The Relationship Between Psychological Dependence and Criminal Behavior

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Abstract
Crime is known to be the result of interaction between internal psychological processes, on one hand, and external objective-related factors, on the other hand. At the same time, criminologists and forensic psychologists have not yet conducted in-depth research into the psychological mechanism of communication between the individual and the situation at the time of the crime. The present study takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from philosophy, psychology, sociology and criminology, to examine criminal behavior through the prism of a phenomenon known as psychological dependence, which determines the perception and assessment of a specific life situation as a problem (conflict) and actualizes harm-doing as a means to overcome it. In the context of psychological dependence, the basic premise is that a crime is committed because of the manifestation of specific personality traits and the influence of a specific life situation.

Keywords: behavioral addiction, psychological dependence, criminal behavior, criminal conduct mechanism, criminal decision-making

1 Introduction
Crime defined as harmful acts taking place in the external world points to the superficial understanding of crime, mainly as a means of causing harm to particular social relations protected by criminal law. From this perspective, research on the topic under investigation is often limited to studying social conditions and reasons behind the commission of crime, without properly examining criminal decision-making. The sociological approach in understanding crime has so far prevailed in criminology. As such, gaps in upbringing and education, unfavorable social environments, financial difficulties, unequal distribution of economic goods, and social stratification are considered the common causes of criminal behavior. In addition to the above, there is the need to adopt the interdisciplinary approach in order to carry out a comprehensive study of criminal personality based on the biopsychosocial model of personality. The author believes that the study of criminal behavior in terms of the integrative individual-situation interrelation using the phenomenon of psychological dependence has important research value and significance.

2 Materials and methods
In 2017, the author conducted a review of English-language research literature on the topic under investigation drawing upon the information provided by the Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies of the University of Toronto (Canada). In Another academic literature search focusing on the terms “behavioral addiction” and “criminal behavior” was made using Medline and Google Scholar in 2019. A careful review of the literature on interactions between addictive and criminal behavior helped to define the basic topic-related concepts.

A strong connection existing between addictive and criminal behavior results from both of them being deviant types of behavior (48). It is no accident that in different cultures and countries addictive behavior is perceived as a cross phenomenon to criminal behavior (22). “Deviant” behavior is commonly understood as a behavior that deviates from social norms and can further be divided into legal wrongs and addictions. A legal wrong is a violation of law, i.e. an illegal action, an offense or a crime (44). Addiction refers to one’s desire to escape from reality by changing one’s psychological condition through the use of some substances or constant focus on certain objects or activities coupled with the development of intense emotions (42).

Among objects of addiction can be specific objects in the surrounding world or engagement into an emotionally significant activity. Modern clinical psychology distinguishes between two groups of addictions: pharmacological and non-pharmacological ones (42). The first group includes alcoholism, addiction to medications or narcotics and solvent abuse. The other group comprises addiction to food, sports, sex, gambling, video games and the Internet, television, cell phones as well as hospitalism, workaholism and shopaholism.
According to ICD-10 and DSM-V, some of the above addictions are recognized as mental disorders.

Furthermore, the author used the results of random interviews of accused persons and persons on trial, obtained during his legal practice in Russia between 2003 and 2012. All of the participants had read and signed a consent form indicating that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without suffering any negative consequences. Every interview was based on the respondents’ rating of notions that were of vital importance for him such as “personal dignity”, “friends”, “family”, “money”, “entertainment”, “gambling”, “sex”, “power”, “alcohol” and “drugs”. Following that, the respondent was asked to choose one of several entities that he expected to improve when committing a crime. The results were divided into two groups, namely, property crime and crime of violence. Theft, fraud, plunder, robbery, intentional destruction of property and self-serving malfeasance in public office were put into the property crime group. Murder, physical assault, infliction of moderate damage to health and infliction of severe damage to health are grouped as crime of violence.

3 Results
Analysis of research literature points to a close link between dependent and criminal behavior. Researchers detected numerous commonalities in the mechanism of formation and passing of substance and behavior addictions (17,19,29). Being inside any kind of addiction psychologically means to feel strong euphoria, to lose self-control and track of time. As opposed to being outside, current addiction means to sense, to be depressed and to think about addictive activity. At the same time, during addictive activity the overall growing tolerance requires increased amounts of something to achieve the same effects (increasing drug dosage or the bet size in gambling, being unable to stop shopping, staying longer with a partner and so on). Moreover, it was observed that addictions are mutually reinforcing, i.e. one dependence increases the risks of emergence of new types of dependence. For instance, a Canadian epidemiological survey estimated that the relative risk for an alcohol use disorders increased 3.8-fold when disordered gambling was present (8,9). Theoretically, the range of objects of addiction is not limited, and a person in the course of his life activity might be addicted to an unlimited number of objects and activities (38). Thus, an addiction can be due to material well-being, wealth acquisition (Slater 1980), a prestigious job, a beneficial social circle, power over other people, pair bonding (38), love (12), family well-being, entertainment and pleasure. At the same time, the fact that addictions are not officially recognized as such does not mean they do not exist or cannot be subjected to research. For this reason, the general term “psychological dependence”, which refers to official addictions and nonofficial dependences, is used in the research community (29,39) and in this paper. Psychological dependence, in a general sense, means a compulsive need that determines the high susceptibility of a personal to a particular external influence. Empirical studies on delinquents show that the latter have a wide range of chemical, personal and behavioral addictions (7,13,20,45). Incarcerated persons often abuse alcohol, psychoactive substances, gambling and have sexual deviations (sexual perversions).

Researchers have carefully examined the relationship between crime of violence/property crime and alcoholic/drug addiction (2,3,27,43,47) as well as gambling (25,31,46). Their studies point to a close link between these types of dependence and income producing offenses which transform into a means to support dependence financially. As stated by Grant “individuals with behavioral addictions, like those with substance addictions, will frequently commit illegal acts, such as theft, embezzlement, and writing bad checks, to either fund their addictive behavior or cope with the consequences of the behavior” (17).

The relationship between addictions and violent offenses has been examined to a lesser degree, and conclusions on this matter are often contradictory. As an example, a number of studies shows lack of any obvious link between dependence on soft drugs, such as cannabis, and violent offenses due to the fact that these soothing substances reduce the likelihood of aggressive behavior (10,36). In the USA, statistics reveals the vast majority of teenagers using soft drugs are not involved in violent offenses, which has been one of the reasons for legalizing cannabis in Canada in 2018. Other researchers highlight a close relationship between cannabis and aggressive behavior, noting that, while reducing the risk of aggressive behavior during intoxication, cannabis does increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior during abstinence (21,35).

Analysis of Brazilian experience has revealed that hard drugs, in particular cocaine, determine violent offenses to a greater extent (1). A similar situation prevails with respect to gambling: some researchers consider it to be related to financially motivated crimes (31,41) while others argue that gambling can lead to non-property offenses, including violence, illegal possession of weapons, arson and vandalism (2,25,33,34). As Griffiths observes, gambling like other addictive behaviors, causes individuals to engage in stealing, cheating with borrowing money and committing violence towards friends, parents and teachers (19).

Finally, one category of habitual criminals has a procedural addiction to criminal behavior, given that they derive pleasure from destructive activity. Addictive criminal behavior is a scientifically substantiated behavior in relation to crimes such as multiple murders, rapes, thefts and terrorism (6).

Psychological research on criminals confirms that they have increased personal sensitivity in certain relationships, the so-called “psychological reagent” (37). Murderers tend to show a sensitivity in interpersonal relationships; sex offenders are characterized by sensitivity to female influence, sexual needs and affirmation of their masculinity; robbers and bandits have a sensitive response to the diminished value of their personality; and thieves pay special attention to material welfare and social status (5). The author confirmed the correctness of these conclusions with the results of interviews conducted among the accused and defendants: criminals accused of property crimes pointed to money, entertainment, alcohol, gambling and drugs as their vital interests while those accused of crimes of violence gave preference to personal dignity, power, friends, family and sex.

It is noteworthy that research in bioenergy radiation and its absorption also confirms this phenomenon, i.e. personal sensitivity. The inherent quality of every living being, including man, is radiation. When interacting with objects encountered on its way, radiation is absorbed, reflected or
passes unimpeded. The object thus responds to radiation whose parameters are in some respects similar to its characteristics (24). Consequently, environment can affect individuals in three different ways: one may fall under the influence of the external environment and accepts it; one may be under the influence of the external environment yet one repels it; and one is independent of such influence altogether. Responses vary depending on how the parameters of incoming radiation correspond to the characteristics of the person receiving it.

4 Discussion
According to the author, the phenomenon of psychological dependence is of universal significance for criminal behavior and is not limited exclusively to drug, alcohol, gambling and related multiple crimes. To uncover a “link” between the criminal’s personality and a criminogenic situation, it is necessary to identify the basic elements of a crime that are inherent in any deliberate criminal act, regardless of its composition. Such elements seem to be “harm” and “problem”. Owing to its danger to the public, any crime involves infliction of real physical, material, moral, organizational and other harm or a threat thereof. Because of the deliberate nature of crime and the perpetrator’s awareness of the risk to stand trial, any criminal harming an individual, society or the state, acts consciously under the conditions of a situation that is subjectively perceived as a problematic conflict. Consequently, discovering a psychological connection between the criminal’s personality and the criminogenic situation means to reveal the component in his psyche responsible for perceiving the situation as a problematic conflict, which actualizes active behavior taking the form of harmdoing.

As it possesses the property of reflection, the psyche ensures the person’s connection with the world around him. The psyche has as its material substratum the human brain, studied as part of a medical scientific pattern called the “central nervous system”; yet it is not limited by it in the same way as a broadcasting television is not limited by its microcircuits. As a reflecting system, the psyche accumulates ideal informational patterns throughout a person’s life, some of which perform evaluative and motivational functions. In an attempt to designate these patterns, psychology uses a wide diversity of terms such as needs, desires, wants, likes, habits, interests, motives, goals and directions, among others. Diversity in terminology often leads to conceptual disputes and, thus, stands in the way of achieving specific research objectives. Suffice it to note that modern psychology, along with criminology, has no unified approach to understanding the psyche, personality, motives and behavior. What is important is not the number of terms used and their further theoretical correlation, but the understanding that the individual’s attitude to various situations forms ideal patterns of the psyche and ensures their assessment as positive, negative or neutral. Situations facing individuals throughout their lives have varying degrees of importance for him. External objects and situations lead to activity when their meanings for a person are reflected in his consciousness. Consequently, the notion of importance is central to understanding criminal behavior and requires a brief overview on the Need Theory.

Needs as a source of dependence. Psychology considers a need as a necessity, something to be satisfied, lack of wellbeing, a condition (23). Despite the lack of uniform understanding of what a need is, this psychological phenomenon is as close as possible to the notion of psychological dependence. The most quoted psychologist on this matter, Abraham Maslow, adhered to a strictly determined view on the list and hierarchy of needs, dividing them according to the principle “from the lowest to the highest” into physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem and the need for self-actualization (30). According to David McClelland, people have three needs: need for power, need for achievement and need for affiliation, and they do not have any hierarchy, as a person makes his choice between them (32). Erich Fromm believes that a person has the following needs: relatedness, creativity, rootedness, sense of identity and frame of orientation (15). According to Viktor Frankl, the individual’s main and only need is his pursuance of meaning (14). A comparative analysis of the theories of needs shows their diversity and variability. In different periods of life, in various spheres of human activity and in different situations, a person has many needs and motives that form his sphere of needs and motivations (26). The latter is, therefore, a flexible system where the hierarchy of needs is determined by the importance that the individual attaches to them.

In the author’s view, criminal behavior should be associated with needs of special significance to the individual, resulting from the transformation of needs into dependence.

To explain the transformation of needs into dependence, it is necessary to consider the proportion of the biological and the social in the individual. In examining this controversial issue, it is assumed that humans have the highest level of social development among all species. The humans construct roads and buildings, cultivate nature, create technical means and invent social institutions, but, in the process of their social evolution, they also develop all kinds of dependencies. Why cannot other species reach the same level of social development? What is the source of dynamic human activity? Unfortunately, psychology often overlooks. While distinguishing humans from other species in terms of the mind and speech, psychology does not provide a clear explanation of what makes humans different from animals. Perhaps, only philosophical anthropology partially compensates for this serious gap in psychological research, especially in terms of human spirituality. Postulating the human aspiration to search for meaning, philosophy emphasizes the unique ability of man to change the world and himself. However, as a science of ideas, philosophy provides no psychological explanation for this ability. In the author’s view, the psychological difference between humans and other species should be made according to consciousness levels. A human being is one whose consciousness separates him from and opposing him to nature. Every second, at every moment of his activity, the human being feels and understands the existence of a border between him and the natural world, between him and society, between him and other humans, which in turn becomes a condition for the human to change nature, society and himself.

Biological needs of humans, such as nutrition, survival, procreation and safety, have been developed in society, generating new aspirations and ways to meet them. In the author’s view, a wide diversity of social needs results from the biological need for safety. In nature, the need for safety has
biological overtones, i.e. it is limited to the physical survival of a species which does not separate itself from nature. On the contrary, in society, the need for safety has social, psychological and spiritual dimensions. For a person, safety is not only a question of his physical safety, but also that of sufficient material income, prestigious work, a beneficial social network, a sense of confidence and absence of anxiety for him and his family’s future.

Thus, a developing psychological dependence becomes a side effect of the human aspiration for meaning. Given that division of labor and money as a universal means of payment are typical of any developed society, people need to make no physical efforts to fulfill a need, and it is possible to satisfy that need immediately and repeatedly. Therefore, the imbalance in the effort-result system can lead to the transformation of a need into an addiction. Certainly, needs do not necessarily transform into addictions. The formation of addictions is fostered, on one hand, by the individual’s social maladjustment (lack of stable social connections, permanent job, family, etc.) and, on the other hand, by his individual psychological characteristics (mental infantilism, anxiety, chronic dissatisfaction, rigidity) (19). These and other factors encourage the person to ease his social maladjustment and anxiety by directing all of his efforts toward an obtainable type of activity that forms his “psychological comfort” zone (6).

Repetitive behaviors, such as jogging, gardening, socializing with friends or eating can systematically satisfy normal needs without being identical too addictions (11). A repetitive behavior is a means of habitually satisfying a human need, along with which alternative types of activity can satisfy an ongoing need. In this regard, repetitive behaviors are a form of flexible, adaptive behavior that does not adversely affect individuals. On the contrary, the harmful nature of dependency is determined by the fact that the dependent person is trapped in a “false refuge” in which the addictive type of activity becomes the only way to manage stress and experience positive emotions (28). At the same time, the addicted person’s consciousness is continually expecting the repetition of the addictive behavior in the future while perceiving the present moment as unsatisfactory and depressing. In this regard, the transformation of a need into an addiction can be regarded as a pathological adaptation mechanism (42). Conflict as the consequence of dependence. “Conflict” (from Latin conflictus – “clash”) is generally understood as a clash of disparate tendencies (40). In terms of criminal behavior, one of these tendencies is rooted inside one’s personality as its psychological dependence and the other one lies in a situation as a stimulus, impinging on the object of dependence.

Taking into consideration the personality-situation interrelation, it is necessary to proceed from the fact that there exists no objective list of problem-and-conflict situations, which are apriori such for any person. A problem or a conflict becomes such as a result of the subject’s evaluation of various external influences (stimuli), which gives him a reason to commit a crime. Having studied the role of life situations in commission of crime, Antonyan concluded that problem situations exist only in criminals’ consciousness (4). Psychological dependence is a phenomenon that determines most of the so-called “need conflicts” resulting from the encroachment on a subject’s essential needs (for instance, material welfare, sense of belonging to a community, prestige, self-esteem) (40). As opposed to a need, a formed addiction becomes an autonomous psychological component. According to Ilyin, “a need does not lead directly to activity but merely provokes increased sensitivity to the effects of the corresponding irritants” (23). Only during the very first stages can an addicted person survive the struggle of motives; thereafter he no longer chooses, being drawn by a stream from which he cannot escape, even if it is connected with the violation of standards of moral and law (6). As defined in addiction-related research studies, conflict is an integral part in the evolution of any type of addiction (16,18). Conflict between the addicted person and people around him becomes obvious when the latter try to put an end to his addictive behavior, whether directly or indirectly. Furthermore, the addicted person feels conflict if he lacks funding to feed his addiction.

Psychological dependence forms a “zone of sensitivity” of a person to situations (stimulus) impeding the achievement or maintenance of an object (subject) of dependence. These situations are objectively assessed as problematic and conflict. Thus, if one is dependent on material well-being, one’s attention and activity will be directed towards material values. Obtaining material well-being is very satisfying and losing it is devastating for such a person. If one is obsessed with leadership, one will do his best to manage other people. Such a person will be very satisfied if other people follow his decisions, and in contrast, other people’s attempts to impose their will would provoke a negative reaction for the subject. If a person is addicted to interaction and communication, his priority is to gain favor with people around him and to develop close relations with his friends and family. People’s negative attitudes towards him, the loss of a friend or family disintegration would cause such a person a deep psychological trauma.

Consequently, psychological dependence heightened by stimuli of the crime situations is responsible for the individual’s subjective perception of conflict. Harm as the consequence of dependence. In a natural environment, we have the opportunity to observe competition within the same species and between different species, which often results in significant harm caused to some of them. Animals protect their home, eat other species, and compete to reproduce and, therefore, causing harm is not typical of humans only, but of other species as well. In dangerous situations, behavioral patterns in nature and society have more similarities than differences. In nature, such reactions are represented by the “struggle, escape behavior, freezing behavior” formula transforming into the “aggression, retreating, waiting” one in the social context. Social aggression can be expressed physically, verbally or substantively. At the same time, not all harm is socially dangerous or criminal.

In his theory of destructiveness, Eric Fromm draws a clear distinction between harm in nature and in society (15) and divides human destructiveness into benign and malignant forms of behavior. Benign destructiveness is motivated by human instincts and assists in the survival of the individual and race, fading as soon as danger disappears. This type of destructiveness corresponds to justifiable self-defense in Criminal Law. Far from being defensive, malignant destructiveness aims to meet personal needs, unrelated to biological survival, by causing harm to others or to oneself.

One of the key features of behavioral addiction is one’s failure to resist an impulse, a drive, or a temptation to perform
an act that is harmful to oneself or to others (17). Harmful consequences of addictive behavior are related to personal (depression, anxiety, ill-health, suicide), interpersonal (divorce, separation), social (poor performance, absenteeism, job loss), financial (debts, asset losses, bankruptcy) and legal consequences (wrongdoing). Causing harm to other people, their property, society and the State in general is a prerequisite to the emergence of legal losses. Consequently, external malignant destructiveness must be manifested to suppress psychological dependence and criminal behavior.

Given their weakened will, the addicted are predisposed to impulsive actions that cause harm to entities protected by criminal law. These entities suffering from criminally liable harm are differentiated according to the type of crime. In case of property crime, they serve as a tool for ensuring the addicted person’s financial security (for instance, game-oriented theft, use of alcohol or drugs under the influence of gambling or chemical dependence). In case of crimes of violence, these entities are an obstacle to the continuation of addictive behavior (for example, a murder aimed at avenging an offense against a family member under the influence of family dependence).

In summary, criminal behavior takes the form of aggressive responses to problematic and conflict situations, being aimed at meeting personal and group needs and implemented, at the addiction level, through the deterioration of other representatives of their species.

Conclusion. Therefore, the following stages represent the association between psychological dependence and criminal behavior: transformation of a need into a dependency → repression of the formed dependency by stimuli of the external situation → perception of the conflict → causing criminally liable harm. This mechanism is consistent with the criminological theory about crimes being the result of mutual interaction between the individual’s peculiar traits and the situation. The above confirms the author’s hypothesis that psychological dependence is a vital link between the criminal’s personality and the crime-prone situation. The nature of this study does not permit to draw any conclusions about causality, yet the research outcomes suggest there is a strong association between psychological dependence and criminal behavior. The findings of this paper can be significant for predicting and preventing criminal behavior and, at the same time, increasingly point to the need for further applied research aimed at verifying the correlation between psychological dependence and the type of crime and also at pinpointing interaction between psychological dependence and factors underlying criminal behavior.

References

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