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A COMPARISON OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF WHITE-COLLAR AND BLUE-COLLAR INMATES IN ISFAHAN

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to compare the personality traits of white-collar and blue-collar criminals in Isfahan. The population under investigation consisted of all the male inmates in Isfahan in spring 2014. The research sample included 117 male white-collar (59 subjects) and blue-collar inmates (58 subjects); who were selected through the use of convenience sampling method. A causal-comparative descriptive research design was used. The instrument adopted includes the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (1985). The gathered data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The results indicated that there exists a significant difference between the white- and blue-collar inmates in neuroticism and extraversion components ($p \leq 0.05$) while there was not observed any significant difference between the two groups with respect to other components.

Keywords: *Personality, Crime, White-Collar Criminals, Blue-Collar Criminals*

INTRODUCTION

The complexity of the phenomenon of crime, the troubles in explaining human behaviors and multiplicity of crime inducing factors make us resort to various sciences such as criminal anthropology, criminal law, sociology, psychiatry, psychology and economics. Undoubtedly, crime is not merely a psychological phenomenon but one of the branches that along with other scientific branches could help in resolving these problems. In order for the various scientific branches to be able to play their role in solving the issue of crime, we are compelled to first provide a precise meaning for crime. From the late nineteenth century, the issue of crime, which philosophers have debated for centuries, has ended in systematic efforts along with the development of biology, sociology, psychology, medicine, etc. However, despite the contribution of anthropologists and statisticians in crime analysis, fundamental theories have been derived from sociology, psychology and psychiatry (Dadsetan, 2010). According to the law text and Article 2 of the Islamic Penal Code, adopted on April 21, 2013 and various definitions offered by jurists and also with regard to the principle of legality of crime and punishment in accompany with the legal rule of “No punishment except in Accordance with the Law” (Punishment for what has not been declared as a crime is denounced), crime is known as any behavior of committing or breaching an act for which penalties are prescribed by the law. In other words, committing or violating an act is not a crime unless the legislature declares it as a crime. Crimes could be committed against peoples’ property or against their soul and body alike or against both; however, the approach of the majority of criminologists was directed toward violent and street crimes. Hence, they have been disinterested in studying the hidden aspects of crime (Mir, 2010). Sutherland (1940) made an attempt to explain that crime analysis, without taking into account the crimes committed by white-collar criminals, would challenge the criminal justice system; and in the end the costs imposed on society by white-collar criminals would be much higher than those imposed by blue-collar criminals (Belson & Simpson; translated by Rahimi, 2012).

Sutherland considered white-collar crimes as those illegal activities committed by respectful people of high social class in the context of professional activities. In most cases the crimes committed by white-collar criminals take on a legal appearance. In fact, they behave in legal settings in such a way that the terms and the appearance of the law might be maintained; although, the spirit of the law is violated (Mack, 2006). In examining the feature of white-collar crimes, the main aspect to be studied is the characteristics of these criminals; not the crime itself i.e. the high economic and social status distinguishes them from other defendants (Green, 2004). Blue-collar criminals (dirty) comprise another group. They are

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those criminals who are associated and involved mainly with the private sector and the community. Public bribery and illegal payments are rest in this group. This kind of corruption is regarded as the micro-corruption (Blue-Collars' corruption) (Pica; translated by: Hosseini and Abadi, 2011). These groups of criminals benefit from physical capabilities in committing crime. Their crimes do not require planning or mental complexities (Salimi, 2008). The issue of white-collar criminals proposed by Sutherland (1983) and the attention given to it during years have led the researchers and consequently the governments' legislatures to take these groups of crimes and criminals into consideration. In a following manner, interdisciplinary fields such as psychology should not only assess the psychological factors underlying the criminal behavior of regular offenders but also seek to identify the psychological causes of those criminals who have capital and are supported by politicians and the media. One of the features that are of interest to psychologists includes personality traits and the type of criminals. Personality is comprised of the combination of distinct characteristics named traits. Traits refer to a specific set of features such as thinking, attitude and behavior (Math *et al.*, 2011). If personality traits are inflexible and tend to lead to functional disorders, a diagnosis of personality disorder may also be made (Behan & Spur, 2011). Eysenck (1916) held the idea that the combination of neurological and personal status, circumstances, and factors result in a variety of crimes. This hypothesis implies that some characters more than others are highly prone to crime. Personality factor is one of the main factors underlying criminal behavior, and it is regarded as the only systematic method to assess such behavior. Based on a series of experimental studies, Eysenck proved that there are three main factors of extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism in personality (Eysenck, 1916; translated by Pasha & Najafi, 2010). Levin and Jackson (2004) also suggested that an important factor which could assist us to explain crime and criminal behavior is personality. Moreover, they asserted that personality is a major factor in criminal behavior and the only systematic method available to assess criminal behaviors. In fact, personality plays a determinant role in the development of crime. Many studies have addressed this factor in surveying criminals and approved the role of personality features in the occurrence of a crime (Alilou *et al.*, 2009; Grousi *et al.*, 2007; Levine & Jackson, 2004; Wow *et al.*, 2001). In a study conducted by Busby *et al.*, (2008) on finding out why talented, smart and educated people commit a crime, it was pointed out that a majority of white-collar criminals are generally classified into two main categories of leaders and followers and each category has its own distinct characters. Due to their real nature, the followers are obedient with low self-esteem compared to their leaders. It is natural if there appear a variety of social deviations in different societies since there is no society in which criminal behaviors are not displayed. On the other hand, since social security requires social reaction against crime; thus, studying criminal phenomena and personality characteristics of criminals are necessary in every society. Due to the fact that criminal acts committed by white-collar and blue-collar criminals result in long-lasting ominous and destructive effects on the structural aspect of society especially social and economic aspects; therefore, studying the characteristics of white-collar versus blue-collar criminals from a psychological point of view is a vital task. Owing to the incremental increase in these crimes and their devastating impact on communities, the current study sought to compare the personality and psychological characteristics of white-collar and blue-collar criminals. To this end, this research work addressed the following question:

Is there any significant difference between the personality traits of white-collar and blue-collar inmates?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

A causal-comparative descriptive research design was used. The population under study was comprised of all the male inmates in Isfahan in spring 2014. The research sample included 117 male white-collar (59 subjects) and blue-collar inmates (58 subjects) and they were selected through convenience sampling method. The instrument adopted includes:

NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO – FFI)

This is a 60-item questionnaire which includes 5 components of neuroticism (N), extraversion (E), openness (O), agreeableness (adaptation) (A), and conscientiousness (C). Each component is evaluated

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through 12 questions on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “absolutely disagree”, “disagree”, “no idea”, “agree” to “absolutely agree”. The scores could also range from 12 to 60. The higher the scores are, the more they are indicator of the presence of that component feature in the person. In this inventory, some items are directly scored as such that “absolutely disagree” is scored 1; “disagree” 2 and it similarly goes on to the last item which awarded a 5. However, some of the items are reversely scored meaning that “absolutely disagree” is awarded 5 and “disagree” is awarded 4 and it similarly goes on to the last item (absolutely agree) which is scored 1. The retest in a small sample of 31 men and women within 3 months demonstrated the final ratio to be between 0.92 and 0.66 for secondary traits and also higher reliability coefficients (0.93, 0.87, and 0.86) were obtained for the main components of N, E and O (McCrae and Costa, 1985, Grousi, 2001). The long-term reliability of the NEO-PI-R test is also examined. A 6-year longitudinal study reported a reliability coefficient of 0.68 to 0.83 in both personal and shared reports. Within 3-year intervals the reliability coefficient was estimated to be between 0.63 and 0.79 (McCrae and Costa, 1985; Grousi, 2001).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Given the objective of the study which was to explore the differences between white-collar and blue-collar criminals with respect to their personality features, the following results were obtained. Table 1 presents the mean and the standard deviation of big five personality factors in the two sample groups.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of big five personality factors in sample groups

Row	Big Five personality factors	White-collar criminals		Regular criminals	
		M	SD	M	SD
1	neuroticism	2.72	0.83	3.03	0.72
2	extraversion	3.74	0.59	3.46	0.64
3	conscientiousness	3.45	0.51	3.43	0.67
4	agreeableness (adaptation)	2.65	0.71	2.86	0.65
5	openness	3.99	0.67	3.75	0.67

As is seen in table 1, the mean score of neuroticism in white-collar criminals and regular criminals was 2.72 and 3.03, respectively. The mean score of conscientiousness in white-collar criminals was 3.45 while it came out to be 3.43 in regular criminals. The mean of agreeableness (adaptation) in white-collar criminals and regular criminals was 2.65 and 2.86, respectively. The mean score of openness in white-collar criminals was 3.99 and it was 3.75 in regular criminals. The results of the multivariate analysis of variance of the big five personality factors are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Results of multivariate analysis of variance on the big five personality factors in the two sample groups

Row	Big Five personality factors	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F- Factor	Significant level
1	neuroticism	2.83	1	2.83	4.7	0.03
2	extraversion	2.27	1	2.27	5.91	0.02
3	conscientiousness	0.01	1	0.01	0.04	0.84
4	agreeableness (adaptation)	1.27	1	1.27	2.74	0.1
5	openness	1.65	1	1.65	3.67	0.058
6	Pillay’s effect	p> 0.05, 1.67, 0.07				
7	Wilks’ Lambda	p> 0.05, 1.67, 0.93				
8	Hotelling’s trace	p> 0.05, 1.67, 0.07				
9	Roy’s largest root	p> 0.05, 1.67, 0.07				

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As is seen in table 2, there exist a significant difference between the two groups of white- and blue- collar criminals with respect to the components of neuroticism and extraversion ($p < 0.05$) while there was not any significant difference between the two groups in conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness ($p > 0.05$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The results revealed that there is a significant difference between the white- and blue- collar criminals with respect to the components of neuroticism and extraversion while there was not any significant difference between the conscientiousness, agreeableness (adaptation) and openness of the two groups. Despite continued review of the literature regarding the evaluation and comparison of white- and blue-collar criminals' characteristics, no research has been found that directly compared the characteristics of these two groups with each other. Therefore, it is attempted to theoretically explain the findings. According to the mean scores demonstrated in table 1, the neuroticism component appeared briefly in white-collar criminals than the blue-collar criminals whereas the component of extraversion was seen more in white-collar criminals than the blue ones. Theoretically, the difference between white- and blue-collar criminals in their neuroticism could be accounted by looking at the expressive characteristics of neuroticism. Neurotic people tend to show a great desire for negative experiences such as fear, sadness, bafflement, anger, guilt and hatred. Although the neurotic individuals stand more than ready for psychological distresses, one of the distinctive features of neurotic is their emotional fragility that prevents them from quick and timely adjustment to the circumstances. Those men and women who score high in neuroticism are prone to have irrational beliefs and are less able to control their impulses. They are much weaker than others in dealing with stress and they also emotionally respond to it and react severely to stressful conditions than other regular people (McCrae & Costa, 1998).

Contemplating what is central in the personality trait of neuroticism, it seems that many of the features listed for this big personality factor is inconsistent with what goes on in white-collar crimes. The white-collar criminals, as mentioned before, are those criminals who commit non-violent, planned and thoughtful crimes. In other words, the crimes they commit mostly need high expertise and accuracy in order to be detected. These criminals often commit an act of crime with contemplation and forethought and then obliterate all the traces which might easily divulge them. Such modes of action and behavior create absolute incompatibility with what appears in neuroticism personality trait. Neuroticism passes up many opportunities that might arise for white-collar criminals or it quickly exposes them and makes them become subject to the law. Thus, the lower degree of neuroticism in white-collar criminals than blue-collar criminals seems to be logical. On the other hand, if it is acknowledged that part of what has been reported in this study regarding the degree of neuroticism in white- versus blue- collar criminals was related to their mental status of being imprisoned, it seems that due to some hidden potential supports, the white-collar criminals felt less worry, anxiety, fear and excitement. Accordingly, it is likely that this situation led to the lower neuroticism degree in white-collar criminals.

The following is a discussion on why white-collar criminals demonstrated higher degree of extraversion than blue-collar criminals. Extraversion is a personality feature based upon being sociable, having a desire for developing comprehensive relationships and escaping from loneliness, and being sanguine. This basic personality type leads the extroverts to be in touch and interact with a diverse range of people in the community. Especially for an individual who harbors a lot of worldly and financial ambitions, this extraversion features could provide grounds for making calls and interacting with influential individuals in power. In most of the crimes committed by white-collar criminals, the ability and willingness to interact with others for crime preparation are fundamental issues and could not be ignored. It is for this reason why a significant difference was seen to exist between the white- and blue-collar criminals with respect to extraversion personality trait. The difference is quite reasonable and it may be in the field of crime and criminology that extroversion could be considered as a risk personality characteristic.

Another point that is essential to be taken into consideration when explaining the results of the first hypothesis is that there was not seen any significant difference between the white- and blue- collar criminals in the components of conscientiousness, agreeableness (adaptation) and openness. This finding

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is somewhat surprising because it seems that there should be lied a significant difference between these two groups with respect to the components of conscientiousness and agreeableness. In fact, regarding the type of crime and the situation of white-collar criminals it is expected that the personality features of conscientiousness and agreeableness appear higher compared to blue-collar criminals. However, the non-significant difference between the two groups could be influenced by several factors among which we would mention the most important one.

Evaluating the self-report of personality traits and some other psychological characteristics, it is likely that instead of reporting what is true, the people report the ideal situations. These self reports could make some of the expecting differences not be exhibited in statistical analyses. On the other hand, one possibility is that despite the expected differences, there really might not be any difference between the two groups of criminals in conscientiousness, agreeableness (adaptation) and openness. This could be clarified by further investigations in the future.

Furthermore, despite the lack of differences found out here, a significant difference may lie between the white- and blue-collar criminals with respect to the three big personality traits.

However, detecting these differences require the use of careful diagnostic and full-question tools in assessing the characters. It is worth mentioning that administering full-item questionnaires among prisoners is not a simple and easy job. To this end, in order to benefit from these detailed full-item questionnaires in future investigations, it is necessary that researchers consider measures prior to the implementation of their research work.

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