Proceeding Paper

Personality and Aggressive Behavior in a Domestic Violence Suspects Sample [†]

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Abstract: The goal of this study is to show the relationship between the 5-factor model of personality and aggression in 54 suspects of domestic violence, between 23 and 68 years old, assessed in the Victims Information and Assistance Office (GIAV) within the Public Prosecutor's Office. The results show us a positive correlation between neuroticism and physical aggression, anger, hostility, and total aggression score; a negative correlation between extraversion and physical aggression; a negative correlation between agreeableness and physical aggression, anger, and total aggression score; and a negative correlation between conscientiousness and physical aggression, anger, and total aggression score. Our results show the importance of studying the relationship between personality and aggressive behavior and allow us to understand and find assessment strategies (e.g., personality and aggressive behavior assessment) and prevention strategies for domestic violence. Therefore, we reinforce the relevance of continuing the study of this topic, which could strengthen a closer relationship between forensic psychology and law.

Keywords: personality; aggressive behavior; five-factor model; domestic violence

1. Introduction

The five-factor model (FFM) is the most modern and widely acknowledged method of describing and evaluating personality. According to the FFM, the five basic domains that incorporate personality are neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness [1]. According to Costa and McCrae (1992), neuroticism characterizes people who frequently experience negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, resentment, and grief), have irrational beliefs and excessive desire and cravings, and are more likely to experience emotional instability and psychological distress [2]. People who have a high score on this dimension are examples of anxious and insecure people, as opposed to people who score poorly, who typically are at ease and pleased with themselves [3]. The level of activity, the demand for outside stimulation, the quantity and quality of social engagement, and the quality of delight are all accounted for by the extraversion domain. People that perform well on this dimension can be characterized as talkative and social. People who score poorly on the dimension are contrasted with them and portrayed as restrained and serious [3]. The ability to be open to experience is measured by one's proactive pursuit of appreciation and tolerance for experience for its own sake, as well as one's exploration of the unfamiliar. People that perform well on this factor are considered to be unconventional and curious. Contrarily, persons with low scores are conventional and realist [3]. Agreeableness measures the degree of interpersonal orientation toward others

along a continuum ranging from sympathy and compassion to antagonistic ideas, feelings, and behaviors. People who perform well on this dimension are thought to be kind and sincere, whereas those who perform poorly are thought to be agitated and manipulative [3]. Conscientiousness refers to a person's ability to regulate their impulsivity. Those who exhibit high levels of conscientiousness are viewed as reliable and scrupulous [2]. Low scorers, in contrast, are unreliable and reckless [3].

According to personality and aggression theorists, personality traits play a significant role in predicting aggressive behavior [4]. The understanding of this relationship was improved by the use of the FFM [2,5,6] and was used by a few researchers [7–9] to investigate the relationship between aggression and several personality traits. While developing the Aggressive Questionnaire, Buss and Perry (1992) assumed that this behavior could be categorized into four factors: verbal aggression (e.g., yelling, cursing, threatening, insulting); physical aggression (e.g., hitting, striking, breaking things); anger (e.g., physiological arousal); and hostility (e.g., feelings of ill will and injustice) [10]. Agreeableness, which is negatively correlated with both self-reported and peer-reported aggressive behavior and violence [7], is the strongest personality predictor of this type of behavior [11]. Anger and agreeableness were found to be negatively correlated [12]; therefore, it may be claimed that those who have low levels of agreeableness are more likely to experience rage when they are provoked. Apart from the measure of agreeableness, all the individual variables have a statistically significant impact on aggressive behavior [3], whereas neuroticism is positively correlated with hostility and anger. Neuroticism was found to have the highest individual impact on aggression, implying that the more stable your emotions, the less aggressive you are. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that emotionally unstable people (those with high levels of neuroticism) are more prone to experience negative emotions, and as a result, they have lower levels of patience [3]. Some authors [13], by studying the relationship between personality traits and the Aggressive Questionnaire, concluded that, first, there is a correlation between neuroticism and all four measures of the Aggression Questionnaire. Second, hostility and verbal aggression were mostly unrelated to (poor) conscientiousness, although physical aggression and anger were highly related to it. On the other hand, the correlations between the component extroversion and violent conduct are contradictory: the link between self-reported physical violence and extroversion, for instance, was shown to be negative [11], although another study [13] discovered a positive correlation between both. Regarding the last factor of the FFM, openness to experience, it appears to be unrelated to any aggressive behavior [7]. Low agreeableness, low conscientiousness, and high neuroticism have previously been associated with aggression [14,15]. Higher BPAQ scores were positively associated with neuroticism and negatively associated with agreeableness and conscientiousness [16]. In a study with 38 suspects of domestic violence [16], the authors found a positive correlation between neuroticism and hostility, a negative correlation between openness to experience and overall aggression, a negative correlation between agreeableness and physical aggression and anger, and a negative correlation between conscientiousness and anger.

2. Materials and Methods

The sample is composed of 54 suspects of domestic violence (n_{men} = 46 (85.2%); n_{women} = 8 (14.8%)) between 23 and 68 years old (*M* = 45.39, *sd* = 10.36) assessed in the Victims Information and Assistance Office (GIAV) within the Public Prosecutor's Office. Most of the sample were only suspects (*n* = 35), and others were victims and suspects simultaneously (*n* = 19). A large proportion of the sample had middle school education (27.8% (*n* = 15)), followed by high school education (25.9% (*n* = 14)) and B.Sc. degrees (24.1% (*n* = 13)). Our sample was mostly experts in the intellectual and scientific professions (24.1% (*n* = 13)) and industrial, agricultural, and fishing workers (16.7% (*n* = 9)). The relationship between victims and our sample were: 19 married; 14 ex-boyfriends/girlfriends; 11 divorced; 3 boyfriends/girlfriends; 3 partners; 3 ex-partners; 1 lover. Regarding criminal history, 38.9% (*n* = 21) had previous contacts with the Criminal Justice System, including

convictions in 13.0% (*n* = 7) of cases. Data were collected from lawsuits, semi-structured interviews, collateral information, and clinical and forensic assessment tools such as NEO-PI-R [2] and BPAQ [10].

3. Results and Discussion

The goal of this study is to show the relationship between the five-factor model of personality (NEO-PI-R) and aggression (BPAQ).

Table 1 shows a positive correlation between neuroticism and physical aggression, anger, hostility, and total aggression score; a negative correlation between extroversion and physical aggression; a negative correlation between agreeableness and physical aggression, anger, and total aggression score; and a negative correlation between conscientiousness and physical aggression, anger, and total aggression score.

Table 1. Relationship between personality and aggression.

	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness
Physical aggression	0.431 **	−0.296 *	−0.289 *	−0.342 *
Anger	0.620 **	−0.135	−0.502 **	−0.402 **
Hostility	0.441 **	−0.168	−0.188	−0.165
Total aggression	0.589 **	−0.203	−0.413 **	−0.338 *

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

These results are consistent with the findings of the empirical studies mentioned above [7,11,13–17], namely, the relation between FFM and aggression. People with higher levels of neuroticism are more likely to experience negative emotions and engage in aggressive behaviors, and people with higher levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness are more likely to experience positive emotions and are less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors.

Our results show the importance of studying the relationship between personality and aggressive behavior and allow us to understand and find assessment strategies (e.g., personality and aggressive behavior assessment) and prevention strategies for domestic violence. Therefore, we reinforce the relevance of continuing the study of this topic, which could strengthen a closer relationship between forensic psychology and law and a better understanding of domestic violence offenders' characteristics.

Informed Consent Statement: All ethical issues were considered due to the sensitive nature of the detailed data, the respective informed consent, confidentiality limits, and information about the ethics and technician's impartiality. Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. The participants signed an informed consent term, which contained the goal of the evaluation, the limits of confidentiality, and information about the ethics and impartiality of the technicians. Written informed consent has been obtained.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing is not applicable because some of the information derives from criminal records.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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