). In addition we found that juveniles convicted for sexual assault use such ineffective coping strategies as "behavioral disengagement" ($p<0.023$), "mental disengagement" ($p<0.021$) and "alcohol-drug disengagement" ($p<0.028$) and also "denial" coping strategy ($p<0.015$). In this way, convicted juveniles use aspects of what might be viewed as emotion-focused coping and coping responses that arguably are less useful. In contradistinction to them, school children with normative behaviors use conceptually distinct aspects of problem-focused coping as "seeking of instrumental social support" ($p<0.013$) and such aspects of what might be viewed as emotion-focused coping as "positive reinterpretation" ($p<0.034$).

Thus, we found that psychological defense mechanisms and coping behaviors of the juveniles convicted for sexual assault do not contribute to solving their problems, but often intensify the duration of adverse conditions.

6.3. The values and specific of motivational sphere and the system of meaningful relationship of the juveniles convicted for sexual assault

Result 1. The characteristics of communication of deviant juveniles are also paid a special attention to in the psychological papers. Therefore, the next step in our study was to identify the preferred style of interpersonal relations of juveniles with criminal sexual behaviors.

Our data on the preferred style of interpersonal relations demonstrate statistically significant differences between groups of juveniles in the following scales: "imperious - leading", "independent - dominant" and "collaborating - conventional" (either $p<0.05$), also "straightforward - aggressive", "submissive - shy", "dependent - obedient" and "responsible - generous" (either $p<0.01$).

In contradistinction to normative schoolchildren convicted juveniles have a prevailing responsibly generous type of interpersonal relations (Table 4). This type of interpersonal relations is accentuated and means kindness, over-commitment, hypersocial attitudes and emphasized altruism of convicted juveniles.

Table 04. Indicators of Preferred Style of Interpersonal Relations of Groups of Juveniles Using Timothy Leary’s Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality (M, SD)

Groups	“Imperious - leading” *		“Responsibly generous” **		Dominant		Friendly	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Juveniles convicted	8.05	2.78	9.14	4.68	3.68	5.35	5.66	10.46
Schoolchildren	8.18	3.83	6.94	2.61	5.72	7.00	0.48	6.70

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01

The schoolchildren differ in prevailing imperious - leading type of interpersonal relations. Such juveniles are intolerant to criticism and reassess their capabilities.

The main social orientations are presented in the form of four orientations: domination - submission, friendliness - hostility. These orientations are also formed by four styles of interpersonal relations: domination - friendliness, domination - hostility, submission - friendliness and submission - hostility. As a Table 4 demonstrates juveniles of both groups have a “domination - friendliness” style of interpersonal relationships.

Result 2. One of the reason for the deviant behavior of juveniles, as a rule, is associated with the space of intra-family and interpersonal relations. Studying the sovereignty of the psychological space, we got statistically significant differences between groups of juveniles by any definition (Table 5).

Table 05. Indicators of the Sovereignty of Psychological Space of Groups of Juveniles Using Questionnaire «The Sovereignty of Psychological Space» (S.K.Nartova-Bochaver)

Indicators	T-points		t	p<0.01
	Group 1	Group 2		
Physical body sovereignty	50	43	3.24	0.002
Territory sovereignty	53	41	5.14	0.000
Sovereignty of things	56	43	6.83	0.000
Sovereignty of habits	52	43	4.49	0.000
Sovereignty of social ties	53	66	-3.72	0.001
Sovereignty values	48	62	-4.05	0.000

Note: Group 1 - convicted juveniles; Group 2 - schoolchildren with normative behavior

Table 5 demonstrates that convicted juveniles have disturbed sovereignty of psychological space (physical body sovereignty, territory sovereignty, sovereignty of things and habits). This indicates a disturbed ability to keep the integrity of psychological boundaries and not break under the influence of external factors (Nartova-Bochaver, 2014).

As Nartova-Bochaver (2014) notes, the main characteristic of sovereignty for personality is the physical body sovereignty. The physical body sovereignty is laid in childhood due to the respectful and careful attitude of parents to child and to child needs. The low physical body sovereignty of convicted juveniles may be due to their desire to work off dependence on parents and at the same time anxiety of their parents about the independence of children. Disturbance of the territory sovereignty and sovereignty of things is reflected in the ability to manage own time.

In contradistinction to them, normative schoolchildren have a disturbance of sovereignty of social ties and sovereignty values. This indicates a desire of the juveniles to have friends who cannot be approved by parents. It also indicates a desire to have a personal freedom of choice (interest, view of life etc.).

Result 3. Each person evaluates his or her life from the point of view of the meaning of life that can be found by a person in the future (the goals), in the present (the process of life), and the past (the result), or in all three components (Leontiev, 2006).

Analyzing purposes in life, we found that convicted juveniles have a lower integral criterion than control group of schoolchildren (Table 6).

Table 06. Indicators of the Purposes in Life of Group of Juveniles Using Purpose-in-Life Test, PIL (Crumbaugh, Maholick, adapt. Leontiev)

Indicators	M	SD
Purpose in life**	20.6	8.651
Process of life**	21.4	6.718
Result of life**	20.5	7.709
Internal locus of control*	16.0	4.309
External locus of control*	24.0	8.106
Integral criterion**	78.0	13.990

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

This indicates that juveniles convicted for sexual assault live for the day and live in the past, they are not satisfied with their life in the present, and also they do not perceive it as interesting, emotional, productive and full of purpose. Juveniles believe that they cannot control own lives, so it makes no sense to plan something for the future.

Certainly such results may be due to the current situation of juveniles - social isolation.

Therefore, the values and motivations sphere and the system of meaningful relationship of the juveniles convicted for sexual assault is characterized by accentuated meaning kindness, over-commitment, hypersocial attitudes and emphasized altruism of convicted juveniles. Such juveniles also have disturbed sovereignty of psychological space which means the disturbed ability to keep the integrity of psychological boundaries and not break under the influence of external factors. In addition, juveniles convicted for sexual assault live for the day and live in the past, they are not satisfied their life in the present, and also they do not perceive it as interesting, emotional, productive and full of purpose.

7. Conclusion

Juveniles convicted for sexual assault differ in such personality characteristics, such as impulsiveness, undiscipline and low self-control. Their aggressive behavior could be considered as tendency to acting-out aimed at adapting to the environment. Aggressive behaviour of convicted juveniles can be determined by the desire to flaunt oneself, on the one hand, and a feeling of inability to act, on the other hand. In addition, their intellectual activity characterised by prevalence of concrete-thinking, less intelligence, lower general mental capacity, and inability to handle abstract tasks.

Psychological defense mechanisms and coping behaviour of the juveniles convicted for sexual assault do not contribute to solving the problem, but often intensify the duration of adverse conditions.

The values and motivations sphere and the system of meaningful relationship of the juveniles convicted for sexual assault is characterized by accentuated meaning kindness, over-commitment, hypersocial attitudes and emphasized altruism of convicted juveniles. Such juveniles also have disturbed sovereignty of psychological space which means a disturbed ability to keep the integrity of psychological boundaries and the stability under the influence of external factors. In addition, juveniles convicted for sexual assault live for the day and live in the past, they are not satisfied with their life in the present, and also they do not perceive it as interesting, emotional, productive and full of purpose.

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