

Study of Criminal Attitude towards Violence and Personality Traits in Males

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Abstract: The problem of studying criminal attitudes, development of tools needed to measure them, as well as these tools' adaptation from original versions into other languages, is particularly topical at the moment. A poorly developed field is the study of the relationship between criminal attitudes and personal traits. The research aim is to study the relation of criminal attitude towards violence and personality traits in males. Research questions: Is there a relationship between criminal attitude towards violence and personality traits (extroversion, psychoticism, neuroticism) in males who have not been convicted? Which of the studied personality traits are the best predictors of the criminal attitude towards violence? Participants: 192 males aged 18 to 39 years ($M = 23.2$, $SD = 3.4$). All the participants have never been brought to justice for violence. Methods used: the Criminal Attitudes to Violence Scale (CAVs); the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised - Abbreviated (EPQR-A). Results: qualitatively different results have been found in groups of participants with high and low CAVs values. In the group with high CAVs values a positive relationship between the criminal attitude towards violence and psychoticism has been found; psychoticism makes the main contribution to criminal attitude towards violence. In the group with low CAVs values a negative relationship between the criminal attitude towards violence and psychoticism, negative relationship between CAVs and extraversion and positive relationship between CAVs and neuroticism have been found; psychoticism and extraversion make the main contribution to criminal attitude towards violence.

Keywords: criminal attitude, criminal attitude towards violence, personality traits, explicit measures.

Introduction

The relevance for studying the problem of criminal attitudes is confirmed by the information provided by the Central Statistics Database of Latvia: 47 406 crimes were committed during the year 2015, a third of which (15 511) were considered to be violent. Despite the existence of a large number of studies related to the research of the causes of criminal behaviour, there is a lack of studies aimed at understanding the relationship between the choice of a violent behaviour and personality traits of an individual.

The authors of the recent study believe it is appropriate to consider the problem of criminal violence in the context of the criminal attitude and attitude towards violence.

Theoretical approaches for studying criminal attitudes

Numerous studies by various authors (Nesdale, Maass, 2009; Mills, Kroner, 2002; Simourd, Van De Ven, 1999; Polaschek, Collie, 2004) indicate the existence of a relationship between criminal attitudes and criminal behaviour. In the context of The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model, described by D.A. Andrews, J. Bonta, J.S. Wormith, criminal attitudes are one of the "Big Four" risk factors that can influence the criminal behaviour and recidivism (Andrews, Bonta, 2006).

Up to date, there is not one specific theoretical model explaining how criminal attitudes are classified or grouped. Within the literature, there is a different understanding of the concept of criminal attitude. Sometimes it is defined as criminal thinking, distorted thinking, irrational beliefs (Andrews, Bonta, 2010). For example, the criminal thinking is defined as the thought content and the thinking process, leading to the initiation and maintenance of the law violating behaviour (Walters, 2006).

Thinking errors or cognitive distortions are defined as a thought process that supports criminality, meaning that positive interpretations of certain situations help to justify or commit specific criminal behaviours. In other words, criminal attitudes point to a belief that individuals feel permitted to engage in criminal behaviours, regardless of the norms of the society or the negative effect on other individuals (Egan, McMurran, 2000).

Individuals, focused on criminal behaviour and incorporating the concept of criminal behaviour, are more exposed to risk of being involved in this particular behaviour (Boduszek, McLaughlin, 2011). A.M. Holsinger (1999) believes that people who have been socialized in crime-prone society and have

acquired antisocial attitudes towards criminal behaviour are more likely to commit crimes in the future. R. Akers Model (1985) is interesting because it explains the criminal activity as a result of decision-making process which is involved in the creation and development of cognitive, behavioural and motivational techniques (criminal attitudes). So, based on this model, people who are involved in the criminal behaviour for the first time because of the socialization with the anti-social "friends" in the future, by means of various reinforcements, acquire knowledge about how to obtain the benefits and avoid the punishment from actual or anticipated impact of the specific (criminal) behaviour (Akers, 1985; Boduszek, McLaughlin, 2011).

The diversity understanding of the construct of the criminal attitude, leads to different methodological approaches, measurement procedures and the problem of the research validity. For example, there is a Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified (CSS-M) which includes the following subscales: Attitudes towards the Law, Courts, Police; Tolerance for Law Violations; Identification with Criminal Others and obviously focuses on the context of attitude (Shields, Simourd, 1991). Another instrument measuring the mentioned context is Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS) reveals the distortions in thinking, such as rationalization or a feeling of permissiveness (Walters, 1995).

Attitudes towards criminal violence

Along with the analysis of the influence of criminal attitudes on criminal behaviour in the context of violent offenses, it is important to also note the role of attitude towards violence. There are a number of studies pointing to a relationship between positive attitudes to violence and violent behaviour. The beliefs that contribute to approval of various types of aggression (including violence), acquired in a very early age, contributes to the maintenance and demonstration of this kind of behaviour in the future (Slaby, Guerra, 1988; Huesmann, Guerra, 1997; Zelli, Dodge, 1999). In the study in year 1997, D. Polashek and colleagues pointed out the predictive role of attitude towards violence in the context of the presence of sexual and non-sexual violence against women (Polashek, Ward, 1997). Violence is understood as an expression of hostility and anger with the intention to hurt or cause harm to people or property through the use of physical force (APA Dictionary, 2015). It is important to note that the main factor that turns "violence" to "criminal violence" is the law. Without the law violence may be immoral, demoralizing and can cause damage, but it will not constitute as a crime (Riedel, Welsh, 2002).

Earlier developed techniques aimed at measuring attitudes towards violence, in practice, proved not to be very suitable tools for measurement of attitudes towards violence of violent inmates. For example, Attitudes Towards Violence Scale (ATVS) (Funk, Elliott, 1999) and Attitudes to Guns and Violence Questionnaire (AGVQ) (Shapiro, Dorman, 1997) have been developed on a sample of non-offender adolescents. The EXPAGG-M, focused on the measurement of a wide range of aggressive attitudes, also has been developed on a sample of students (Archer, Haigh, 1997). However, when tested on a sample of prisoners, the method could not distinguish between prisoners convicted of violent crimes from ordinary prisoners by the Instrumental (Instrumental) scale. It is true to say that there are factors that significantly obstruct the usage of research methods which were developed and adapted on non-criminal samples on violent, convicted criminals (Polashek, Collie, 2004).

Criminal Attitude towards Violence scale (CAVs) is a technique that combines two constructs: The criminal attitude and Attitude towards violence (Polashek, Collie, 2004). One of the short-term priority objectives for the mentioned scientists was to create an easily understandable and relatively short scale, as the criminals have low literacy levels and they can stay focused for a limited amount of time. Originally CAVs consisted of 75 statements within the context of non-sexual acts of physical violence. Some statements were taken from EXPAGG-M; (Archer, Haigh, 1997), and the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale (ATVS) (Funk, Elliott, 1999). Most of the statements are new and created by the authors, based on their clinical experience and the experience of their fellow practitioners working with prisoners convicted for violent crimes. As a result, this technique measures the attitude towards the non-sexual physical violence clearly addressing the individual, who is involved in the criminal lifestyle, such as "Carrying a weapon or a knife lets other people know that it is better not to mess with me". After several stages of adaptation and approbation CAVs was shortened to 20 item scale that proved to be the most reliable while measuring criminal attitude towards physical violence (Polashek, Collie, 2004).

For the first time in Latvia this scale was used by L. Simane-Vigante under the supervision of Doctor of Psychology, Professor I. Plotka with the permission of D. Polashek. L. Simane-Vigante studies the

problem of criminal construct: criminal attitudes and criminal attitudes towards violence with both - explicit and implicit methods of measurement (Simane-Vigante, Plotka, 2015).

The role of personality in predicting the criminal attitude towards violence

Based on their study of 255 prisoners, scientists S. Yochelson and S. Samenow presented the idea of the important role of the personality to develop and maintain criminal attitudes (criminal thinking styles) (Yochelson, Samenow, 1976).

A meta-analysis conducted by P. Gendreau, T. Little, and C. Goggin (1996), has identified a large number of factors predicting recidivism, four of which were the best predictors - criminal friends, the offender's criminal history, criminal attitudes, antisocial personality of the offender. In the construct of antisocial personality authors put concepts as sociopathy and psychopathy, measured with instruments such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) (Schiele, Baker, 1943); the Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-R) (Hare, 1991); the Socialization scale (SOC) of the California Personality Inventory (CPI), (Gough, 1957; Gendreau, Little, 1996).

E.M. Cale presented a meta-analytic review in 2006, where H.J. Eysenck's crime theory (Eysenck, 1977) serves as a theoretical basis for the study of the relationship between personality characteristics and anti-social behaviour. The main personality traits "Big 3" in the context of the H.J. Eysenck's theory are - extraversion (E), neuroticism (N), and psychoticism (P). In this approach out of all personal traits, psychoticism (impulsivity / disinhibition) most closely associated with anti-social behaviour, and extraversion / sociability least closely linked with antisocial behaviour (Eysenck, Eysenck, 1994; Cale, 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that antisocial attitudes, criminal bonds, recidivism and antisocial personality are closely linked both theoretically and empirically (Boduszek, McLaughlin, 2011).

It is important to note that in the context of this paper, the criminal attitude towards violence is investigated with self-assessment procedures, defined as the conscious, controlled and direct, allowing access only to the explicit attitudes (Plotka, Igonin, Blumenau, 2016).

Theoretical analysis confirms the validity of the research studying the link between criminal attitudes and personality traits. However, studies investigating the influence of personal characteristics on criminal attitudes towards violence are very few.

The aim of the present research is to study the relation of criminal attitude towards violence and personality traits in males.

Research questions: Is there a relationship between criminal attitude towards violence and personality traits (extroversion, psychoticism, neuroticism) in males who have not been convicted? Which of the studied personality traits are the best predictors of the criminal attitude towards violence?

Methodology

Participants

192 men, aged 18 to 39 years ($M = 23.2$, $SD = 3.4$) "Non-convicts" previously not convicted adult male volunteers. 22 of them have higher education, unfinished higher education- 114, secondary vocational education- 28, secondary (secondary education) - 25, basic education - 3. 128 participants have a permanent job, 64 are temporarily employed. Three participant's native language is Latvian, 188 - Russian and 1 has a different native language. 153 men evaluated their financial situation as average, 13 below average and 26 - above average. 95 participants are in a stable a relationship, 97 – are not involved in a relationship at the moment.

Measures

The Criminal Attitudes towards Violence scale (Polaschek, Collie, 2004) in the further linguistic adaptation in Russian. It is one-factor scale, which consists of 20 items. The variable, which is measured by this scale, is the attitude towards physical criminal violence of non-sexual nature and it reveals the participant's willingness to be involved in criminal and violent behaviour. The results of testing the internal consistency of the translation techniques were satisfactory Cronbach's alpha coefficient $\alpha = 0.77$) and the next stage of the adaptation can occur.

The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised-Abbreviated (EPQR-A) (Francis, Brown, 1992) in the primary linguistic adaptation in Russian. The questionnaire consists of 24 questions and includes four scales: extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism and lie scale. Total Cronbach's alpha coefficient $\alpha = 0.70$.

For both measures the method of three times reverse translation was used. The scales were translated in Russian language.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted with the help of printed and electronic versions of the test for measuring attitude towards criminal violence and personality traits, which was carried out individually and in groups.

Results and discussion

Measured variables:

- 1) "Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence";
- 2) "Psychoticism", "Neuroticism", "Extraversion".

To answer the first research question descriptive statistics were calculated and a study of the empirical data distribution's correspondence to normal distribution was conducted. It was found that the distribution of the empirical data does not correspond to a normal distribution. Therefore, the Spearman and Kendall rank correlation coefficients to study the relationship were used. All correlation coefficients in absolute value do not exceed 0.20 and are not statistically significant, except the Kendall's correlation coefficient between the neuroticism and CAVs: $\tau(192)=0.106, p=0.048<0.05$ that shows on a very weak monotonic positive relationship. Therefore, non-monotonic relationships were examined. In the first stage a non-linear regression analysis for linear, quadratic and cubic models was used. A quadratic relationship between psychoticism (dependent variable) and CAVs (independent variable) was found: $F(3, 188) = 15.23., p<0.001$ (Figure1). Further investigation was therefore continued with correlation coefficients. CAVs was divided into two groups according to median $Mdn=53.00$. Scores, which are less than median correspond to low level of CAVs; scores, that are higher than median correspond to high level of CAVs. In the groups with high and low CAVs values, Spearman's and Kendall's correlation coefficients were calculated.

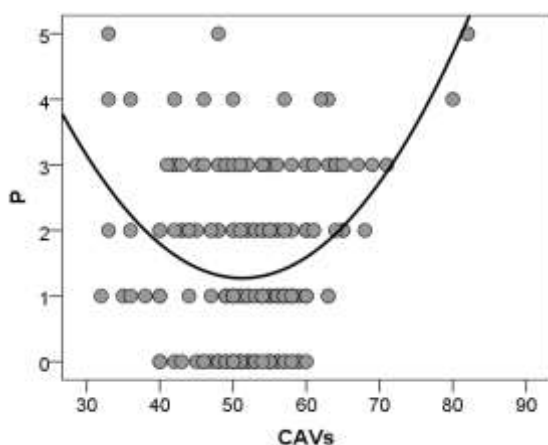


Figure 1. Quadratic regression model. Fit line.
P - psychoticism (dependent variable), CAVs (independent variable).

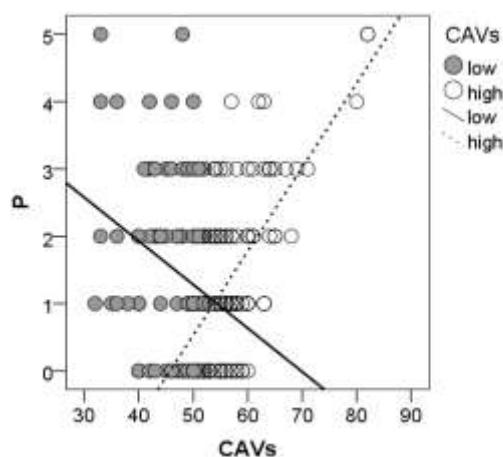


Figure 2. Scatter. Variables CAVs- psychoticism (P) for participants with low CAVs and high CAVs.

CAVs – Psychoticism

In the group of participants with low CAVs' values, the relationship between CAVs and psychoticism is monotonic, negative. Spearman's correlation coefficient $r_s(91) = -0.229^*, p<0.05$. In the group of participants with CAVs' high values, the relationship between the CAVs and neuroticism is positive. Spearman's correlation coefficient $r_s(101)=0.377^{**}, p<0.001$ (Figure 2). For the entire group of participants CAVs relationship with neuroticism is not revealed. Spearman's correlation coefficient is equal to $r_s(192)=0.083, p=0.250, ns$ (ns - not significant).

CAVs – Extroversion

In the group of participants with low CAVs' values the relationship between CAVs and extroversion is monotonic, negative. Spearman's correlation coefficient $r_s(91) = -0.301^{**}$, $p < 0.01$. In the group of participants with high CAVs values the relationship between CAVs and extroversion was not found. Spearman's correlation coefficient $r_s(101) = 0.070$, $p = 0.490$, ns (Figure 3). For the entire group of participants the relationship between CAVs and extroversion was not found. Spearman's correlation coefficient $r_s(192) = 0.011$, $p = 0.875$, ns.

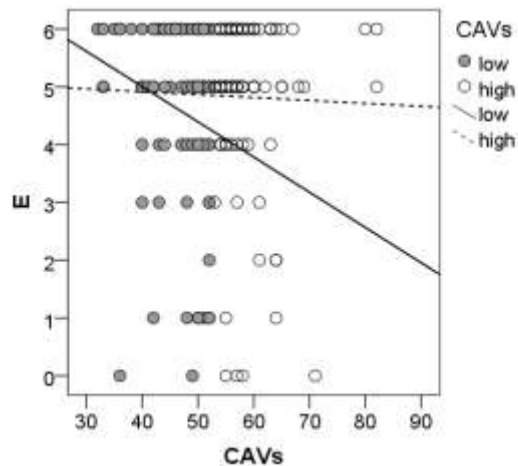


Figure 3. Scatter. Variables CAVs- extroversion (E) for participants with low CAVs and high CAVs.

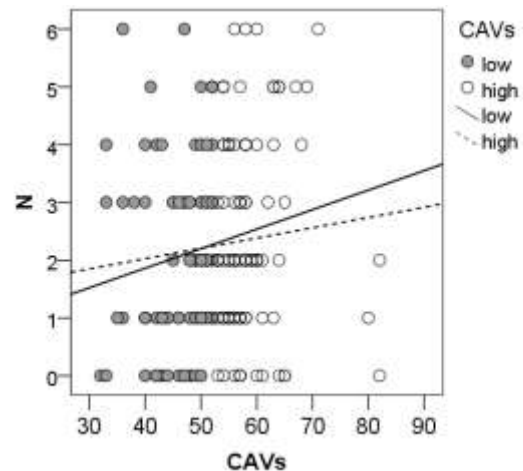


Figure 4. Scatter. Variables CAVs- neuroticism (N) for participants with low CAVs and high CAVs.

CAVs – Neuroticism

In the group of participants with low CAVs values the relationship between CAVs and neuroticism is monotone, positive. Spearman's correlation coefficient $r_s(91) = 0.214^*$, $p < 0.05$. In the group of participants with high CAVs values the relationship between CAVs and neuroticism was not found. Spearman's correlation coefficient $r_s(101) = 0.097$, $p = 0.335$, ns. For the entire group of participants a weak positive correlation between CAVs and neuroticism was revealed. Kendall's correlation coefficient is equal to $\tau(192) = 0.106$, $p < 0.05$ (Figure 4). This result can be considered less accurate than the one described above.

To answer the second research question a multiple regression analysis was used. Since the relationship between the variables: “Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence” (CAVs) and “Psychoticism” was non-monotonic, then for writing the regression equation and determine which of the given predictors (“Psychoticism”, “Neuroticism”, “Extroversion”) contribute most to CAVs, the scale CAVs was divided into two intervals - above the median and below the median. For each interval the regression equation was constructed. In both cases Stepwise, Forward and Backward methods gave the same results.

High CAVs values. For the predicted values an equation was obtained:

$$\text{CAVs (estimate)} = 54.197 + 2.715 * \text{Psychoticism.} \quad (1)$$

The greatest impact on the “Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence” is made by the variable “Psychoticism” ($\beta_1 = 0.582$, $t(100) = 7.12$, $p < 0.001$). It means, that the variable “Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence” (CAVs) increases with the increase of variable “Psychoticism”. Variables “Neuroticism” and “Extroversion” are not included in the regression equation.

The coefficient of determination R -Square = 0.339 shows that 33.9 % of variability of the dependent variable “Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence” is due to the influence of the independent variable “Psychoticism”. The Adjusted R -square = 0.332. The standard error is estimated at 4.55. ANOVA showed that the model (1) is significant: $F(1, 99) = 50.69$; $p < 0.001$.

Low CAVs values. For the predicted values an equation was obtained:

$$\text{CAVs (estimate)} = 51.503 - 1.132 * \text{Psychoticism} - 0.739 * \text{Extroversion.} \quad (2)$$

The greatest impact on the variable “Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence” (CAVs) is made by the variable “Psychoticism” ($\beta_1 = 0.275$, $t(90) = -2.75$, $p < 0.01$), then, by “Extroversion” ($\beta_2 = -0.218$, $t(90) = -2.17$, $p < 0.05$). R -Square=0.118 shows, that 11.8 % of variability of the dependent variable “Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence” is due to the influence of the independent variables “Psychoticism” and “Extroversion”. Adjusted R -square=0.098. Standard error of estimate is 5.06. ANOVA showed that the model (2) is significant: $F(2, 88) = 5.91$; $p < 0.01$. The negative sign of the standardized coefficients indicates a decrease in the variable “Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence” with increasing of the values of variables “Psychoticism” and “Extroversion”. Variable “Neuroticism” was not included in the regression equation.

Thus, at high values of CAVs the greatest positive impact on the “Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence” is made by the variable “Psychoticism”. At low values CAVs the greatest negative impacts on the “Strength of criminal attitude towards physical non-sexual violence” is made by variables “Psychoticism” and “Extroversion”.

Interpretation of the results:

1. For the entire sample of students a positive but very weak correlation between neuroticism and the strength of the criminal attitude towards physical violence was found. Emotional stability is characterized by low scores on the neuroticism scale. High scores imply on emotional instability, which can be revealed as high emotionality, impulsivity, lack of interest, lack of confidence, sensitivity, sensibility and a tendency to irritability. Neurotic personality is characterized by inadequately strong reactions in relation to the stimuli that cause them. Individuals with high scores in neuroticism scale faced with stressful situations may develop neurosis. It is possible that with increasing emotional instability the strength of attitude towards physical violence may increase. Vice versa, with increasing strength of attitude towards criminal violence, individual can develop emotional instability. Neuroticism does not contribute significantly to attitude towards physical violence. Perhaps the revealed positive relationship was present due to a third variable, which is positively associated with both - neuroticism and attitude towards criminal violence. That is, under certain conditions, neuroticism and strength of attitude towards violence are accordingly increasing.

2. High scores on extraversion scale correspond to individuals that are characterized by sociability, impulsiveness, irascibility, self-confidence, optimism and high activity levels. Feelings and emotions do not apply to strict control, so extroverted individuals are prone to risky behaviour. Extraverts are usually quick to get angry, become aggressive easily and may be unreliable. Low scores on extraversion correspond to introverts. Such individuals are quiet, shy, prone to self-analysis, reserved and distant from all people but are close to friends. They plan and think about their actions in advance, do not trust sudden motives, take decision-making very seriously, love everything to be in order. They control their feelings, it is not easy to irritate them. They are pessimistic, highly appreciate moral norms.

In the group of participants with low CAVs values, a negative correlation between extraversion and the strength of criminal attitude towards physical violence was found. In the group of participants with high CAVs values the relationship between extraversion and the severity of the criminal attitude towards physical violence is not revealed.

In the group of low CAVs' values a negative relationship between the "Extroversion" and the "Strength of criminal attitude to physical violence" can be explained by an error of explicit (self-reported) measurement. It is possible that high values of CAVs are underestimated by extraverts and low values are overestimated by introverts. In this case, there is a need for implicit measurements of the strength of criminal attitude towards physical violence.

3. High scores on Psychoticism scale are characterized by a tendency to antisocial behaviour, pretentiousness, inadequate emotional reactions, highly prone to conflict situations, tendency of non-contact, self-centeredness, lack of empathy, hostility towards others, cruelty, non-conformism, social indifference, carelessness and recklessness. Participants with low scores on the psychoticism scale are socialized.

In the group of participants with low CAVs values a negative correlation between psychoticism and the strength of the criminal attitude towards physical violence was found. In the group of participants with

high CAVs values a positive correlation between psychoticism and the strength of the criminal attitude towards physical violence was found.

With increase of low strength criminal attitude towards physical violence the anti-social orientation may be suppressed by the participants. With further increase in the strength of attitude towards violence antisocial orientation is no longer suppressed, on the contrary, it becomes higher.

In the group of low CAVs' values a negative relationship between the "Psychoticism" and the "Strength of criminal attitude to physical violence" can also be explained by an error of explicit (self-reported) measurement. As psychopathic personality is antisocial, for the participants in the group with CAVs below median, CAVs values may be underestimated, while socially responsible participants may overestimate low CAVs values. In this case also, there is a need for implicit measurements of the strength of criminal attitude towards physical violence.

4. For participants with CAVs values above the median in the regression equation with the dependent variable the "Strength of the criminal attitude towards physical violence" only the variable "Psychoticism" was included (with a positive coefficient). Thus, out of neuroticism, extraversion and psychoticism only psychoticism contributes in criminal attitude towards violence. This result is consistent with Cale's (2006) conclusions, that out of the personality traits, psychoticism is most closely associated with anti-social behaviour.

5. For participants with CAVs values below the median in the regression equation with the dependent variable the "Strength of the criminal attitude towards physical violence" variables "Psychoticism" and "Extraversion" were included, both with negative coefficients. This result is likely to be interpreted as a measurement error, explained in second and third paragraphs. Only implicit measurements of attitude towards violence could clarify the results.

Conclusion

The main idea of the theoretical background was to analyse researches of the problems of the criminal violence causes and their relationship with personality traits in men. The analysis showed that the construct of criminal attitude towards violence overlaps with both - general criminal attitudes and attitudes towards violence.

This multidimensional construct of criminal attitude's causes makes it difficult to create various techniques for its measurement and as a result leads to ambiguities in the interpretation and validity evaluation of such research. In the recent study special attention was paid to the analysis of the tools that are necessary for measuring attitudes towards violence. The difficulty has been associated with the selection of the necessary tools to measure attitudes towards criminal violence. Criminal violence refers only to those violent acts that are prohibited by law, and, as a rule, include the use of physical force. The essence of the concept of criminal attitude towards violence is the approval of the use of physical violence in the course of committing criminal acts. In the context of this work criminal attitude towards violence is a kind of criminal attitude. For criminal attitude towards violence measurement the Criminal Attitude towards Violence scale was used, which is a method, which measures attitude towards non-sexual physical violence referring to the respondent's involvement in criminal lifestyle. The first stage of linguistic adaptation was carried out for the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised-Abbreviated (EPQR-A).

Chances are that at low values on CAVs, neuroticism, extraversion and psychoticism are not related to criminal attitudes towards violence. Starting of some CAVs values, that are close to the median, a positive correlation relationship between the strength of attitude to the criminal violence and psychoticism is revealed.

The limitation of this study: the investigated participants never were not attracted to criminal responsibility.

For further investigation of the relationship between the criminal attitude towards physical violence with neuroticism, extraversion and psychoticism, the implicit measurements are needed.

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