



SELF-AGGRESSION IN DELINQUENT TEENAGERS

G.-S. VANCU¹, M.-M. LAZĂR²

Gabriela Sorina VANCU¹, Mioara Maria LAZĂR²

^{1,2}, University of Aurel Vlaicu of Arad, RO

¹ E-mail: vancugabriela@yahoo.com

² E-mail: mioara_maria_lazar@yahoo.com

¹ ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7511-9298>

Abstract

This paper aims to to approach the issue of self-aggression among juvenile delinquents due to the actuality of the phenomenon, the life risk, but also the social and mental health implications of their reintegration into society. Our study aimed to provide an overview of accentuated personality traits and relevant aspects of the psychological history of 40 young delinquents who are institutionalized, some of whom have a psychiatric history.

We also observed the correlation of these traits with autolytic acts and illicit acts. The motivation of the study comes from the need to know adolescents who exhibit self-aggressive acts in order to intervene with programs to prevent suicide and juvenile delinquency.

Key words: *autoaggressiveness, delinquent teenagers, aggression, delinquent acts, autolytic acts.*

INTRODUCTION

The approach to the phenomenon of juvenile self-aggressiveness and its production mechanisms justifies its actuality and relevance by the intense character of this phenomenon, by the criminal offense, which brings serious damage to human interests, of maximum generality. It endangers the adolescent's life as well as the fundamental values and norms recognized and accepted within society, thus affecting his good functionality (*Banciu, D. 2000*).

The psycho-social guidelines in the field of juvenile delinquency support the idea that delinquent behaviors among minors are caused by the inability to adapt satisfactorily to the social environment, due to psychological disorders caused by a multitude of factors (*Focault, M. & Focault, M. 1997*).

Among the delinquent behaviors of adolescents, one with a major impact is self-aggression. Due to the increase in the number of suicides and the awareness

SELF-AGGRESSION IN DELINQUENT TEENAGERS

of this social danger, it was proposed to introduce the "self-harm syndrome" in the DSM-V as a separate clinical entity (*Plener and Fegert, 2012*).

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The appearance of delinquent manifestations in adolescents is linked to a lack of family socialization and/or the existence of educational dysfunctions at school. Due to the lack of knowledge of the socio-familial conditions and the lack of proper supervision by the school of students who display deviant behaviors from an early age, they can become illicit or self-aggressive acts with adolescence (*Pasca, M. D. 2005*).

Neighborhood subculture is a factor that can negatively influence a child's education. Neglected by family and school, the teenager takes refuge in groups because he is accepted here. Serious acts are usually committed in these groups: theft, vagrancy, destruction of property, rapes, crimes, consumption of prohibited substances, online violence, self-aggressive or hetero-aggressive acts.

Taking into account this aspect and correlating it with the unlimited access and appetite of adolescents in the virtual world, as well as with statistical data, we can conclude that delinquent adolescents have a much higher level of self-aggression than the general population (*Fraze, S.G., 2003*). Therefore, this phenomenon must be continuously studied because it can take on various forms of manifestation from parasuicide to intentional or manipulative suicide, all manifested in the online environment (*eg: various posts with a hidden SOS message, podcasts, YouTube videos, the Blue Whale phenomenon, The Fire Fairy*).

In the many definitions of aggression, the common aspect of aggressive behavior has been captured by the intentionality of the aggressive act: "Aggression can be defined as conduct that intends to harm, cause pain, suffering or death to another. The crucial element of the definition is the intention: the person must intend to do harm, for his act to be considered aggressive" (*Butoi 2000*).

"Aggressiveness can thus be considered as any form of behavior directed with intention towards objects, persons or oneself, in order to cause harm, injury, destruction and damage" (*Mitrofan, 1992*).

According to Berkowitz, the aggressive act is the result of the interaction between aggression-frustration (*Leonard Berkowitz 1969*). Berkowitz introduces the notion of the "weapons effect". In his understanding, through the process of social learning, some objects can be associated with aggression. Applying this principle to the delinquent environment, we could conclude that certain specific factors (weapons, drugs, alcohol or blunt objects) can influence the delinquent's behavior in the sense of intensifying aggression.

Bandura explains aggression from the perspective of social learning, the imitation of aggressive behavior. He argues that aggression manifests as a

function of: past personal and observed experiences; rewarding or coercive expectation; the impact or success of previous aggressive behavior, situational factors; cognitive factors (*Bandura, 1988*).

In Bandura's experiments, aggression is expressed by hitting a small child's doll, verbalizing aggressive intentions, but it is also expressed by self-mutilation or suicidal behavior. Suicide attempts are quite common, as are various autolytic behaviors such as scratching or burning the skin, swallowing/inserting objects, medicinal or toxic substances, refusing food, accessing various websites, online games.

Suicidal behavior is a way of expressing pain, but it can also represent a manipulative way of adolescents, such as to avoid abandonment or to obtain various other immediate benefits.

Adolescent self-aggression would represent an attempt to avoid strong negative emotions (*Marica, 2007*).

Another form of manifestation of self-aggression in adolescents is slander, it being a verbal form of premeditated aggression, which represents a way of "socio-moral murder". It presupposes the establishment of a target towards which the image-killing "poison" is directed, which denotes an accumulation of resentment, envy, adversarial positions, hatred (*Sutherland E. H., Cressey D., 1966*).

Self-denigration - aims at causing one's own suffering on a moral level, with the aim of reducing intrapsychic tension and that undermines the personality. It can be the replica of an inferiority complex, and the benefit can be translated into the stimulation of appreciation, attention, the denial of defamation and the highlighting of some qualities from the other people around (*Irenaus, 2018*).

Self-harm - is "another way of saying the unspeakable" (*Banciu, 2000*). It consists in causing pain of any kind, from moral to physical, through bodily harm, accompanied by a reduction of varying degrees of the instinct of conservation (*Vandebosch, H., 2001*).

Self-aggression is generally viewed as a coping mechanism, whereby a person physically injures the self to cope with emotional pain or to alleviate feelings of numbness through stimulation.

Self-aggression is any deliberate behavior, with or without suicidal intent, that causes bodily harm for the purpose of emotional release. Physical pain is often easier to manage than emotional pain, which is intolerable. Wounds inflicted validate emotional distress.

Fraze (2003) proposes the definition of self-aggression as "a deliberate destruction or alteration of body tissues without the desire to die and which can be major, stereotyped or superficially moderate". Superficial self-injury -moderate or deliberate, in Favazza's sense, represents "a direct, repetitive and episodic form of superficial self-mutilation, without producing death and which is serious enough to produce alteration of the body especially".

SELF-AGGRESSION IN DELINQUENT TEENAGERS

Butoi (2000) considers autolytic gestures as having a "direct, repetitive nature of injury to the tissues of one's own body, with low lethality, which occur in a short time, are accompanied by the consciousness of one's own action and involve the express intention of self-harm".

Most researchers consider this behavior, which consists in causing pain of any kind, from moral to physical, through bodily harm, accompanied by a reduction of varying degrees of the instinct of conservation, to be a maladaptive coping mechanism, in which self-harm is aimed at reducing internal tension and relieving overwhelming emotions. This understanding excludes suicidal intent from the definition of self-aggression.

The integrative theoretical model, proposed by Suyemoto in 1998, distinguishes between six functional types of self-injurious behavior:

1. THE SOCIAL MODEL - the creation of responses reinforced by the social environment to facilitate the expression of aspects that cannot be expressed verbally and the sublimation of conflicts;

2. ANTI-SUICIDE MODEL - injury has a substitute role for suicide, it represents a compromise between the desire to live and die;

3. THE SEXUAL MODEL - self-aggression is the result of open conflicts of sexuality;

4. THE MODEL OF AFFECT REGULATION - self-aggression expresses and controls mania, anxiety, psychological pain, which cannot be verbalized or expressed in other ways;

5. THE DISSOCIATION MODEL - self-harm is a way to stop or overcome the effects of dissociation resulting from the intensity of emotionality;

6. INTERPERSONAL BOUNDARIES MODEL - self-injury is an attempt to create a distinction between oneself and others, to protect against the tendency to lose one's identity;

Hawton and Harriss (2008) studied a group of 710 teenagers, determined that at this age self-aggression is related to current life difficulties (family, school, etc.). They believe that self-aggression manifests itself due to unresolved existential questions, cognitive immaturity, with inability to solve problems due to deficiencies in abstract thinking, conflicts in various relationships, especially with authorities.

Longitudinal studies have revealed certain groups of individuals who present a particular vulnerability to self-aggression, among them the persons deprived of their liberty are in the first place (*Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2010*).

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

Our research is based on the questionnaire method, the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the psychological sheets. We chose this

method considering the autolytic tendencies in delinquent teenagers, the seriousness of the committed acts and the study of personality dimensions.

2.1. Objectives of the study:

- studying the correlation between accentuated personality traits in delinquent teenagers and autolytic acts in order to prevent their occurrence;
- studying the correlation between personality traits and the type of delinquent act committed by the adolescent.

The database was collected between 01.03.2022 - 01.06.2022, statistical processing with SPSS 20. We applied the t test for comparisons and Pearson for correlations.

2.2. Methodology

In our research we used the Schmiescheck accentuated personality questionnaire and the parameters taken from the Psychological Observation Sheets.

The questionnaire for detecting accentuated personalities was translated and adapted for Romania by the psychologist I. M. Nestor, in 1975.

The questionnaire includes 88 questions, mixed presented, forming ten groups, each group aiming to explore/highlight a certain "accentuated" feature:

- I - 12 questions regarding the demonstrative nature;
- II - 12 questions regarding the hyperexact nature;
- III - 12 questions regarding the hyperperseverant nature;
- IV - 8 questions regarding unruly nature;
- V - 8 questions regarding the hyperthymic nature;
- VI - 8 questions regarding the dysthymic nature;
- VII - 8 questions regarding cyclothymic nature;
- VIII - 4 questions regarding the exalted nature;
- IX - 8 questions regarding the anxious nature;
- X - 8 questions about the emotional nature.

Dimension: Autolytic antecedents

Regarding autolytic antecedents, the score 0 means the absence of autolytic gestures, and the score 1 the presence in the antecedents of self-aggressions. The mean on this dimension $m=0.55$, and $sd=0.5$.

Dimension: Delinquent act

Also according to the severity criterion, the scores from 1 to 2 were established, 1 meaning serious (crimes of the type: murder, rape, robbery), and 2 less serious (theft, burglary, without injury to persons). Thus the average obtained is $m=2.58$, and $sd=1.1$.

2.3. Research sample:

The participants in the study are 40 delinquent teenagers who, for the crimes they committed, are in a re-education center in Romania. All study participants are male.

SELF-AGGRESSION IN DELINQUENT TEENAGERS

3. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS:

Hypothesis no. 1: There are significant differences in autolytic behavior on the "unruly" dimension.

As seen in Table 1, the average obtained by delinquent adolescents without an autolytic antecedent on the uncontrollable PA dimension is $m=19.82$, and the average obtained by prisoners with an autolytic antecedent on the uncontrollable PA dimension is $m=22.43$, thus in the case of adolescents with autolytic antecedents, the mean on the uncontrollable PA dimension is significantly higher.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Autol		Antec_a	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	S
A_N	0 - without antec		1	19.82	2.89	.703	
	1 - with antec		2	22.43	1.77	.371	
			3				

Following the application of the t-test, the obtained coefficient $t=-3.523$ was significant at a $p<0.01$ threshold, thus the hypothesis according to which there is a significant difference depending on the presence of autolytic gestures in delinquent adolescents on the uncontrolled PA dimension is confirmed.

Table 2: Correlations

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	ig.	f	ig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Aqual	.890	.023	.358	.001	2.611	-.741	4.1	1.1	

unru ly	varian ces assum es	3	0	23					12	11
	qual varian ces not assum es			3.2 85	4.75 5	003	2.611	- 795	4.2 49	.97 3

According to the hypothesis and the results obtained in the case of the quantitative analysis, it can be stated that delinquent teenagers who present uncontrollability as the accentuated personality trait, tend to resort to autolytic gestures. Moreover, the author of the questionnaire for accentuated personalities applied in this study, Leonhard considers accentuated personalities, from the point of view of social integration, as presenting only a pathological tendency, but when this tendency reaches high scores it determines behaviors "with specific notes".

In the case of the present study, the specific notes coincide to a large extent with the autolytic behavior. The accentuation of the personality trait represents a constant on the uncontrolled dimension, and the particular social context is a precipitating factor of the pathological behavior. This consideration mobilizes us under the aspect of vigilance regarding the approach to delinquent teenagers who present, in the social context, higher risks of adopting autolytic behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: The gravity of the act committed by delinquent teenagers correlates with the demonstrativeness factor

Table 3: Descriptive statistics

		M	Std.	
		ean	Deviation	N
cts	A	2.	1.10	4
		58	7	0
	P	1	5.02	4
A_Dem		8.60	7	0

Thus, between the acts committed and demonstrative PA we obtained a correlation coefficient $r=0.425$, significant at a $p<0.01$ threshold, i.e. with the increase in the seriousness of the act, the predisposition towards demonstrative PA increases.

SELF-AGGRESSION IN DELINQUENT TEENAGERS

Thus, the hypothesis is confirmed, the seriousness of the act correlates directly proportionally with the accentuation of demonstrative PA.

Table 4: Correlations

			A	P
			cts	A_Demo
cts	A	Pearson	1	.4
		Correlation		25(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
		N	4	4
A_Dem	P	Pearson	.4	1
		Correlation	25(**)	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
		N	4	4

Delinquent teenagers who have committed serious crimes show demonstrative behavior, which is often expressed through self-aggressive acts. It is the expression of parasuicide with the aim of getting out of anonymity, to impress other teenagers or employees in the prison system or even relatives, namely family and friends.

Limitations of the research: Being an experimental research, we did not consider predictive factors (we did not analyze causality), we focused more on correlations.

CONCLUSIONS

The two hypotheses of our study were confirmed:

- *delinquent teenagers who present "uncontrollableness" as an accentuated personality trait tend to resort to autolytic acts;*
- *the seriousness of the act of delinquent teenagers correlates directly proportionally with the accentuation of the "demonstrativeness" dimension;*
- *psychological counseling is needed to make them aware of the social danger of their previous actions, sensitize them to re-education actions, understand the need to reintegrate into a normal and dignified social life and prevent the commission of self-aggressive acts;*
- *effective participation in various educational activities and projects for reintegration into society is required.*

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