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# Personality Disorders in Relation to Crime

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## ABSTRACT

Personality disorders, including borderline and antisocial, are mental disorders that influence the thoughts and behaviors of affected individuals. There is currently a lack of studies in the relationship between these individuals and crime rates, though it is often found criminal offenders have said disorders. These disorders can be traced down to neurological and biochemical dimensions, including disruptions in brain function and chemical levels. These disorders can also be developed from childhood abuse or other disruptions in adolescent development. Though all personality disorders are developed similarly, the differences in presentation affect the type of crime committed and specific crime scene behaviors. The purpose of this study is to examine different factors correlating to personality disorders and determine the causation of crime by these personality disorders, if any. These studies can be used to predict crime under the condition of having a personality disorder and narrow down suspects. The relationship between the condition and crime will be explored for both correlation and causation. Future research can be done to predict and halt related crimes committed due to the influence of a personality disorder.

**Keywords:** personality disorder, crime, mental illness, crime scene behaviors, criminal profiling

## Introduction

Criminal psychological profiling analyzes behaviors and classifies potential offender characteristics.<sup>1</sup> Among mental illnesses, personality disorders have high links to crime, especially antisocial personality disorder and borderline personality disorder. Antisocial personality disordered persons are characterized by the disregard of others' emotions and rights, often leading to aggression. Borderline personality disordered persons are characterized by difficulty controlling emotions, often leading to impulsivity. Although the behavioral science unit of the FBI was established in the 1970s, there are still many questions left unanswered or wrongly answered regarding mental disorder behaviors and related crime conduct. Very few original and academically reviewed studies on crime and psychological profiling have been published.<sup>1,2</sup> This includes a lack of information on physiological dimensions that cause personality disorders. This information can be useful for crime prediction and crime scene behaviors. Some suggest the reason for this deficit is because prior to the 1960's, many individuals deemed mentally ill were hospitalized for said illness, i.e., unable to potentially commit a crime, so the rate of crime among these individuals was no higher than non-mentally ill individuals.<sup>3</sup>

This review will explore personality disorders at the neurological and biochemical dimensions as well as adolescent experiences that influence these disorders. After a personality disorder is identified in an individual, crime behaviors, such as level of

substance abuse, type of crime, and specific crime scene behaviors can be examined.

There are many predictors for crime if a personality disorder is declared in an individual, which can be used to prevent further social disorder.

### **Neurological and Biochemical Dimensions**

There is prevalent evidence that emotions that manifest from neurological and biochemical dimensions play a crucial role in daily moral processing. Among adolescence, the occurrence of a personality change is significantly related with traumatic brain injuries.<sup>4</sup> The more severe the injury, the more persistent the personality change.<sup>4</sup> Disturbances in neural tissue, most commonly the limbic system, can lead to permanent changes in the control and expression of behaviors and effective responses.<sup>5</sup> Abnormalities in emotions often manifest themselves through mental instability including impulsivity, fixations, and personality changes.<sup>6</sup> Indirect effects to consider include limited cognitive and motor skills resulting from the injury causing dependency on others. These effects can lead to depression, apathy, and social isolation.<sup>5</sup> Research has been done at this level to predict if there are any specific damages within the brain that cause personality disorders.

Orbitofrontal cortex damage has been associated with poor judgement and abnormal emotional responses, characteristics that resonate highly with personality disorders.<sup>7</sup> Anterior cingulate cortex damage has been associated with difficulty in processing of external and internal emotional stimuli, including lack of empathy and

emotional misunderstanding.<sup>6</sup> Lack of empathy and related issues are most common in antisocial personality disordered individuals; they often do not comprehend nor care about the consequences of their actions. Studies show antisocial personality disorder individuals may have central nervous system damage, resulting in difficulty experiential learning.<sup>6</sup> Frontal lobe damage, which is frequently found in homicide perpetrators, has been associated with the inability to control emotional behaviors as well.<sup>7</sup> These neurophysiological processes can drive personality disorder-diagnosed persons, causing anything from frustration, constant hypervigilance, and/or heightened threat appraisal.<sup>8</sup>

Several chemicals have been studied in relation to behavioral effects. Impulsivity has been linked with low monoamine oxidase (a catalytic enzyme) activity.<sup>6</sup> Low levels of serotonin, a major contributor to feelings of well-being, have been associated with aggressive behavior.<sup>6</sup> Disturbances in certain chemicals found in personality disorder-diagnosed individuals can cause them to see nonthreatening situations as threatening, resulting in according aggressive action.<sup>8</sup> Results from these studies indicate a close relationship between T<sub>3</sub> and T<sub>4</sub>, thyroid hormones that play vital roles in brain development and function, with abuse and antisocial personality characteristics. There is a possibility that these hormones institute the same neurobiological basis.<sup>6,9</sup> This information can be used to predict a personality disorder if there is a quick test that can determine this relationship at a younger age, however, further research needs to be

done in this area. In a study of the neurobiology of female homicide perpetrators, levels of AM cortisol (a steroid hormone that regulates several things in the body with high sensitivity to stress) and DCS (a slope measurement of changes in levels of cortisol) decreased as crime severity increased.<sup>7</sup> In this study neurological conditions, traumatic brain injuries being most predominant, were found in 95% of the female prison inmates that partook in the investigation.<sup>7</sup> These studies display that personality disorders are uncontrollably inherited and can develop at different stages in life.

### **Effects from Disturbances in Adolescence and the Link to Crime Scene Behaviors**

Childhood maltreatment has also been studied in relation to development of a personality disorder. In a study involving males, it was found that experiencing abuse in adolescent years increased the likelihood of committing crime in adulthood.<sup>10</sup> The presence of maltreatment in adolescence is also significantly associated with borderline personality disorder.<sup>10</sup> This stands true for antisocial personality disorder, however these individuals are also more likely to return to custody after being released for a domestic abuse crime.<sup>10</sup>

In a similar study it was found that females that suffer the most childhood sexual abuse are more likely to commit homicide.<sup>7</sup> There is significant association between crime, childhood sexual assault, and traumatic brain injuries, which was discussed in the previous section.<sup>7</sup> A study done in 2017 shows correlation between this and negative effects to brain development during critical periods as well as long-lasting HPA

(hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal, located just above the brain stem) axis dysfunction.<sup>7</sup>

These studies display that the predictor of childhood abuse can be used to prognosticate crime in both males and females (Table 1). Given that crime is related to personality disorders, an indirect correlation can then be made between childhood abuse and development of such disorders.

The effect of deviant peer association in development of antisocial personality disorder mixed with substance abuse has also been connected.<sup>8</sup> A study conducted in 2019 found an elevated risk for development of antisocial personality disorder if an individual has deviant peer association in the presence of substance abuse, especially marijuana.<sup>8</sup> This result could be expected as one growing up in the presence of deviance and misbehavior can be easily influenced by such actions, especially in a crucial time of brain development.

Specific homicide crime scene behaviors in mentally ill offenders vary per crime. In a Finnish sample of homicide offenders with mental disorders, they found that borderline personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder are most common.<sup>3</sup> Over 20% of these individuals, with personality disordered offenders and drug addicts most likely, moved the body or covered it.<sup>3</sup> This is highly suggestive of antisocial personality disordered individuals as their crimes tend to be more preplanned or thought out. A study specific to serial rape offenders found the most central behaviors are indicative of planning and sophistication, which is again suggestive to antisocial

personality disorder.<sup>1</sup> The central themes of rape in this model were premeditation, violent expression and robbery.<sup>1</sup> Theft, a property crime, is highly linked to antisocial personality disorder as discussed in the next section. 71% of personality disordered offenders reported having an argument with the victim prior to the slaying, which is suggestive of borderline personality disorder as these individuals often do crime out of emotion.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1. Common predictors of crime and aggression for males versus females.**

	Childhood maltreatment	Recent domestic abuse	Being under the influence of alcohol	Neurological history (TBI's)
Males		✓		✓
Females	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Having a personality disorder	Borderline P.D.	Antisocial P.D.	References
Males	✓		✓	4, 8, 10
Females	✓	✓		5, 10

✓: Sex has this predictor

### Personality Disorders and Related Crimes

There is a difference in characteristics among individuals with antisocial and borderline personality disorder. Antisocial personality disorder is most identified with the lack of emotional arousal and inability to empathize with the emotions of others.<sup>6</sup> These individuals lack remorse for consequences of hurtful actions, reducing one's ability to conduct themselves properly in a community.<sup>10</sup> Antisocial personality disordered persons also show less fearfulness and concern about punishment, and possess no emotional barriers to violence.<sup>6, 11</sup> These individuals are not only associated with psychopathy, but also narcissistic personality traits including an inflated sense of their importance and lack of empathy for others.<sup>12</sup> On the contrary, borderline



personality disorder is identified with the abundance of emotions. This abundance often leads to impulsivity, including self-damaging behavior and difficulty keeping stable relationships, especially domestic and long-term.<sup>10</sup> Their hyperarousal and impulsivity leads to irritability and outbursts most associated with physical violence.<sup>11</sup> Having borderline personality disorder was assessed as a significant predictor of violence in both sexual and nonsexual crimes in a study of the severity of aggression in sexual crimes.<sup>13</sup>

There is evidence that crimes committed by antisocial versus borderline personality disordered individuals differ. A study on personality clusters showed subjects with antisocial and borderline personality disorders are most commonly related with criminal behavior.<sup>14</sup> However, antisocial personality disordered offenders are more likely to commit property crimes, such as home break-ins or burglary, which usually require planning, while borderline personality disordered offenders are more likely to commit violent and emotional crimes.<sup>11</sup> Antisocial personality disordered persons are more indifferent, therefore get less involved physically or emotionally and prefer property crime, while borderline personality disordered persons rarely commit premeditated crimes do to their impulsivity.<sup>15</sup> This impulsive, emotional crime can include using instant impact weapons like guns, blunt and sharp weapons, kicking, and hitting.<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion

As a legion of studies show, personality disorders and criminal activity and moral deviance are consistently related down to the neurological and biochemical level. Traumatic brain injuries, especially frontal lobe damage, have been linked to development of personality disorders and crime.<sup>6</sup> Negative childhood occurrences including abuse and association with deviant peers also contribute.<sup>10, 14</sup> These factors and personality disorders go hand and hand with substance abuse, and can affect specific crime scene behaviors. The most substantial difference between antisocial and borderline personality disordered individuals' crime scene behaviors is that antisocial personality disordered individuals are more likely to commit well thought out, preplanned property crimes versus borderline personality disordered individuals with more emotionally driven, impulsive, violent crimes.<sup>3</sup>

There are still several clusters of research that need done in the forensic psychology field, most involving the causes of these personality disorders. There are also discrepancies in how significant the effect of antisocial and borderline personality disorders is on crime conduct. More studies on this information can then be taken to further use for prevention of related crimes.

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