

Psychodynamic Characteristics of Ego in Alcoholic Offenders and Non-offenders

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Summary - The research was based on some personality characteristics of alcoholics, such as specific ego qualities of alcoholic offenders in respect to the type of criminal offence, and non-offenders. The research was carried out in the prison and within the hospital system during the years of 2002/2003 in Popovača. Two groups of subjects were included. The experimental group (E) (N=96) was comprised of individuals sentenced to prison for homicide (N1=32), traffic offences (N2=32) and offences against property (N3=32). The control group (K) (N4=64) included the alcoholics undergoing the hospital treatment at the Alcoholism Department of Neuropsychiatric Hospital Dr Ivan Barbot in Popovača. The research results indicated that the homicide offenders exhibited lower ego during the latent phase and an overall stronger ego than non-offenders.

Key words: Alcoholic, Ego, Criminal offence

INTRODUCTION

According to Turčin¹, none of the factors that encourage the criminal acts is as undeniable and obvious as alcohol. Nevertheless, there are numerous attempts of searching for something that could be classified as "alcoholic personality" or "prealcoholic personality".^{2,5} Some authors indicate neuroticism, weak ego, addiction and change in stimuli intensity as significant characteristics of the alcoholic personality. There is numerous evidence of weak ego in alcoholics.^{6,12} Erikson^{13,16} describes an alcoholic as an individual whose life course is defined by

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a negative ego-identity, which reduces and destroys his abilities. Thus, everything that makes the ego stronger contributes to the strengthening of an individual's ego-identity.

Nenadic Sviglin¹⁰ states that the alcoholics who began drinking before the age of twenty, and exhibited the antisocial behaviour, showed the highest level of hostile feelings among groups. The psychosocial maturity in latent phase was lower in the group of alcoholics with antisocial behaviour, who began drinking before the age of twenty, than in the following two groups: alcoholics without antisocial behaviour and alcoholics with antisocial behaviour who began drinking after the age of twenty.¹¹

Kozaric Kovacic⁹ states that the group of aggressive alcoholics showed a significantly lower psychosocial maturity in the latent phase, in contrast to the non-aggressive alcoholics, which indicates the ego development blocking in this phase. A study by the same author showed that delinquent alcoholics exhibited a weaker ego in the latent phase with a significantly higher level of outward hostility than the non-delinquent alcoholics.

The aim of the study

To determine the psychodynamic characteristics of ego and psychopathologic characteristics of alcoholic personality in respect to the type of criminal offence.

The hypothesis of the study

Alcoholic offenders committing homicide have weaker egos and present more hostile, depressive and anxious personality characteristics.

Sample and method of the study

The study was conducted within the penal system, in the penitentiary in Lipovica and at the Dr Ivan Barbot Neuropsychiatric Hospital in Popovaca. The study included two groups of subjects.

The experimental group (E) (N=96) was comprised of individuals with prison sentences for homicide (N1=32), traffic offences (N2=32) and property offences (N3=32). The experimental group was comprised of subjects who had been diagnosed with alcohol dependence during the expert evaluation and were being treated for alcoholism during their incarceration. The subjects had been drinking for at least five years and the clinical assessment of alcohol addiction met the diagnostic conditions according to MKB-10 and DSM-IV criteria.

The control group (K) (N4=64) was comprised of alcoholics who were being treated for alcoholism at the Department for alcohol abuse at the Dr Ivan Barbot Neuropsychiatrie Hospital in Popovaca; they, too, met the diagnostic conditions. We excluded the alcoholics suffering from severe physical illnesses, those that had used drugs or other psychotropic substances during the last year prior to the study, those with obvious organic disorders, those suffering from schizophrenia or affective disorders not related to alcohol, those with antisocial personality disorders before the presentation of alcoholism, and those with high primary intellectual dysfunctions. Schizophrenia, mania, depression and antisocial personality disorders were diagnosed according to the DSM-IV criteria.¹⁸ The study was carried out between the fifth and the tenth day after the admission.

The following measuring instruments were applied for each subject:

1. A structured questionnaire for general data;
2. A structured questionnaire for the alcohol abuse history;
3. An ego identity scale according to Erikson¹³¹⁵ for estimation of fixation and regression, to determine the six levels of psychosocial maturity. The questionnaire consisted of eighty statements. Eight statements served to determine the level of truthfulness (lie scale); the subsequent seventy-two statements, divided into groups of twelve, were related to the six phases of the individuality development - from early childhood to adulthood (infancy, early childhood, time of play, school, adolescence and early adulthood). Having received the instructions, the subjects completed the scale on their own.

Statistical evaluation of data

The data obtained using the tests and questionnaires were computer-processed using the univariate and multivariate analytical procedures, discriminative and regression analysis.

RESULTS

The subjects were matched according to their marital status. Both groups included the same number of subjects living in wedlock and those not. Also, the subjects did not significantly differ in respect to age, total family income, educational background and occupation.

Table 1. Final table of variance analysis (ANOVA) for groups of subjects with traffic, property or homicide offences and non-offenders; N=160

Var.		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Between groups	1018.342	3	327.581		
EIS4	Within groups	14593.213	156	94.523	3.476**	0.018
	Total	15738.974	159			
	Between groups	189.73	3	64.527		
EIS4	Within groups	3821.631	156	24.821	2.59*	0.051

Var. - variable; EISL - EIS6 - ego identity scales; EIS4 - total number of points on ego identity scale; df - degree of freedom;

F - Value of F-ratio; p - importance of F-ratio; **p<0.05; *p=0.051.

Table 1 shows the ANOVA results for four groups of subjects on the EIS scale. Significant difference was found for the EIS4 variable (scale of fourth crisis phase of ego identity-latent phase; $F=3.42$, $p=0.018$). The groups showed a significant difference on the scale that relates to the fourth phase of psychosocial maturity. Differentiation among groups (traffic offence, property offence, homicide, non-offenders) was also found on EIS4. Value F ratio was $F=2.59$ and it was significant at the a level of $>5\%$ ($p=0.051$). There are indications of a possible significant difference on this scale between subjects. We calculated a post-hoc test, in order to establish which groups differed significantly on the EIS4 ego-identity scale.

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Table 2. The results of the Bonferroni post-hoc test for all four groups of subjects (traffic offence, property offence, homicide, non-offenders); N=16.

Dependent variable	(I) Group of subjects	(J) Group of subjects	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
EIS4	property	homicide	7.833	2.432	0.0!>**
	homicide	property	-7.833	2.432	0.01**
ElStot	homicide	non-offenders	2.859	1.07	0.05*
	non-offenders	homicide	-2.859	1.07	0.05*

EISL - EIS6 - ego identity scales; ElStot-total number of points on ego identity scale; Imam, Imal, Imad-Scales on LMA questionnaire; epqp-epqc - scales on EPQ personality questionnaire; mmpl-mmpma MMP1 personality inventory scale

Mean difference (I-J) - average difference between group I and J; St. error- Standard error; sig. - significance of Bonferroni post-hoc test; p=0.0.1; p=0.05.

Statistically, the Bonferroni post-hoc test showed a significant difference between the property offence and homicide groups for variable EIS4. The difference was significant at the level of 1%. Property offenders had significantly higher results on the EIS4 ego-identity scale than those who had committed homicide. Significant difference on the ElStot ego-identity scale was found between the subjects who had committed homicide and non-offenders: the difference was significant at the level of 5%. The differences in the arithmetic means of both groups showed that the homicide offenders had significantly higher results.

Table 3. Equivalence test of arithmetic means for four groups on the ego-identity variables (traffic offence, property offence, homicide, non-offenders); N=160.

Var.	Wilks' Lambda	F	df1	df2	Sig.
EIS4	0.938	3.523	3	125	0.014*

Var. — variable; F — value of F-ratio, df degree of freedom; Sig. level of significant difference, p<0.05

Table 3 shows the test results, the difference between arithmetic means of groups defined in respect to criminal offence (traffic offence, property offence, homicide, non-offenders) on the EIS ego-identity scale. The arithmetic means equivalence test shows which independent variables are predictors *per se*; this is true for the

EIS4 variable (fourth crisis phase of ego identity-latent phase scale) ($F=3.523$; $p=0.014$). The EIS4 variable best shows the differences between the four subject groups.

Table 4. Structural correlations matrix between the discriminative variables (Var.) and standardized canonical discriminative functions (Functions) for subject groups (traffic offence, property offence, homicide, non-offenders).

Var.	Function		
	1	2	3
EIS4	-0.438*	0.182	0.084

- The greatest absolute correlation between ego identity variable and canonical discriminative function.

Table 4 shows that the EIS4 variable correlates to a high degree with the canonical discriminative function. It best discriminates the four subject groups.

DISCUSSION

The conducted study showed that the criminal offenders exhibit a weaker ego in the latent phase, and an overall stronger ego than non-offenders. Variance analysis results, calculated using the data from the EIS scale (ego-identity), showed that the groups of alcoholic offenders (homicide, traffic, property) differ only on the EIS4 scale, $F=3.42$, $p=0.018$. On this scale, property offenders accomplished significantly higher results than homicide offenders.

In order to establish ego characteristics in alcoholics in respect to type of offence (homicide, traffic, property), a variance analysis ANOVA was calculated with which we tried to establish the differences among the groups on the EIS questionnaire (ego-identity scale). A significant difference was found only for the EIS4 variable, $F=3.42$, $p=0.018$. The Bonferroni post-hoc test showed-significant difference of this variable between the subjects who had committed property offences and those who had committed homicide. Property offenders had the significantly higher results on the EIS4 ego-identity scale than those who had committed homicide. Since the EIS4 scale refers to Erikson's productivity/inferiority phase, according to these results, the alcoholic homicide offenders showed a higher level of inferiority and much less productivity than the alcoholic property offenders.

The findings confirmed the formulated hypothesis.

Erikson's psychosocial development theory is used for interpreting the addiction tendencies (according to Fulgosi, Kozaric-Kovacic).⁹¹⁶ The causes of inclination towards the drug addiction must be sought out in developmental problems, or problems arising during the psychosocial development. Motives for substance abuse are numerous. They include curiosity, thrill seeking, escaping emotional tensions, escaping social pressure, rebellion against authority, peer pressure, a wish for self-improvement. These motives may be connected with the identity crisis and identity confusion. Each successfully overcome psychosocial crisis contributes to the identity reinforcement and empowerment. Erikson's fourth phase-productivity/inferiority matches the Freud's latent period. In this phase, the child starts school and is exposed to new social influences. The child must gradually learn to harness its lively and developed imagination and is subjected to formal education. Under the ideal circumstances, child will develop its work ethics at home and in school (Erikson's¹³¹¹⁶ productivity and diligence), primarily through the method of approval and satisfaction after having successfully completed a task. If parents, and other individuals engaged in the child's education, discourage it in its attempts, the child will probably develop a feeling of subordination, inferiority and inadequacy. On the other hand, if parents, and other individuals of authority, praise and encourage the child in its activities, it will acquire a sense of being competent and will be encouraged to take on new tasks. The basic strength that arises from diligence is the strength of being competent and able, which includes demonstrating skills and intelligence in accomplishing tasks. It is important to mention that this is the last phase in which the outcome of crisis solving depends on other people, and it depends more on what other people do to a child than what the child does to itself. What ego shows in this phase - (basic trust, autonomy, initiative, diligence, or suspicion, doubt, guilt and subordination) - will define the rest of an individual's life.

If we compare this to the results obtained in this study, we can assume that the educational methods of parents, as well as other individuals included in the education of alcoholic homicide offenders and property offenders, differed considerably and probably caused differences in productivity, diligence, initiative and basic trust (psychosocial maturity) in the two subject groups.

Differences between alcoholics in this phase were also found in earlier studies. Nenadic Svaglin¹⁰ found that psychosocial maturity in the latent phase is lower in alcoholics who started drinking before the age of twenty than in those who started drinking after twenty. A difference was also found between the alcoholics with antisocial behaviour who started drinking before the age of twenty and those without antisocial behaviour who started drinking after twenty."

In their research, Kozaric-Kovacic⁹ found a group of aggressive alcoholics with extremely low psychosocial maturity, in contrast to non aggressive alcoholics, while in other development phases, these groups showed no differences. In this study, it was also found that the control group (non-alcoholics), as opposed to alcoholics, showed significantly higher psychosocial maturity in every developmental phase, except in the latent phase. In the latent phase, there was no significant difference between the alcoholics and the control group, although the control group scored higher on this scale.

The author concludes that the reason for this difference (although it does not reach the level of significance) lies within the group of aggressive alcoholics, as there was a significant difference between the aggressive and the non aggressive alcoholics in the latent phase, that is, the group of aggressive alcoholics was at a lower level of psychosocial maturity than the non aggressive alcoholics and the control group. Hecimovic¹⁹ obtained similar results with neurotic subjects. Based on these results, it seems that the psychosocial development in this phase is crucial for the onstart of drinking before the age of twenty, antisocial behaviour and aggression. Based on the variance analysis results, it was found that, on the ego-identity scale, significant difference between alcoholic homicide offenders and alcoholic non-offenders exists only on the EIS4 scale. On this scale, homicide offenders achieved higher results. Discriminative analysis revealed that the EIS4 variable best differentiates the four subject groups (property offenders, traffic offenders, homicide and non-offenders); $F=3.523$, $p=0.014$.

In order to examine the specificity of ego in alcoholic offenders and non-offenders, a variance analysis and a discriminative analysis were calculated based on the results on the ego-identity scale. A significant difference was found only on the EIS4 ego-identity scale, between the alcoholic offenders and non-offenders. On this scale, the offenders scored higher results than non-offenders. Based on the discriminative analysis results, it can be seen that only the EIS4 variable (scale for fourth ego-identity-latent phase) differentiated the four subject groups ($F=3.523$, $p=0.014$), which confirms the previously found difference between the homicide and the property offenders. Based on these results, the alcoholic non-offenders have a weaker ego than the alcoholic homicide offenders.

Erikson's psychosocial personality development theory says that the levels or phases of development in life are influenced by social factors, which interact with the physically and psychologically developing organism. He believes that there are levels, i.e. more or less defined ages, when children learn the new types of behaviour as a response to the new social and developmental influences. Erikson

assumes that the ego has eight developmental phases and that on every level, an individual has to overcome certain crises through which he will develop a feeling of self or of others. A crisis can be overcome in a positive or in a negative manner. If it is positive, the ego gets stronger, and if it is negative, the ego gets weaker and the individual will reach the next crisis without having successfully overcome the first one. Each phase contributes to shaping of a complete personality.

According to Erikson's thesis, and based on the study conducted, it seems that the group of alcoholic non-offenders, in contrast to the alcoholic homicide offenders to a lesser degree, overcame some kind of crisis during the psychosocial development phases. The reason for this difference may lie in what meaning the act had (homicide) for the individual who had committed the crime. It is possible that the criminal offenders use such an act of crime to resolve the inner conflicts and cumulative aggression (in contrast to alcoholic non-offenders), which might result in strengthening of the ego. This assumption should be examined in the future studies and research.

The above hypothesis is consistent with Nenadic Svirgin's¹⁰ findings - that hostile feelings signify a weak ego and weak impulse control. In her study, the alcoholics with antisocial behaviour showed more hostile feelings than alcoholics lacking these characteristics. They were more open about their unfriendly feelings toward others than subjects without antisocial behaviour. The author also states that alcoholics with antisocial behaviour were probably under the unfavourable influence of their surroundings, although we cannot exclude the possibility of a constitutionally weaker ego. In contrast to the alcoholics without antisocial behaviour, the alcoholics with antisocial behaviour showed a lower psychosocial maturity (weaker ego) in the second (early childhood), third (time of play), fourth (school), fifth (adolescence) and sixth (early adulthood) developmental phases of individuality. The alcoholics with antisocial behaviour showed weaker ego and more fragile sense of self than the alcoholics without antisocial behaviour.

CONCLUSION

1. Homicide offenders show more inferiority and incompetence than property offenders, but have an overall stronger ego than non-offenders.
2. Alcoholic property offenders show higher ego strength in the latent phase (less feelings of inferiority and inadequacy).
3. Alcoholic non-offenders, in contrast to homicide offenders, do not try to present themselves more socially desirable and have weaker overall ego strength.

SAŽETAK

Sažetak - Istraživanje se temelji na nekim značajkama osobnosti alkoholičara kao što su specifičnosti ega alkoholičara počinitelja kaznenih djela prema vrsti kaznenog djela i nepočinitelja. Istraživanje se provodilo u penalnom i bolničkom sustavu tijekom 2002/2003. godine na području Popovače. Obuhvaćene su dvije skupine ispitanika. Eksperimentalna skupina (E) (N=96) obuhvaća osuđene osobe na izdržavanju kazne zbog krvnih delikata (N1=32), prometnih delikata (N2=32), i imovinskih delikata (N3=32). Kontrolnu skupinu (K) (N4=64) sačinjavali su alkoholičari koji su uključeni u bolnički tretmen na Odjelu za alkoholizam Neuropsihijatrijske bolnice «Dr. Ivan Barbot» u Popovači. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na to da počinitelji krvnog kaznenog djela pokazuju slabiji ego u fazi latencije, odnosno ukupno snažniji ego od nepočinitelja.

Ključne riječi: Ovisnici o alkoholu, Ego, Počinitelj kaznenog djela

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