

Research article

UDC 376:159.9

doi: 10.46741/2686-9764.2022.57.1.011



## Specifics of Psychological Defense of Persons Serving Sentences in Places of Imprisonment for Crimes against the Person and Correctional and Educational Work with Them

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### Abstract

*Introduction:* the article is devoted to the specifics of psychological defense of convicts who are serving sentences in prison for crimes against the person. Psychological defense helps a person to maintain inner peace, create conditions for self-justification, thereby reducing the influence of social control. *Purpose:* on the basis of the study to determine features of psychological defense of convicts serving imprisonment for the first time and repeatedly for crimes against the person, to give recommendations on correctional and educational work with this category of convicts. *Methods:* theoretical analysis of literature; methods of synthesis and generalization; projective method: test "Drawing a non-existent animal"; method of statistical data processing: the Fisher transformation of the sample correlation coefficient. *Results:* the convicts serving imprisonment for recurrent crimes against the person differ from those serving sentence for the first time by using types of psychological defense, such as denial, displacement and projection. Recidivists try to protect themselves from all the reality surrounding them, cannot open up to natural communication due to constant fear for their emotional peace. They do not want to admit their antisocial actions, which are repressed into the unconscious or denied. With the recurrence of crimes, convicts again resort to these types of psychological defense to feel safe. The revealed features of psychological defense of persons serving sentences for crimes against the person for the first time and repeatedly have supplemented the characteristics of persons in this category and should be taken into account when organizing correctional and educational work with them in places of deprivation of liberty. *Conclusions:* when determining a direction of correctional

and educational work with convicts of this category, it is important to take into account features of their psychological defense, identify whether convicts have overcome selfishness, stubbornness and individualistic attitude towards people, whether they have learned to analyze their actions and admit mistakes. It is crucial to encourage the ability to see positive traits and moral qualities in each person.

**Key words:** places of deprivation of liberty; correctional process; convicted for the first time; convicts serving imprisonment for recurrent crimes; crimes against the person; psychological defense; specifics of psychological defense; correctional and educational work.

#### 5.8.1. General pedagogy, history of pedagogy and education.

**For citation:** Zautorova E. V., Kevlya F. I. Specifics of psychological defense of persons serving sentences in places of imprisonment for crimes against the person and correctional and educational work with them. *Penitentiary Science*, 2022, vol. 16, no. 1 (57), pp. 107–114. doi: 10.46741/2686-9764.2022.57.1.011.

### *Introduction*

In conditions of humanization and improvement of legislation persons serving sentence have expanded rights. Receiving psychological assistance in places of deprivation of liberty is directed on studying and considering individual characteristics of criminals of various categories [7]. Each category of convicts has general and specific psychological and pedagogical characteristics [20]. It is relevant to study personality characteristics of convicts who have committed crimes against the person. This type of crime is a criminal act that encroaches on safety of life, health, honor and dignity, as well as on sexual inviolability of the individual and his/her constitutional rights, human and civil freedoms, interests of minors and the family [6].

Nowadays, statistical data indicate a decrease in the number of registered crimes against the person [10]. At the same time, the issue of execution of punishment in relation to convicts who have committed crimes against the person is critical. Convicted persons serving sentence for crimes of this category, especially repeated offenders, are socially dangerous persons with stable antisocial views, skills and misconduct [12]. They blame other people for their failures in life, justifying and defending themselves, do not repent of the criminal acts committed, etc. [19]. Their notions and ideas are difficult to correct. Convicts of this category react badly to preventive measures and psychological and pedagogical influence. The greatest number of con-

flicts and cases of regime violation is observed precisely among these convicts [18]. In this regard, it is necessary for penitentiary institution employees to constantly monitor their behavior.

Gradual repentance of those convicted of their crimes is crucial for correction of persons of this category. This can be achieved by studying features of their psychological defense, which aims to reduce or minimize experiences that traumatize a person (the mechanisms of psychological defense are denial, suppression, repression, rationalization, reactive education, substitution, sublimation, identification, depersonalization [8]).

The problem of psychological defense in foreign psychology is studied by the researchers, such as A. Adler, G. Glezer, E. Johnson, D. Ikhilevich, W. Reich, A. Freud, S. Freud, C. Jung, etc. S. Freud introduced concepts of “psychological defense”, “protective mechanisms of the psyche” into the psychological thesaurus (work “The Defense Neuropsychoses”, 1894). Then they were transformed, revised, interpreted and modernized by researchers and psychotherapists of different generations [5]. So, A. Freud studied affect, which includes protective mechanisms, such as fear, anxiety, etc. [15].

In Russian psychology F.V. Bassin was the first to formulate the problem of psychological defense, followed by I.Ya. Bereznaya, F.E. Vasilyuk, R.M. Granovskaya, B.D. Karvasarsky, V.K. Myager, V.A. Talashov, etc. In literature the concept of psychological defense is

defined rather inconsistently; at the moment there is no generally accepted classification. F.V. Bassin considers psychological defense as the moment of fruitful expansion, development of the motivational structure of the personality [1]. O.S. Savenko and F.E. Vasilyuk claim that protective mechanisms appear in the process of self-actualization of the individual, in the “situations of impossibility” [2]. R.M. Granovskaya defines psychological defense and its functions as follows: “the action of psychological defense mechanisms is aimed at maintaining internal balance by displacing from consciousness everything that seriously threatens the person’s value system and at the same time his/her inner world” [3; 11].

Psychological defense helps a person to maintain inner quietness, create conditions for self-justification, easing a person of remorse and guilt in the crime committed, thereby reducing the influence of social control [9]. If this justification and this psychological defense are not destroyed, then a convict is unlikely to be able to embark on the path of changing his/her personality, correction. Over-persuasion seems expedient, which is considered as a radical breakdown, restructuring of views and beliefs of a convicted person, replacing them with opposite ones [16].

Erroneous views and beliefs of convicts are very different and may have completely different reasons [4]. In this regard, we conducted a study to identify characteristics of convicts’ psychological defenses.

#### *Organizing research in convicts’ psychological defense.*

The research was multi-staged. At the first stage, the procedure for studying personal files was carried out. The main purpose of this stage was to select subjects and determine two groups (experimental and control). The purpose of the second stage was to identify types of psychological defenses of convicts serving imprisonment for repeated crimes against the person and serving sentences for the first time. At the third stage, the results of the study of 2 groups were compared.

The empirical study was conducted at the Correctional Facility No. 4 of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia in the Vologda Oblast (February–March, 2021). This correc-

tional institution is a special regime colony, where male convicts (especially dangerous recidivists) and persons sentenced to life imprisonment serve their sentences.

The experimental group (hereinafter referred to as the EG) included convicts (30 men) serving imprisonment for recurred crimes against the person. Information about the nature of committed offenses was obtained from personal files of the convicts. The control group (hereinafter – CG) included 30 men serving imprisonment for crimes against the person for the first time. All respondents were 30–45 years old, the average level of education was compulsory.

#### *Analysis of data received due to a “Drawing a non-existent animal” test*

This test was used to identify subconscious personality traits by analyzing the subject’s drawing [13]. The test attracted our attention by the fact that it is intended for practical study of some elements of personal defense. By nature, it refers to projective methods, is not subject to statistical verification or standardization. In this regard, the analysis of drawings was performed similarly to the “Free drawing” test. The analysis results are presented in descriptive forms.

The test is indicative, according to the data composition. Therefore, it cannot be used as the only research method, but only in combination with other methods. Beforehand we applied a method of diagnosing typologies of psychological defense (designed by R. Plutchik, adapted by L.I. Wasserman, O.F. Yeryshev, E.B. Klubova).

#### *Analysis of the data obtained due to the “Drawing a non-existent animal” test*

Based on the data of the diagnostic methodology of typologies of psychological defense of convicts carried out earlier [7], we find out that convicts serving imprisonment for repeated crimes against the person are trying to protect themselves from all the reality surrounding them, cannot open up to natural communication due to constant fear for their emotional calm. They cannot and do not want to give up constant concealment of feelings, drives, and actions that contradict social life norms. The EG convicts refuse to admit their antisocial actions, which are repressed into the unconscious or denied. With the re-

currence of crimes, they again resort to these types of psychological defense, preserving their dignity.

Besides, the CG convicts differ significantly by psychological defense types, such as displacement, compensation and projection. Thus, the hypothesis is confirmed that repeated offenders differ from first-time con-

victed persons by the use of psychological defense types, such as denial, displacement and projection.

To further confirm the findings, psychological defense was assessed by interpreting characteristics of the drawing. Psychological characteristics of the drawings in the EG are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Psychological characteristics of the "Drawing a non-existent animal" test in the experimental group*

Drawing characteristics	Interpretation	Representation of characteristics in the EG convict's drawing, %
Selected upper contour of the shape	Defense against persons in authority, exercising coercion	40
Selected lower contour of the shape	Defense against ridicule, fear of condemnation of the younger	17
Emphasized side contours of the shape	Readiness for self-defense (any)	43
Doubling on the body of the animal itself on the right side	Defense in the process of real activity	3
Doubling on the body of the animal itself on the left side	Protecting thoughts, beliefs from other people	40
Mouth with teeth	Defensive verbal aggression	30
Horns (especially in combination with claws, bristles)	Protection from aggression (defensive and reactive in nature)	27
Tail pointing downwards	Dissatisfaction with oneself, constant criticism of one's actions (as a way of defense)	23

Table 1 shows that self-defense is characteristic of more than one third of convicts serving imprisonment for repeated crimes against the person. In other words, in any worrisome situation they are ready for defensive behavior, using one or another protective mechanism.

An alarm situation can be caused by states of anxiety, threat, external or internal restrictions on the part of any phenomenon or object. Perhaps, due to a long time spent by the EG convicts in places of deprivation of liberty, they constantly feel this nervous situation and are unconsciously ready to battle it. Also, more than one third of the EG convicts are subject to constant protection from a superior person who actually has the opportunity to impose a ban, restrict, and enforce. These may be heads of the detachment, employees and representatives of the administration of the correctional facility.

Along with the data indicated in Table 1, we observe that convicts always protect their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes from other people.

This defense can be implemented through the use of such mechanisms as "denial", i.e. convicts deny existence of another opinion or belief on a certain issue and recognize only their own opinion.

The EG convicts also defend themselves by showing verbal aggression. This can be expressed in the form of shouting, obscene language, rude expressions, insults, etc. This may be caused by the way of life and socio-psychological atmosphere of places of deprivation of liberty. There is also aggression in response to aggression, dictated most often by the conditions of survival in such facilities. Repeat offenders show defense against non-recognition, lack of authority, ridicule; they are not afraid of condemning other people.

Therefore, the convicts of this group are constantly ready for self-defense on any occasion, including against persons in authority and those entitled to prohibit certain actions, as well as protect their thoughts and beliefs from other people. We do not record such a

way of defense as criticism of one's own actions, emotions, etc.

Psychological characteristics of the drawings in the CG are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Psychological characteristics of the "Drawing a non-existent animal" test in the control group*

Drawing characteristics	Interpretation	Representation of characteristics in the EG convict's drawing, %
Selected upper contour of the shape	Defense against persons in authority, exercising coercion	27
Selected lower contour of the shape	Defense against ridicule, fear of condemnation of the younger	7
Emphasized side contours of the shape	Readiness for self-defense (any)	33
Doubling on the body of the animal itself on the right side	Defense in the process of real activity	0
Doubling on the body of the animal itself on the left side	Protecting thoughts, beliefs from other people	3
Mouth with teeth	Defensive verbal aggression	17
Horns (especially in combination with claws, bristles)	Protection from aggression (defensive and reactive in nature)	27
Tail pointing downwards	Dissatisfaction with oneself, constant criticism of one's actions (as a way of defense)	20

Table 2 indicates that more than one third of the CG convicts are characterized by self-defense, constant response to any negative situation. This may be provoked by fear for their lives, physical and moral integrity of convicts serving their first criminal sentence and not adapting to imprisonment conditions. Also in this group, defense is manifested against persons in authority exercising coercion. Those serving imprisonment for crimes against the person for the first time show a defensive response to aggression. Probably, this is a condition for survival and existence in places of deprivation of liberty.

The CG convicts, to a lesser extent than the EG convicts, use means of verbal aggression as a defense when defending their thoughts and beliefs; they are characterized mainly by readiness for self-defense, and protection from aggression is most often defensive and reactive in nature.

We will compare the values obtained during the "Drawing a non-existent animal" test in the EG and the CG using the Fisher transformation [14] (Table 3).

Table 3

*Psychological characteristics of the "Non-existent animal" drawing in the experimental and control groups*

Drawing characteristics	Interpretation	EG %	CG %	Significance of differences
Selected upper contour of the shape	Defense against persons in authority, exercising coercion	40	27	-
Selected lower contour of the shape	Defense against ridicule, fear of condemnation of the younger	17	7	-
Emphasized side contours of the shape	Readiness for self-defense (any)	43	33	-
Doubling on the body of the animal itself on the right side	Defense in the process of real activity	3	0	-
Doubling on the body of the animal itself on the left side	Protecting thoughts, beliefs from other people	40	3	0.01
Mouth with teeth	Defensive verbal aggression	30	17	-
Horns (especially in combination with claws, bristles)	Protection from aggression (defensive and reactive in nature)	27	27	-
Tail pointing downwards	Dissatisfaction with oneself, constant criticism of one's actions (as a way of defense)	23	20	-

As can be seen from Table 3, there are significant differences between experimental and control groups in protecting their thoughts and beliefs from other people. This may be due to the fact that convicts serving imprisonment for recurred crimes against the person are more cautious, since for them this is already a way of existence in this environment. This is due to a long time spent in places of deprivation of liberty, unformed moral and legal consciousness, distorted value orientations, lack of self-criticism, selfishness, etc.

*Results.* Thus, convicts serving sentences for repeated crimes against the person, unlike convicts serving their first sentences for these crimes, are characterized by a more aggressive form of protecting their thoughts and beliefs from other people. Thus, the hypothesis was confirmed that repeat offenders differ from convicts serving their imprisonment for crimes against the person by a wider use of psychological defense, such as denial, displacement and projection.

The revealed features of psychological defenses of convicts serving sentences for crimes against the person for the first time and repeatedly supplemented characteristics of persons in this category and this should be taken into account when organizing correctional and educational work with them in places of deprivation of liberty. It is important to establish how much convicts have overcome the individualistic, egoistic attitude towards other persons, whether a respectful attitude towards a person has been developed. The priority areas are to correct aggressiveness, form skills for managing aggressive emotions and partner communication in persons who have committed violent acts. This work can be carried out in four directions: 1) teaching how to express anger in an acceptable form; 2) teaching of self-regulation and self-control; 3) practicing communication skills; 4) forming positive personality traits.

Among the measures to reduce aggressiveness in male convicts, it is extremely important to introduce a system for monitoring the specifics of their personality transformation and socio-psychological phenomena among convicts in a correctional facility and implement a set of measures of a general preventive and special preventive nature.

#### *Conclusion*

We have analyzed features of psychological defenses of convicts serving sentences for crimes against the person committed for the first time and repeatedly. Psychological defense helps a person to maintain inner quietness, create conditions for self-justification, and if this justification and this psychological defense are not destroyed, then the convicted person will not be able to change and the correction process will be ineffective.

When determining the direction for correctional and educational work with convicts of this category, it is important, first of all, to establish how much they have overcome their individualistic, egoistic attitude towards other persons, whether a respectful attitude towards people has been developed. It is crucial to teach convicts to think more about consequences of their actions, cultivate respect for people, consciously comply with regime requirements, and strive to eradicate such qualities as rudeness, cruelty, indifference to the fate of other people.

Correctional and educational work with convicts sentenced for crimes against the person requires a comprehensive approach and, consequently, high professionalism of the correctional institution staff, as these convicts have a low moral and educational level. A correctional facility solves tasks of forming a system of moral values, harmonizing convicts' inner world, improving their ability to interact in a team and family and tolerant attitude to others.

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*Received May 31, 2021*

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