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ANIMAL ABUSE, ABUSE HISTORY, AND PERSONALITY TRAITS AS PREDICTORS OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR IN ANAMBRA STATE CORRECTIONAL INMATES

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Abstract

The rising rates of criminality in Nigeria have become a significant social challenge, posing threats to human security and societal well-being. This persistent increase suggests that addressing criminal behavior requires more than just enhanced security measures, necessitating an investigation into underlying predictors. This study examined the roles of history of animal abuse, history of personal abuse, and personality traits as predictors of criminality among inmates in correctional centres in Anambra State, Nigeria. Seventy-eight (78) inmates from two correctional centres who met the inclusion criteria participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 25 to 45 years, with a mean age of 35.14 years and a standard deviation of 6.57. Data were collected using the Criminal Behaviour Scale and the Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Short Form (EPQR-S), while histories of animal abuse and personal abuse were assessed as demographic variables. A correlational study design was employed, and multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate the relationships between the variables. The findings revealed that while history of animal abuse showed a positive but statistically non-significant relationship with criminality (β = .30, t (78) = .27, p = .79), history of personal abuse emerged as a significant predictor of criminality (β = .26, t(78) = 2.27, p = .03). Personality traits such as extraversion (β = -.19, t(78) = -1.69, p = .10), neuroticism (β = .06, t(78) = .51, p = .61), and psychoticism (β = .07, t(78) = .67, p = .51) did not significantly predict criminality among the inmates. The study underscores the need for early intervention programs targeting individuals with histories of abuse during childhood or adolescence to mitigate the risk of criminal behavior later in life. These findings provide valuable insights for developing targeted rehabilitation and prevention strategies.

Keywords: History, Animal Abuse, Personality, Criminality, Inmates, Correctional Centres

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Introduction

Criminality and associated activities, such as rape, kidnapping, terrorism, homicide, and armed robbery, are rising at an alarming rate in Nigeria, presenting significant threats to human existence and societal stability (Emekpor et al., 2024). Victims of these crimes often face enduring psychological trauma, emphasizing the pervasive discomfort crime generates within society (Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2010). Despite various measures employed by Nigerian security agencies to curb criminal behavior, the crime rate continues to escalate. The persistent rise in crime suggests that addressing criminality requires more than enhanced security measures, as criminals increasingly adopt sophisticated tactics. Understanding factors contributing to criminal tendencies is crucial for developing timely and effective interventions. This study focuses on exploring the roles of history of animal abuse, history of abuse, and personality traits as predictors of criminal behavior among inmates in correctional centers in Anambra State.

History of animal abuse refers to previous engagement in socially unacceptable behaviors causing unnecessary pain, suffering, or death to animals. It encompasses neglect, torture, abandonment, and other offenses against animals. Animal abuse can be classified into active cruelty, involving deliberate harm such as hitting, stabbing, or burning animals, and passive cruelty, characterized by neglect, such as failing to provide adequate food, water, or veterinary care. These behaviors may indicate deeper psychological issues that could extend to interpersonal violence, forming a potential precursor to criminal activity. History of abuse refers to an individual's exposure to physical, sexual, or psychological maltreatment or neglect. Such experiences often include physical violence, verbal abuse, sexual exploitation, or failure to provide basic needs like nutrition,

medical care, and emotional support (Jenkins, 2019). Abuse transcends socioeconomic and ethnic boundaries, influencing individuals across all levels of society.

Studies suggest that childhood abuse often correlates with maladaptive behaviors, mental health challenges, and intergenerational transmission of violence (Stith et al., 2000). Social learning theory highlights that children model behaviors they observe or experience, potentially normalizing violence as a mode of interaction (Bandura & McClelland, 1977; Franklin & Kercher, 2012). Consequently, exposure to abuse increases the likelihood of perpetrating violence or engaging in criminal acts during adulthood (Valdez et al., 2013). Personality traits are enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that uniquely influence an individual's interactions and adaptations to their environment. According to Eysenck's PEN model, personality traits can be categorized as psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism (Eysenck, 1985).

- Psychoticism involves traits such as aggression, egocentricity, and impulsivity, often associated with antisocial behaviors.
- Extraversion is marked by sociability and sensation-seeking, traits Eysenck hypothesized to be linked with criminal tendencies.
- Neuroticism encompasses traits like anxiety and moodiness, with high scores indicating emotional instability.

These personality dimensions provide a framework for understanding individual differences in susceptibility to criminal behavior. For instance, individuals with high psychoticism may demonstrate impulsive or aggressive tendencies, increasing their likelihood of engaging in criminal acts (Eysenck, 1964).

Statement of the Problem

The exponential increase in criminal activities in Nigeria has created a significant societal challenge. Crimes such as robbery, burglary, and internet scams dominate daily news, highlighting the pressing need for effective interventions. Youths, constituting a significant portion of Nigeria's population, are frequently implicated in these crimes, diverting their energy from national development to illicit activities (Mbachu & Alake, 2016; Okafor et al., 2024). The persistent rise in crime rates underscores the importance of understanding the root causes of criminal behavior. Although previous studies have examined factors like personality and abuse, there is limited research within the Nigerian context on the combined impact of history of animal abuse, history of abuse, and personality traits on criminality. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining these variables among inmates in correctional centers in Anambra State.

Theoretical Framework/ Empirical Review

This study is anchored on social process theory, which posits that criminal behavior is shaped by social interactions and the processes of socialization (Siegel, 2005). The theory suggests that criminal tendencies result from learned behaviors, failure to control criminal predispositions, and societal endorsement of deviant behaviors. Social process theory emphasizes the role of social learning, where individuals adopt behaviors based on observed interactions (Bandura, 1977). For instance, individuals exposed to abuse or animal cruelty may internalize these behaviors, increasing their propensity for violence or criminality. Personality traits further interact with these learned behaviors, influencing an individual’s likelihood of engaging in criminal acts.

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between the study variables and criminality. Vaughn (2009) found a strong association between animal cruelty and subsequent criminal behavior. Similarly, Kellert and Felthous (1985) identified domestic violence and childhood abuse of animals as common precursors to aggression in adulthood. Duncan et al. (2005) reported that

children exposed to abuse or domestic violence were more likely to engage in aggressive or criminal behavior. Widom et al. (2006) further corroborated this finding, noting higher rates of criminal records among individuals with histories of childhood abuse. Personality traits have also been linked to criminal behavior. Turner (2014) found that lower levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness were associated with white-collar crime, while Fuller (2012) observed a relationship between personality traits and general offending. Eysenck's PEN model remains a foundational framework for understanding the interplay between personality and criminal tendencies.

Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical and empirical foundations, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. History of animal abuse will positively and significantly predict criminality among inmates of correctional centers in Anambra State.
2. History of abuse will positively and significantly predict criminality among inmates of correctional centers in Anambra State.
3. Personality traits (psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism) will positively and significantly predict criminality among inmates of correctional centers in Anambra State.

This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the predictors of criminal behavior within the Nigerian context, contributing to the development of targeted interventions that address the root causes of crime. By examining the roles of history of animal abuse, history of abuse, and personality traits, this research seeks to inform policies and programs aimed at reducing criminality and promoting societal stability.

Methods

Study Design

The study utilized a survey approach and adopted a correlational research design to examine the predictive relationship between history of animal abuse, history of abuse, personality traits, and criminal behavior among inmates. The study employed multiple (linear) regression analysis for data interpretation, using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

Participants

The participants comprised seventy-eight (78) inmates drawn from the Awka and Ekwulobia Correctional Centers in Anambra State. Both convicted and awaiting trial inmates were included to ensure an adequate sample size. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria. Their ages ranged from 25 to 45 years, with a mean age of 35.14 and a standard deviation of 6.57. All participants had attained a minimum educational qualification of a B.Sc. degree.

Instruments

Two primary instruments were used for data collection:

1. Criminal Behaviour Scale

   The Criminal Behaviour Scale, developed by Hathaway and McKinley (1967), is a 72-item inventory originally derived from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). For this study, 51 items were utilized, excluding the K Scale, as it is deemed non-essential for research purposes. Sample items include statements like *"I have very few quarrels with members of my family"* and *"My daily life is full of things that are interesting to me."*

   - Reliability: Hathaway and McKinley reported a one-week test-retest reliability coefficient of .80 for the Pd Scale.

- Validity: Ivor (1984) reported a concurrent validity of .57 with the Arrow Dot Test, a subtest of the IES Test.

2. Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Short Form (EPQR-S) The EPQR-S, developed by Eysenck et al. (1985), measures personality traits through four indices: extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and the lie scale. This study utilized three indices: extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. Each index consists of 12 items. Sample items include *"Are you a talkative person?"* and *"Are you rather lively?"*
    - Reliability: Eysenck et al. (1985) reported reliability coefficients for neuroticism (.84 for males, .80 for females), extraversion (.88 for males, .84 for females), and psychoticism (.62 for males, .61 for females).

Demographic Measures

- **History of Animal Abuse**: Measured by assigning a value of 1 for "Yes" and 0 for "No" in response to a question asking participants if they had ever maltreated an animal.
- **History of Abuse**: Measured similarly by assigning 1 for "Yes" and 0 for "No" in response to a question about previous experiences of abuse.

Both items were appended to the questionnaire to capture participants' demographic backgrounds related to animal abuse and personal abuse history.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Inmates awaiting trial or convicted for engaging in criminal activities.
2. Inmates with a history of animal abuse.
3. Inmates with a history of abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual).

4. Inmates willing to participate and who signed an informed consent form.

Procedure

An introductory letter, signed by the Head of the Department of Psychology at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, was presented to the Heads of Operation at the Awka and Ekwulobia Correctional Centers. The purpose of the study was explained in detail, and permission was granted to conduct the research on scheduled dates. On the agreed dates, adequate rapport was established with the participants, and their informed consent was obtained. Questionnaires were administered to inmates who met the inclusion criteria, utilizing purposive sampling. A total of 90 questionnaires were distributed; 83 were returned, but only 78 were properly filled and subsequently coded into SPSS for analysis.

Statistics

The study was a correlational survey aimed at understanding relationships between variables rather than establishing causation. Multiple (linear) regression analysis was employed as the primary statistical tool for examining the predictive relationships between history of animal abuse, history of abuse, personality traits, and criminal behavior. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 25.

Results

Table I: ***summary table of regression coefficients on history of animal abuse, history of abuse and personality as predictors of criminality among inmates of correctional centers in Anambra state***

Variable	**Beta**	***SE***	**B**	***P***
History of animal abuse	.30	1.09	.03	.79
History of abuse	2.32	1.02	.26	.03
Extraversion	-.73	.43	-.19	.10
Neuroticism	.16	.32	.06	.61

Psychoticism	.21	.31	.07	.51

The table above showed a positive but statistically no significant prediction of history of animal abuse on criminality among the inmates of correction centers in Anambra state = β = .03, t =.27, p = .79.

On the contrary, the table showed a positive and statistically significant prediction of history of abuse on criminality among the inmates of correctional centers in Anambra state β = .26, t=2.27, p = 03.

The details of the table also showed: a negative and statistically no significant prediction of extraversion on criminality among the inmates of correctional centers in Anambra state at β = -.19, t =-1.69, p = .10, a positive but statistically no significant prediction of neuroticism on criminality among the inmates of correctional centers in Anambra state at β = .06, t =.51, p = .61, and a positive but statistically no significant prediction of psychoticism on criminality among the inmates of correctional centers in Anambra state at β = .07, t =.67, p = .51.

Discussion

This study investigated the predictive roles of history of animal abuse, history of abuse, and personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) on criminality among inmates of correctional centers in Anambra State. Three hypotheses were postulated and tested using multiple regression analysis. The first hypothesis, which proposed that history of animal abuse would predict criminality, was not supported. This finding contradicts prior studies, such as Vaughn (2009), which found a link between animal cruelty and criminal behavior. The discrepancy may be attributed to differences in cultural contexts, societal norms, and study settings. For example,

cultural perceptions of animal abuse and their implications may vary significantly across regions. Additionally, theoretical frameworks such as the rational choice theory might explain this finding. The theory posits that individuals make calculated decisions to commit crimes based on personal motives, such as greed, anger, or thrill-seeking, rather than factors like past animal abuse.

The second hypothesis, which proposed that history of abuse would positively and significantly predict criminality, was supported. This aligns with studies by Kellert and Felthous (1985), who found that aggressive criminals often have a history of childhood abuse characterized by domestic violence and paternal maltreatment. Similarly, Duncan et al. (2005) reported that boys with conduct problems were more likely to have experienced physical or sexual abuse and domestic violence. Widom et al. (2006) also found a significant correlation between childhood abuse and adult criminal records. These findings emphasize the long-term impact of childhood abuse on an individual's likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior later in life. The third hypothesis, which posited that personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) would predict criminality, was not supported. This finding is consistent with Turner (2014), who found no significant associations between these personality traits and the propensity to commit white-collar crimes. However, the result contrasts with Fuller (2012), who identified conscientiousness and agreeableness as personality factors related to offending. The lack of significance in this study may indicate that the relationship between personality traits and criminal behavior could depend on the specific context of the crime or other mediating variables.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have several implications:

1. Theoretical Implications: The study contributes to the existing literature on the predictors of criminal behavior, particularly highlighting the significant role of childhood abuse in shaping future criminal tendencies.
2. Empirical Implications: It provides empirical evidence that history of abuse is a stronger predictor of criminality than history of animal abuse or personality traits.
3. Practical Implications: The study underscores the need for early identification of individuals exposed to abuse and their enrollment in intervention programs to mitigate the risk of future criminal behavior. Clinicians and correctional centers can use these findings to develop targeted rehabilitation strategies for inmates.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Integration of Clinical Forensic Psychologists in Schools: Educational institutions should engage forensic psychologists to provide psycho-educational programs that address the relationship between childhood abuse and criminal behavior.
2. Inclusion in School Curricula: Schools should incorporate topics addressing childhood abuse, its implications, and prevention into extracurricular programs.
3. Stakeholder Engagement: Policymakers and educators should focus on addressing predictive factors of criminality, particularly childhood abuse, rather than solely emphasizing the consequences of criminal behavior.
4. Early Intervention: Individuals with a history of childhood abuse should be identified early and provided with psychological support to prevent future involvement in criminal activities.

Limitations of the Study

The study relied on self-reported data, which could be influenced by social desirability bias, leading participants to provide responses that portray them in a socially acceptable manner. However, assurances of confidentiality were given, which likely encouraged greater honesty in responses. Additionally, the study's correlational design limits the ability to establish causation between the variables under investigation.

Conclusion

This study examined history of animal abuse, history of abuse, and personality traits as predictors of criminality among inmates of correctional centers in Anambra State. The findings revealed that history of abuse significantly predicted criminal behavior, while history of animal abuse and personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) did not. The results emphasize the profound influence of early abuse on future criminal tendencies, highlighting the need for early intervention programs. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of addressing childhood abuse as a key factor in preventing criminal behavior and promoting societal well-being.

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