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Creativity Turns Malevolent: Personality Pathways to Criminal Behavior in Adolescents and Young Adults

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Abstract

This research explored the relationship between Eysenck's personality traits (Psychoticism, Extraversion, Neuroticism), malevolent creativity, and criminal tendencies among adolescents and young adults. Data were collected from 400 adolescents and young adults (200 males, 200 females) aged 16–24 in Lahore, using the EPQ-R, MCBS, and SRDS. The results revealed that Psychoticism was the strongest predictor of criminal tendencies ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$), while malevolent creativity, particularly the "playing tricks" subscale, also emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$). Extraversion showed a small but significant correlation with delinquency ($r = .12$, $p < .05$), while Neuroticism and Lie had significant correlations but weaker effects in regression. The results support Eysenck's PEN model and concepts from Social Information Processing Theory, showing that high psychoticism combined with malevolent creativity increases the risk of criminal actions. These findings highlight the importance of trait-based interventions, especially for youth high in impulsivity and manipulative thinking. Culturally informed policies and psychological assessments are essential for reducing youth crime and understanding its root causes.

Keywords: psychoticism, malevolent creativity, delinquency, adolescents, personality traits, Eysenck PEN model

Introduction

The important developmental stages in a life of person are adolescence and young adulthood, and these stages are determined by psychological, emotional, and behavioral transitions a person goes through. During these stages and transitions, a person experiences several changes and developments, particularly in the formation of identity, autonomy, and is also more influenced by the environment and surroundings. The formation of certain brain areas is still in process, and these areas are immature like, prefrontal cortex, are in charge of impulses and decision-making capabilities. The improper and immature working of these brain areas can cause teenagers and young adults to get involved in risky and impulsive behavior. So, this certain age group is at high risk of criminal and antisocial tendencies, and this calls for necessary research and a deep understanding of fundamental

and rooted psychological traits and cognitions that cause criminal tendencies and antisocial behavior (Arain et al., 2013).

Eysenck personality traits

Eysenck's personality theory was developed by Hans Eysenck (1916-1997). The personality model, also called as PEN model, has a biological basis that focuses on three key personality traits, stated as: Psychoticism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism, constituting as PEN model. In the original theory, he only gave the concept of extraversion and neuroticism, but then later on, Eysenck added psychoticism to his theory as Eysenck realized that it was also a contributing factor to the personality model, thus constructing a BIG three model of personality (Eysenck, 1981).

Eysenck stated that psychoticism has no outward boundaries between psychosis and normalcy. The high score on psychoticism will be expressed as ego-centered, hostile, cold, and creative behavior, while a low score on the P scale will be defined as high empathy, conformity to social norms, and high levels of collaboration and cooperation with others. A critical account regarding psychoticism was presented by Eysenck that it is not similar to clinical psychosis, but under certain conditions stress or genetic malfunction, it can manifest as psychotic disorders (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1976).

Individuals with high levels of extraversion tend to be more active in socializing with others, they are talkative in nature, outgoing, try new experiences, and work better with groups. They also enjoy being the center of attention and generally have a larger friend group. Eysenck proposed a personality model, and extraversion is one of the traits in that model. It explains that people fall within the range of introversion(low extraversion), where people exhibit characteristics like quietness, reserved actions, and thoughtful cognitive patterns, to high extraversion (Eysenck, 1979).

The last dimension in Eysenck's personality model is neuroticism which means emotional instability in people. Individuals who have high scores of neuroticism have high and often experiences of anxiety and stress. They also struggle with mood swings and extreme emotional reactions. They have a negative outlook towards life and always focus on negative and sad perspectives instead of positive ones, and they may also be jealous of others and think they have a better life. On the other hand, individuals scoring low on neuroticism are emotionally resilient and calm. They cope with problems and stressful situations easily and don't pressure themselves. They are also tolerant and act calmly during stressful situations (Eysenck, 1979).

Malevolent Creativity

In the past, creativity was viewed as the generation of original ideas that were unique and helpful. Creativity was always seen as a positive and desirable characteristic that was used for the good of people and society, and was the mark of intelligence in individuals. However, creativity can also be used for negative and harmful goals. This side of creativity that serves its function in anti-social actions is called malevolent creativity, which accounts for the dark side of creativity. This mentions the usage of original and innovative ideas for harm, manipulation, and unfair advantages. In negative creativity, the harm is usually not intended, but in malevolent creativity, the harm is intentional and deliberate (Cropley et al., 2008).

Malevolent creativity is not only used in serious, violent crimes like terrorist attacks, robbery, or murder, but it can also be depicted in normal everyday life as manipulation, lying, tricks, deception, and revenge. A scale was developed to measure these actions in everyday life, called as Malevolent Creativity Behavior Scale MCBS. The scale has three subscales or dimensions that constitute malevolent creativity, named as hurting people, playing tricks, and lying to people. All of this subscale describes original creational tendencies that can be used for harm and gain (Hao et al., 2016).

Literature Review

Numerous studies have been carried out on Eysenck personality theory, malevolent creativity, and their link with crime. These studies are carried out in diverse contexts. The planned research is assisted by former research and theoretical frameworks. To explore these variables, various studies have been established all around the globe to measure Eysenck personality traits, along with malevolent creativity and their effect on criminal tendencies.

Criminal tendencies in adolescents and young adults are a multifaceted issue influenced by various psychological traits and cognitive processes. Among these, Eysenck's personality traits and malevolent creativity are significant predictors of delinquency (Szabó et al., 2022).

Eysenck's personality theory

Eysenck's theory, specifically the dimensions of Psychoticism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism (PEN), offers a significant biosocial framework for understanding criminal behavior. Eysenck's theory presumes that there is a strong biological and genetic basis for personality that interacts with environmental factors to shape behavior, including criminal tendencies (Eysenck, 1987). As stated in the article "Turning now to a substantive account of the genetics of criminality and personality, it may be useful briefly to review the evidence on those aspects of personality (psychoticism, extraversion, neuroticism) that have been found to be related to criminality". This text highlights the core role of Eysenck's personality traits on crime (Gudjonsson, 2016).

The dimension that is persistently presented as the most actively linked to criminal tendencies. People who are characterized by aggression, impulsivity, lack of empathy, and antisocial tendencies are high in psychoticism. These traits contribute directly to behaviors often found in criminal populations, including violent offenses, rule-breaking, and a lack of remorse (Eysenck, 1996). The text clearly states, "Males have higher P scores than women, but female criminals have higher P scores than male criminals (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1976)". Extraverts are often predicted as sociable, impulsive, and sensation-seekers. In relation to crime, the active seeking of excitement can lead to actions that can be risky with no regard for consequences. Extensive research states that extroverts are more likely to be among criminals, especially in adolescents and young adults (Farrington, 1976). Eysenck (1996) asserted that extraverts are less prone to be corrected by classical conditioning, which is important to develop a conscience mind and also helps to learn how to inhibit antisocial impulses. Neuroticism means emotional instability, anxiety, and moodiness. While not directly predictive of crime, neuroticism may increase vulnerability to emotionally driven or reactive offenses, particularly under stress or provocation (Eysenck & Gudjonsson, 1989).

Neurotic individuals may lack the emotional resilience required to manage conflicts or frustrations, leading to maladaptive responses that include aggression or impulsive acts. The influence of neuroticism on criminal behavior is generally stronger in adults than in youth. Individuals who are high in neuroticism are more emotionally reactive experience negative emotions greatly (Eysenck, 1996).

Malevolent creativity

Creativity is known globally as a foundation of human progress and evolution, driving people towards innovation, artistic expression, and problem-solving skills beyond multitudes of land and culture. Yet, a less researched and often considered edgy and controversial or morally ambiguous aspect of creativity is how it has its essence in criminal tendencies. Though creativity is often instinctively perceived as a pragmatic and useful trait, the characteristics we subject to creativity can, in specific situations, be used to gain harmful goals (Cropley et al., 2010).

To understand this link between crime and creativity is to understand that crime, specifically crime that requires resources and novelty, needs a sense of innovation rather than impulsiveness or deviation (Cropley & Cropley, 2013). This particular concept helps us change our focus from classical criminal actions towards those behaviors where criminals were seen using strategy, planning, or creative methods to acquire illegal goals and needs. This can include instances where offenders implement elaborate fraud schemes, strategic hacking operations, or creative ideas to avoid detection; all of these instances require a creatively malevolent mind to plan and execute such crimes (Cropley & Cropley, 2013).

Rationale

Understanding criminal tendencies from a psychological viewpoint is essential for early action and prevention. Eysenck's personality theory proposes that traits like Psychoticism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism can make individuals more likely to engage in harmful behaviors. Malevolent creativity, the ability to think in new ways for destructive purposes, intensifies these traits, especially during teenage years and early adulthood. This research investigates how these factors interact to disclose the psychological origins of destructive actions and provide direction for focused efforts to decrease youth crime.

Objectives

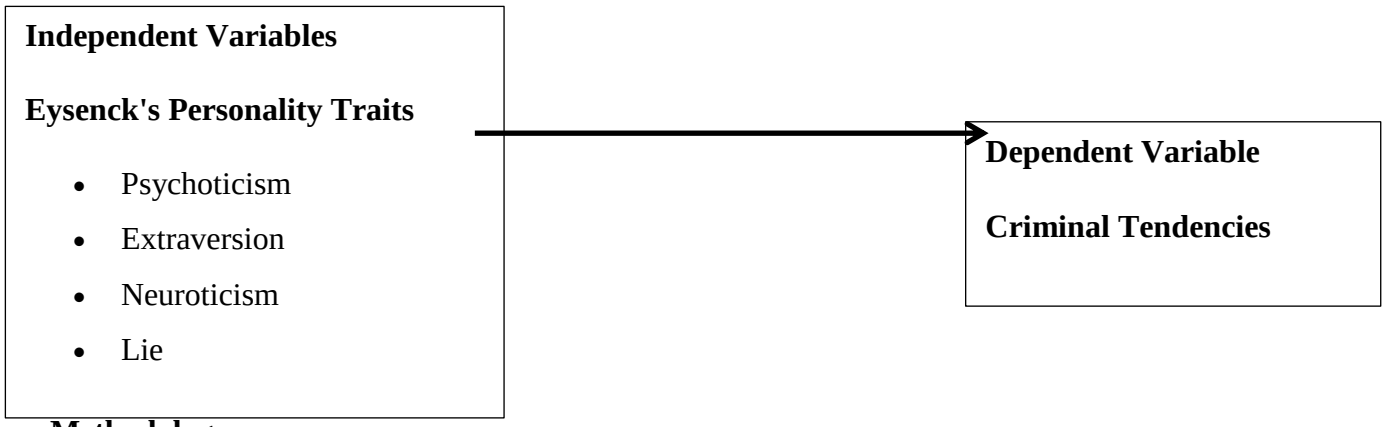
- To analyze the relationship between Eysenck's personality traits and criminal tendencies in adolescents and young adults.
- To investigate the role of malevolent creativity in shaping criminal behaviors.
- To explore the combined influence of Eysenck's personality traits and malevolent creativity on predicting criminal tendencies.

Hypotheses

1. The psychometric properties of Eysenck Personality, Malevolent Creativity, and Self-Reported Delinquency show acceptable internal consistency and reliability.
2. There is a relationship between Eysenck's personality traits (psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism) and criminal tendencies in adolescents and young adults.
3. Malevolent creativity influences the development of criminal behaviors in adolescents and young adults.

4. The integration of Eysenck's personality traits and malevolent creativity significantly predicts criminal tendencies in adolescents and young adults.

Theoretical framework



Methodology

The main objective of this study was to see how certain personality traits and creative thinking styles affect the likelihood of young people getting involved in criminal behavior.

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design was used to examine the relationships between Eysenck's personality traits, malevolent creativity, and criminal tendencies among adolescents and young adults.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

The study recruited 400 participants through simple random sampling. The sample included 200 young adults, 100 females, and 100 males. Similarly, 200 adolescents were also recruited, containing a sample of 100 males and 100 females. Participants were selected from educational institutions from Punjab (GCU Lahore, Star Academy Sargodha, Superior College, Unique Academy, Army Public School, Lahore Women's University), ensuring equal gender representation to analyze gender differences and other relevant variables.

Inclusion Criteria

- Participants aged 16–24 years.
- Individuals residing with their parents or guardians.

Exclusion Criteria

- Participants are unwilling to provide informed consent.
- Younger than 16 years old and older than 24 years.

Assessment measures

Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R)

The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R), developed by Hans J. Eysenck and Sybil B. G. Eysenck in 1985, is a 48-item self-report tool measuring three core personality dimensions: Psychoticism (P; 12 items), assessing aggression, impulsivity, and lack of empathy; Extraversion (E; 12 items), assessing sociability and energy; and Neuroticism (N; 12 items), assessing emotional instability, anxiety, and moodiness. An additional 12-item Lie scale (L) detects socially desirable responding. Items are answered in a Yes/No format, with scores summed per subscale; higher scores indicate stronger trait

expression. Reverse scoring applies to select items. The EPQ-R has demonstrated strong reliability and validity (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985).

Malevolent Creativity Behavior Scale (MCBS)

The Malevolent Creativity Behavior Scale (MCBS), developed by Hao, Tang, Yang, Wang, and Runco (2016), is a 13-item measure assessing three dimensions: hurting people (e.g., "How often do you think about ideas to take revenge when unfairly treated"), lying (e.g., "How often do you fabricate lies to simplify a problem situation"), and playing tricks (e.g., "How often do you have ideas about how to pull pranks on others"). Items are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = always), and total scores reflect overall malevolent creativity potential, with higher scores indicating higher potential. The scale has no reverse-scored items and has shown strong reliability, with internal consistency coefficients above 0.80 (Hao et al., 2016).

Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (SRDS)

The Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (SRDS) by Rochester was developed to assess various delinquent behaviors such as stealing, drug use, sexual misconduct, lying, violence, gambling, police encounters, and disobedience. SRDS consists of 36 positive statements related to these behaviors. The SRDS uses a Yes/No response format. Scoring involves summing the total number of "Yes" responses for each subscale. A higher score indicates higher delinquency. The reported alpha reliability of the SRDS is 0.92 (Rochester Youth Development Study, 1986).

Ethical considerations

While conducting research, ethical considerations were kept in mind.

- Permission was taken by the concerned authorities.
- Assured participants about the confidentiality of personal information as well as their responses.
- The consent forms were taken from the participants.
- Participants had the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

Procedure

For the purpose of the present research, permission to use the scales was sorted out; all scales are available in the free public domain. The permission letter was taken from the concerned department, identifying the researcher and the topic under investigation. Participants were selected through simple random sampling. Participants' consent was sought from the participants after explaining the nature and purpose of the research. All the queries were answered by the researcher. After that's participants were thanked for their cooperation, and statistical analyses were carried out through SPSS 21.

Results

Reliability Analysis

Table 1

Reliabilities of Subscales of Eysenck Personality, Malevolent Creativity, and Self-Reported Delinquency (N = 400).

Measures	*K*	*M*	*SD*	*Range*	*α*
Eysenck Personality	48				

Extraversion	12	7.14	2.72	0-12	.67
Neuroticism	12	7.97	3.10	0-12	.74
Psychoticism	12	5.44	2.25	0-12	.46
Lie	12	5.66	2.12	0-12	.40
Malevolent Creativity	13	36.39	8.30	1-65	.78
Hurting People	6	15.78	4.57	1-30	.69
Lying	4	12.07	3.39	1-20	.70
Playing Tricks	3	8.50	2.82	1-15	.60
Self-Reported Delinquency	36	8.76	6.60	0-36	.88

Note:*k= No of items, M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation, α= Cronbach alpha*

Reliability analysis was conducted for all variables and their subscales. Eysenck Personality had four subscales: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Psychoticism, and Lie. Extraversion (α = .67) and Neuroticism (α = .74) showed acceptable reliability, while Psychoticism (α = .46) and Lie (α = .40) had low reliability may be due to cultural and contextual reasons. Since the EPQ-R was developed in Western settings, some items may not fit well in a Pakistani context. Traits like aggression or dishonesty are socially disapproved, so participants may avoid reporting them honestly, especially younger students who want to look good in front of others. Some items may also be understood differently across cultures or may feel too personal, which can make answers less consistent. These factors suggest that the scales may need cultural adaptation for more accurate results. Since each subscale measures a different trait, no overall reliability was reported.

For Malevolent Creativity, the overall reliability was good (α = .78). Subscales Hurting People (α = .69) and Lying (α = .70) were acceptable, while Playing Tricks (α = .60) was lower, likely because it had fewer items and participants interpreted trick-playing differently across contexts. Unlike Eysenck Personality, Malevolent Creativity has an overall score since its subscales measure related harmful creative thinking. The Self-Reported Delinquency Scale showed high reliability (α = .88), meaning its items were clear and well understood by participants.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Eysenck Personality, Malevolent Creativity, and Self-Reported Delinquency (N = 400).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Extraversion	7.13	2.723	-	.01	.25**	.01	.12*	.12*	.12*	.02
2. Neuroticism	7.33	3.022		-	.00	.12*	.02	.12*	.04	.16**
3. Lie	5.67	2.127			-	.04	.23**	.19**	.18**	.15**
4. Psychoticism	5.44	2.253				-	.24**	.21**	.21**	.35**
5. Hurting People	15.79	4.580					-	.39**	.35**	.23**
6. Lying	12.05	3.391						-	.38**	.22**
7. Playing Tricks	8.50	2.818							-	.34**
8. Self-Reported Delinquency	8.80	6.632								-

Note: M= Mean and SD= Standard Deviation, **p<.01, *p<.05

The correlation analysis showed several significant relationships. Extraversion was positively related to the lie scale (.25**), hurting people (.12*), lying (.12*), and playing tricks (.12*). Neuroticism correlated with psychoticism (.12*), lying (.12*), and selfreported delinquency (.16**). The lie scale was related to hurting people (.23**), lying (.19**), playing tricks (.18**), and selfreported delinquency (.15**). Psychoticism had strong correlations with hurting people (.24**), lying (.21**), playing tricks (.21**), and self-reported delinquency (.35**). Hurting people correlated with lying (.39**), playing tricks (.35**), and selfreported delinquency (.23**). Lying was related to playing tricks (.38**) and delinquency (.22**). Playing tricks itself was significantly related to delinquency (.34**).

Some variables did not show significant relationships. Extraversion had non-significant links with neuroticism (.01), psychoticism (.01), and delinquency (.02), suggesting that sociability and energy do not directly lead to antisocial behavior in this cultural context. Neuroticism showed non-significant relationships with the lie scale (.00), hurting people (.02), and playing tricks (.04), meaning emotional disturbance was expressed inwardly rather than through harmful or dishonest actions. The lie scale had a non-significant relationship with psychoticism (.04), as these scales measure different traits, social desirability versus aggression/impulsiveness, so they do not strongly overlap.

Regression Analysis

Table 3

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Self-Reported Delinquency from Eysenck Personality and Malevolent Creativity (N = 400).

Predictors	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.29***	
Gender		.41***
BirthOrder		.03
Educational Level		.01
Step 2	.02**	
Extraversion		.01
Neuroticism		.04
Psychoticism		.09*
Lie		.11*
Step 3	.02***	
Hurting People		.02
Lying		.00
Playing Tricks		.18***
Total R^2	.35	

**p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001*

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify predictors of delinquency. In Step 1, demographic factors (age, gender, birth order, and education) were entered. Gender (β = .41, p < .001) was a significant predictor, while birth order and education were not. This step explained 29% of variance (ΔR^2 = .29***). In Step 2,

Eysenck's personality traits were added. The lie scale ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) and psychoticism ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$) significantly predicted delinquency, while extraversion and neuroticism were not significant. This step added 2% variance ($\Delta R^2 = .02$**). In Step 3, malevolent creativity subscales were entered. Playing tricks ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$) was a significant predictor, but hurting people and lying were not. This step also added 2% variance ($\Delta R^2 = .02$***).

Overall, 35% of the variance in delinquency was explained by demographics, personality traits, and malevolent creativity. Significant predictors gender, lie scale, psychoticism, and playing tricks, reflect impulsive or socially deviant traits linked to delinquency. Non-significant predictors may depend on cultural context or personal interpretation. The lie scale predicted delinquency as it reflects dishonesty, while malevolent lying did not because it may represent playful or harmless lying rather than real misbehavior.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how Eysenck's personality traits and malevolent creativity are linked to criminal tendencies among adolescents and young adults. The findings provide useful insights into the psychological and cognitive processes behind delinquent behavior and have important implications for theory, intervention, and policy.

The results confirmed that Eysenck's personality traits are related to criminal tendencies. Among these traits, psychoticism had the strongest and most consistent link with delinquency. This means that individuals who are more aggressive, impulsive, and insensitive to punishment are more likely to engage in antisocial acts. These results support Eysenck's theory (1976, 1977) and earlier studies (Smith & Smith, 1977), which describe psychoticism as a key driver of criminal behavior.

Extraversion showed only a weak link with delinquency, suggesting that being outgoing and thrill-seeking alone does not cause crime unless combined with other risky traits. This is in line with Zuckerman's (1994) sensation-seeking theory. Neuroticism had a small but significant association with delinquency, suggesting that emotional instability may contribute to impulsive acts, especially under stress. The Lie scale also predicted delinquency, indicating that people who try to appear socially desirable may also hide manipulative or dishonest behaviors, as suggested by Davies et al. (1998). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported, with psychoticism as the strongest predictor.

The results also supported the third hypothesis. All dimensions of malevolent creativity hurting people, lying, and playing tricks were positively linked with delinquency, but only playing tricks significantly predicted it in regression. This shows that strategic and manipulative behaviors, such as deceiving or tricking others, have the strongest impact on delinquency. These findings support Hao et al. (2016) and Cropley et al. (2008), who emphasized the "dark side of creativity," and align with the Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT) (Gutworth et al., 2018), which explains that harmful creativity can be learned and normalized through social cues.

The integration of personality traits and malevolent creativity significantly improved the prediction of delinquency. The strongest combination was psychoticism (impulsiveness, aggression) with playing tricks (strategic deception). Together, these traits explained more variance in delinquency and showed a synergistic effect. This supports Lee and Dow (2011), who argued that impulsive tendencies combined with harmful creativity make individuals

more successful in antisocial behavior. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was confirmed, showing that personality and cognition together provide a deeper understanding of criminal tendencies.

Conclusion

This research investigated how Eysenck's personality traits and malevolent creativity combine to shape criminal tendencies in adolescents and young adults. The key findings show that individuals with high psychoticism (β = .09) are at increased risk for delinquent behavior due to traits such as impulsivity, aggression, and weak responsiveness to social norms, consistent with Eysenck's (1976) theory. Malevolent creativity also plays a significant role, particularly the "playing tricks" component, which emerged as a unique predictor of delinquency (β = .18), highlighting the role of strategic manipulation in facilitating antisocial behavior.

Theoretically, this research contributes to a growing body of work that integrates personality and cognitive approaches to crime, showing that traits like psychoticism and malevolent creativity together form a stronger psychological framework for understanding criminal behavior. It also supports the validity of the Malevolent Creativity Behavior Scale (MCBS) as a useful tool in assessing harmful cognitive strategies in youth populations. Practically, the study suggests that early interventions should be trait-specific and developmentally informed, especially for youth high in psychoticism and malevolent creativity. Prevention programs should also include components that address harmful creativity, and policies should promote socialization and emotional regulation training.

In closing, this research emphasizes that criminal tendencies often arise from a combination of innate traits like psychoticism and learned cognitive patterns such as malevolent creativity. By addressing these factors early through screening, interventions, and policy adjustments, we may be able to reduce the likelihood of youth delinquency. Overall, this study calls for an integrated and holistic approach to youth crime, one that considers psychological, social, and cognitive dimensions to help build a safer and more supportive environment for at-risk populations.

Limitations

- Data collected only from Punjab limited the generalizability to rural or other cultural contexts where personality traits may differ. This urban focus led to critical variations in personality dynamics present in other areas, particularly in rural areas.
- The use of self-reported questionnaires in participants may not have given completely accurate answers. This could be due to social desirability bias or reluctance to disclose their true behaviors.

Future Research Directions

- Expand to rural and diverse socioeconomic samples by including rural participants to examine different family dynamics and parenting styles.
- Implement mixed-method approaches and conduct semi-structured interviews to explore personality traits and malevolent creativity triggers. This will ensure objectivity.
- Add neurobiological measurements by gathering physiological data, and use fMRI to compare responses of different age groups.
- Improve assessment tools by administering parallel versions of scales to gain objectivity from of participants.

Implications

- This study integrates Eysenck's personality theorywithmalevolent creativity, Results likehigh Psychoticism andhigh Malevolent creativity predicts delinquency (*$\Delta R^2 = .07$, $p < .01$*).
- The strong reliability of theMCBS (*$\alpha = .78$*)supports its usage in forensic psychology,especially in assessment of strategical offending (e.g., fraud, manipulation).
- Correctional facilities can use these scales as a screening tool to identify students and children with high psychoticism and malevolent creativity. For a highly malevolent creativity score, programs can be applied to teach prosocial problem-solving.

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