

Personality Traits and Juvenile Delinquency

A critical analysis

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“The real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind”

Joseph Conrad Quotes

Abstract— Juvenile delinquency is one of the most exciting and influential areas of research in behavioural sciences and became a focus of many sociologists and social scientists. Delinquency is a state of conduct disorder in youth. The discussion of juvenile delinquency gives attention to age trends, moral development and the continuity and course of antisocial behaviour. These are directly or indirectly influenced by various historical trends, including, changes in society and family. The present study intends to have a critical analysis of role of personality traits (OCEAN and PEN Models) in Juvenile delinquency and criminal behaviour and to determine whether such factors are predictive of future recidivism. Despite of strict legal frame work the juvenile criminal offences remains alarming and this study aims at contributing to the exiting literature to understand how personality influences criminal activity.

Keywords- Alarming; Juvenile Delinquent; Conduct Disorder; Influential; Attention;

I. INTRODUCTION

The study scrutinizes the relationships among personality, delinquency and recidivism from the perspective of very influential personality theories, “The Big Five Model” (OCEAN-Goldberg,1990) and “PEN model” (Eysenck,1977). The Big personality traits are the most basic dimensions that outline the structure of human personality and underlie the symmetries in peoples thinking, feeling and behavior. These traits are dimensional, each of them describes a continuum between two extreme poles regardless of gender, age, or culture and demonstrated utility in predicting problematic behaviors (e.g., delinquency, conduct disorder, externalizing problems) and discriminating between groups (e.g., delinquents versus non-delinquents, externalizing versus non-externalizing). These magnitudes are Neuroticism (vs Emotional Stability), Extraversion (or Surgency), Openness to Experience (also called Culture or Intellect), Agreeableness (vs Antagonism) and Conscientiousness and as a memory aid. These model is labelled as OCEAN Model, has a vast scope in encompassing personality traits. Each of these dimensions is a

combination of several distinct but closely related traits and characteristics. This has been evidently demonstrated in Fig.1.

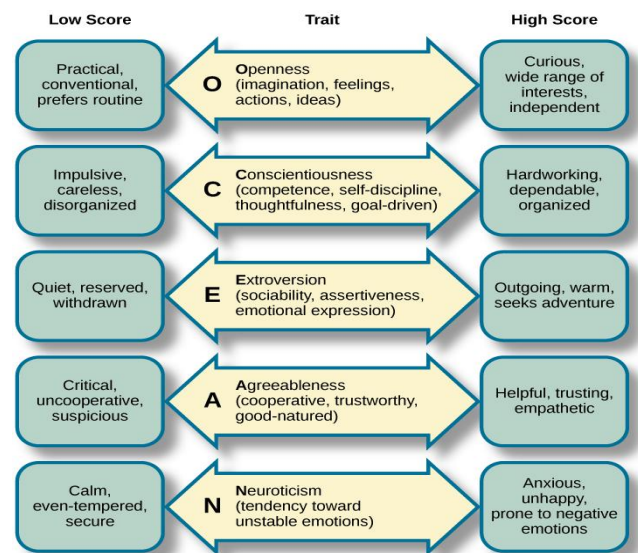


Fig No1: OCEAN Model-Personality Traits.
Source: <https://www.bing.com/images>

Eysenck's PEN model (Eysenck and Gudjonsson,1989) is one of the few theories that clearly related personality traits to criminality, un-fortunately this model has not been often used to explain recidivism. The PEN model is related to

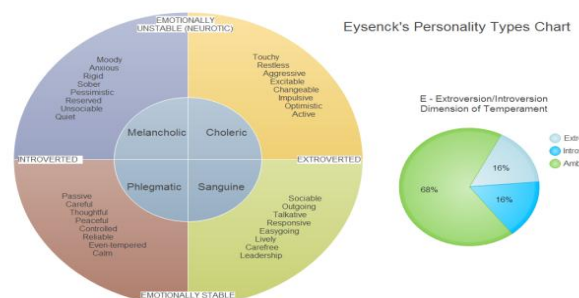


Fig No2: PEN model-Personality Traits
Source: <https://www.bing.com/images>

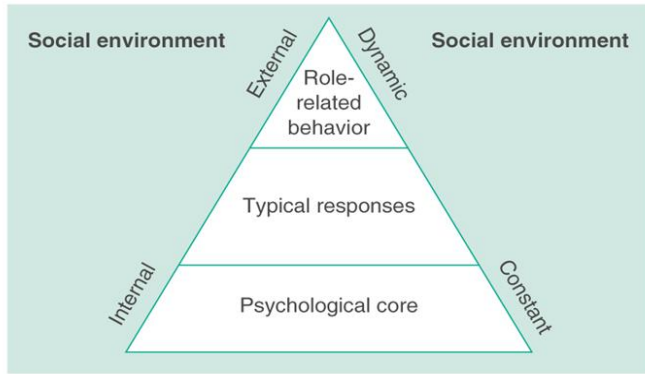


Fig No 3 PEN model-Personality Traits
Source: <https://www.bing.com/images>

OCEAN model to some extent, but has scarcely been used to study relations between personality and delinquency or recidivism. The PEN model has two main aspects: descriptive and casual. The descriptive aspect is hierarchical taxonomy based on factor analysis, such as **superfactors** of Psychoticism, Extraversion and Neuroticism (PEN) and lower order factors like, sociability and positive affect (components of extraversion). However, both the models include Extraversion and Neuroticism at the highest level. The PEN personality traits are demonstrated in Fig No 2 and 3.

This study aims at analyzing both models (PEN and/or OCEAN), where the three basic PEN dimensions of personality (Psychoticism, Extraversion and Neuroticism) are related to physiological mechanisms in the brain and central nervous system and related conditioning processes (Eysenck and Gudjonsson, 1989), can be theorized that delinquents should score high on the PEN dimensions, in spite of not having full empirical support for hypothesis. But studies are evidenced that high Psychoticism is always involved in criminality, regardless of age. Some studies found for Neuroticism to be associated with offenders (Romero, Luengo and Sobral, 2001) and college students (Heaven and Virgen 2001).

Delinquency may be defined as "essentially a thrust against society and may be described as any act or series of acts of an individual or group that violates accepted social or moral standards and brings individuals into conflict with society". A juvenile is a youth teen ranging from as young as 9 years old till the age of 18 who engage in illegal criminal behavior. Defining delinquency is not the hard part, figuring out the reasons why adolescents commit crimes is. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the juvenile delinquency has been an important area of study. Academicians, Medical Practitioners, Legal Scholars, policy makers are ardent on rudimentary queries about the nature of Juvenile Delinquency (JD). How should the concept of JD be demarcated? Who pledges delinquent acts? What is the rate of delinquency? Is the rate increasing or decreasing? How to prevent these crime?

Adolescence has continuously been described as a period of "storm-and-stress"(Arnett,1999). Though this storm-and-stress relics constrained to combats with parents, momentary mood

commotions, confusion, depression and trivial delinquent acts in most adolescents (Arnett,1999), problems escalate in a minority youth. Some adolescents are engaged in serious delinquent acts and end up in juvenile detention centers, others experience severe emotional distress. Studies on child psychology (Farrington, 2005; Lay et al., 2005) endorses detecting childhood, youth and family jeopardy factors is vibrant in the anticipation of juvenile felonious behaviour. Determining which specific risks, or combination of risks, impact on later offending and/or delinquent youth outcomes allows practitioners to identify most efficiently which of these children and youth are most at-risk (Farrington, 2005; Lay et al., 2005) and thus to target prevention and treatment more effectively.

II. THEORIES OF CRIME / DEVIANCE

The study of juvenile delinquency is important because it provides us with trustworthy and reliable theories that can help with understanding the motives of juveniles. These theories fall under three categories, biological, sociological and psychological.

Table 1(a): Biological Theories

THEORIES OF CRIME/DEVIANCE <i>Why Do People Commit Crimes/ Deviance?</i>			
Biological Theories			
<i>Lombroso</i>	<i>Glueck</i>	<i>Klinefelter</i>	<i>Kelly</i>
Criminals had specific bodily characteristics	People with a mesomorphic build can be criminals	Criminals are males having an extra Y chromosome	Chemical imbalances in the body leads to crime
Criticism: <i>Most of these theories are outdated, some of them were used by sociologist to explain criminal behaviour.</i>			

Source: *Why do people commit crime and deviance?* (Cesare Lombroso, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, Klinefelter's Syndrome, Henry E. Kelly)

Biological theory considers delinquent behavior as predisposed and revolves around the idea that children are born to be criminals. Cesare Lombroso is credited for creating the major biological theory called Positivism. His theory states that individuals whom grow up committing crimes have inherited biochemical and genetic factors. Lombroso also states that criminals tend to have certain facial features that are considered a predisposition to commit crime such as a flattened nose and supernumerary teeth. Another criminalist, Sheldon, found that different body types made individuals behave differently. For example, he believed that mesomorphs were more likely to commit crimes because they were athletic, as opposed to the physic of an endomorph, a fat person (Champion, 2004).

Table 1 (b): Psychological Theories

THEORIES OF CRIME/DEVIANCE			
Why Do People Commit Crimes/ Deviance?			
Psychological Theories			
Eysenck	Bowlby	PMT	
Extrovert tend to be criminal as they are more impulsive	Maternal deprivation during childhood may form potential criminals	Women nearing menstruation have a tendency to commit crime	
Criticism: Some of these theories have not been proven and project the male stereotypical image of women			

Source: *Why do people commit crime and deviance?* (Cesare Lombroso, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, Klinefelter's Syndrome, Henry E. Kelly)

Psychological theories help understand juvenile delinquency and "like religion, more than like sociology or law, psychology is essentially concerned with the individual himself and is addressed centrally to the processes within and around the individual which give rise to specific forms of behavior" (McDavid and McCandles, 1962).

Table 1(c): Social Disorganization Theories

THEORIES OF CRIME/DEVIANCE				
Why Do People Commit Crime/Deviance?				
Social Disorganization Theory				
Socialization	Peer group and Sub-culture	Lack of opportunity	Nature of society	Mass Media
The way people are socialized by their parents can have an impact on their behaviour.	Peer influence and sub-culture can force young people into Crime	Lacking the desired opportunity to reach the goals set by the society can force people into crime to achieve them.	The way society functions give certain messages to people and most of them like the poor tend to react negatively in forms of crime	The lifestyle and Wants projected by the mass media make people more competitive, selfish and impulsive.
Criticism: Most of these have been proven to be true as they reflect the real situation in everyday life, but together with the other theories they can explain fully why people commit crimes.				

Source: *Why do people commit crime and deviance?* (Cesare Lombroso, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, Klinefelter's Syndrome, Henry E. Kelly)

Social Disorganization theory is when a community reduces the chances of advancement for the children. For example, schools have high dropout rates, high levels of graffiti, high poverty levels and so on. Residents in these areas experience conflict and despair and as a result they turn to antisocial behavior.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a wide range of theoretical perspectives regarding Big Five (OCEAN) research. Researchers in the lexical tradition such as Lewis R. Goldberg and Gerard Saucier have been content to describe the structure of personality traits without attempting to explain their causes or consequences. Others have focused on relatively specific aspects of the Big Five. According to Big Five, personality traits are genetically based biological dispositions. Depending on our relative standing on these basic tendencies and in interaction with our individual environment, we develop specific patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (also referred to as characteristic adaptations) that in turn influence our objective biography. Although our standing on the five basic tendencies is thought to remain generally stable over time, characteristic adaptations may change.

According to John and Srivastava (1999), the Big Five model of personality began as a etymological approach to capture how people describe themselves and others and later it has been identified in adults across 50 different cultures (Livesley, 2001; McCrae, Terracciano, and Personality Profiles of Cultures Project, 2005). Cross-cultural investigations have found, exception of openness to experience which appears to emerge later in adolescence, the Big Five to appear as early as three years of age (e.g., Caspi and Shiner, 2006; Halverson et al., 2003; Shiner and Caspi, 2003; Shiner, 2009; Tackett, 2006), and increase in stability with increasing age (Roberts and DelVecchio, 2000), but more likely that transactional relationship exists between personality and social context (Wood and Roberts, 2006) and inborn genetic dispositions that are unchanging over time (McCrae & Costa, 2003).

Conscientiousness, also known as constraint, is the tendency to be goal-directed, dutiful, and planful, and further describes the ability to follow socially prescribed norms and rules, delay gratification, and control impulses (John et al, 1999). Conscientiousness reflects characteristics of organization and self-discipline and may indicate a child's maturing attentional skills and abilities to focus on long-term goals over immediate impulses that are related to self-regulation (Shiner, 2009). Conscientiousness, studies have found poor self-control in childhood (Sanson et al, 1999), late childhood (Rubin et al, 2003), and adolescence (Olson et al 1999) predicted conduct disorder. Furthermore, impulsivity or disinhibition is more strongly related to life-course persistent antisocial delinquency than adolescence-limited delinquency (Moffitt et al, 2001).

Neuroticism refers to the susceptibility to experience negative emotions and affect, like anxiety, angry-hostility, irritability, depression, self-consciousness, impulsivity, and vulnerability to stress (John *et al.*, 1999). Highly neurotic children and adolescents are often described as anxious, vulnerable, tense, easily frightened, guilt prone, moody, low in frustration tolerance, insecure in their relationships with others, and disposed to easily “fall apart” under stress (Shiner, 2009). In contrast, emotional stability suggests the tendency to be relatively calm, relaxed, and secure (Miller *et al.*, 2006). At the extreme pathological end, neuroticism can be expressed by severe affective lability, emotional distress, insecure attachment, depression, low frustration tolerance and poor or maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., substance abuse). At the extremely low end the person may lack fear (e.g., low harm avoidance) and anxiety, experience very little emotional distress, and may even appear emotionally flat in stressful situations. In adolescents, neuroticism has also been positively associated with delinquency (ter Laak *et al.*, 2003) and diagnoses of conduct disorder and substance use disorders (Anderson *et al.*, 2007).

Extraversion is characterized by an approach to the social and material world with energy and activity, and includes such traits as warmth, expressiveness, gregariousness, assertiveness, excitement seeking, positive emotionality, and being person-oriented (John *et al.*, 1999). Low extraversion describes a person who tends to be quiet, reserved, aloof, and task oriented (John and Srivastava, 1999) and drives the need for social stimulation.

Agreeableness is an interpersonal disposition, and is the tendency to be prosocial, warm, forgiving, empathic, straightforward, and communal towards others, and includes such traits as good nature, cooperativeness, trustfulness, modesty, and tender mindedness (John *et al.*, 1999). Low levels of agreeableness suggest the tendency to be manipulative, cynical, rude, uncooperative, and suspicious and characterized disorder (Anderson *et al.*, 2007), delinquency, and externalizing behavior problems (John *et al.*, 1994).

Openness captures the individual's intellectual curiosity, originality, creativity, and appreciation of aesthetics and novelty (John *et al.*, 1999) and characterized as openness to feelings, new ideas, flexibility of thought, values, and readiness to indulge in fantasy (McCrae *et al.*, 2003). Low on openness to experience suggests the tendency to be conservative, traditional, and practical.

Juvenile delinquency is generally understood (Loeber *et al.*, 1994) as evolving perspective of biographical conditions, from a social perspective situational cues and social circumstances of the advent of youth criminality are in focus and conditions of individual vulnerability, that is for the dispositions that actually allow biographical or social conditions to engender criminal action. The rise and the decline of delinquency are characterized by two dimensions, this distinction corresponds to the differentiation between long-term GREVE (“early onset”) and short-term (“late onset”) escalation (Loeber *et al.*,

1997) and investigation of adolescence-limited offenders focuses on the discontinuity of juvenile delinquency.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study is an unique effort to gain insight into the relationship between personality traits and Juvenile Delinquency and views expressed in this article are those of the authors personal capacity. Juvenile Delinquency is often a difficult topic to discuss, as there are many different variables that must be taken into account in order to truly define and obtain a thorough understanding of the concept. The most unique aspect of this study is to understand, the significance of early risk factors along with personality traits (as an intervention method) on later violent juvenile offending and this has been clearly explained in Fig No.2.

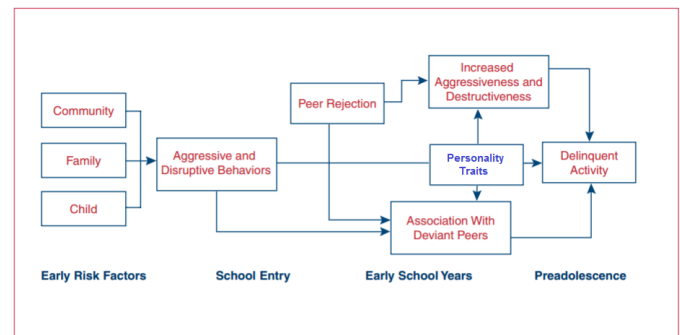


Fig. No2: Peer factor Interventions and Personality Traits.

Source: Adopted from J.D Coie and S. Miller.Johnson, 2001.

Though some risk factors are common to many child delinquents, the patterns and particular combination of risk factors vary from child to child. Identification of these multiple risk and protective factors have proven to be a difficult task and there is no solution to prevent Juvenile Delinquency, identifying risk and protective factors remains essential in escalating the chronic criminality of juvenile. The studies stress that, the focus on risk factors that appear at the young age is the key to preventing child delinquency (Elliott, D.S *et al.* 1996). Preventing delinquency early in a child's life can pay significant dividends by reducing crime rates (Farrington, D.P. 1989).

The Personality Traits (**OCEAN and PEN models**), the association of dimensions as a key research direction to observe and each of them capture a specific facet of identity and can't be ignored in measuring the juvenile delinquency. It is essential to conceptualize and investigate them empirically to gain more comprehensive understanding of these traits on Juvenile Delinquency. Although the Big Five and PEN models are most easily characterized by their extreme poles, it is important to keep in mind that relatively few people are at the extremes. Most people are around the middle of the continuum.

V. CONCLUSION

The avenues of integration of personality traits with criminological theory could also be useful (Adams *et al.*,

1992), in developing a sense of identity in adolescence and emerging adulthood, and might link the functions of identity to psychosocial transition of adulthood. The future research agenda should take into account examining inter connections among identity conceptualizations in adulthood (Marcia, 2002), especially focus on personal pressures arising from the environment align with individual conditioning factors to press a person towards crime.

Disclosure of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest concerning this article.

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