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Negative transgression in the context of empathy and anxiety in prisoners: A perpetrators of violence

Abstract

Background: The concept of negative transgression describes behavior as crossing personal limits in destruction against oneself or other people. Theoretically, personality dimensions have been distinguished that may trigger or weaken negative transgression, e.g. empathy and anxiety.

Aims: The goal of this study was to empirically verify the relationship between negative transgression and empathy and fear in the perpetrators of violence against close relatives. Our hypothesis was that negative transgression would be associated with poor empathy, but with a high level of anxiety.

Methods: The examined persons from the group of male prisoners ($N = 50$) were recruited in one of the prisons in Poland. The participants were convicted of domestic violence – or intimate partner violence. Their age ranged from 21 to 50 years.

Results: The results obtained confirm the hypotheses established, showing that prisoners have an increased level of negative transgression and anxiety, and a decreased level of empathy.

Conclusions: This first study shows that more research is needed on negative transgression with different personality dimensions. Also in the process of reclamation of prisoners, it is worth developing empathy and dealing with anxiety. Then the number of negative behaviors in close relationships will decrease.

Keywords: empathy, anxiety, negative transgression, prisoners

BACKGROUND

The definitions of transgression in psychology, especially in the literature published in English, concern violations of legal or social norms. This is the view of renowned psychologists Bandura, Caprara, & Regalia (2001, p. 127), who define transgression as “anti-social behaviours characterised by verbal and non-verbal aggression, violation of social and legal norms or abuse of psychoactive substances”.

Similar opinions were expressed by McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang (2003), who made a theoretical distinction between positive and negative personal transgression and verified its psychological structure empirically. They defined the term as breaching norms concerning other people. However, positive transgression differed from negative transgression in terms of the extent to which another individual’s boundaries were breached: from ordinary constructive criticism all the way to a wilful attempt to harm another individual. Individuals making use of positive personal transgression, as opposed to negative

transgression, were characterised by high levels of empathy and responsibility, as well as kindness and understanding.

The source literature also introduces the term of moral transgression, understood as breaking moral standards applicable in a given society or group, usually accompanied by negative emotions such as shame or guilt. The term was used, among others, in analyses performed by Wojciszke (2005) and Miller, Burgoon, & Hall (2007). The latter team of researchers also distinguished between two types of transgression. Moral transgression refers to violation of legal norms and the well-being of others, for example theft or robbery, which leads to imprisonment, whereas conventional (relational) transgression concerns all behaviours which disturb relations with other people, such as gossiping or teasing.

We can also distinguish relational transgression which affects negative relates to intimate partner. Signs of such an attitude against another person may be, among others, showing disregard, excessive emotional involvement with another person, and violating privacy and

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intimacy (Metts, 1994). Such behaviours are often a result of seeking revenge on the partner for leaving and establishing a personal relationship with another person.

Negative transgression is a term akin to proactive aggression that occurs in all kinds of violent crimes (fights, rape, domestic violence). It can be characterized as planned aggression aimed at achieving a specific goal, e.g. domination. Often associated with psychopathy, social anxiety, and emotional bluntness (Dodge, Cote, 1987; Gordon, Dalton, Kolbert, Kanyongo & Crothers, 2014).

In the context of transgression, we should also consider research by Fromm (1996), who observed in the mid-1950s that each individual attempts, in their own way, to go beyond (positive transgression) fortuitousness in their own life. It can be manifested by getting to know a new reality at work or acquiring new professional competences. It can also manifest itself in your personal life in better and better functioning with your life partner. However, Fromm also observed acts of exceeding one's abilities in a negative context. An example of such a negative transgression is destroying one's life by self-harming, committing suicide, or consumerism. The latter phenomenon manifests itself in such a form that the subject is constantly subjected to pressure from society to purchase more and more new consumer goods. Such a person buys more and more things, various gadgets, consumes more and more of them, which is accompanied only by pleasure, but sometimes also a feeling of emptiness (Ślaski, 2012).

While discussing transgression based on Fromm's concept, we should consider one more aspect. In the process of satisfying the transcendence need, one may go beyond their own abilities, in a negative sense, by harming themselves or others. An individual may reach subsequent stages of destruction in different areas of activity, e.g. violence in a personal life. In this scenario, one destroys different values just for the sake of destruction and experiences satisfaction or pride about it. This type of transcendence, i.e. overcoming higher and higher degrees of destruction may be called negative transgression (Ślaski, 2012).

Negative transgression is discussed in great detail by Koziellecki (1987; 2001), who also describes the psychological functioning of an individual in terms of going beyond one's abilities in a destructive context. The researcher distinguished between different types of transgression, using a person's best interest as the criterion, which makes it possible to divide the transgressions into constructive and destructive. Actions for the benefit of another person or group constitute constructive transgression, for example the discovery of America, whereas actions damaging other people or one's environment constitute destructive transgression, for instance destroying the environment. It is also possible to distinguish self-destructive transgression—focusing negatively only on oneself and one's personality, for example by self-harming or egoism (Koziellecki, 1987). At the same time, the author of the transgressive personality concept

outlined the conditions that determine the occurrence of behaviours aimed at exceeding one's abilities in a positive or negative context. The main determinants of positive transgression were needs, especially the need for individual accomplishments (individualistic need), positive self-esteem, and positive emotions, such as pride or empathy. In the case of negative transgression, however, factors which played an important role were the need to compete, a low-self-esteem, and negative emotions, such as anxiety and guilt (Koziellecki, 2001; Ślaski, 2012). Therefore, it seems reasonable, based on the transgressional personality concept, which is relatively unknown in the literature in English, to verify the functioning of an individual in emotional and negative transgression terms. It seems that a good predictor of occurrence or non-occurrence of negative transgression can be anxiety, as well as empathy and awareness of one's own emotions.

According to Davis (1983), empathy constitutes a response of an individual to other people's experiences, which causes affective and non-affective results in the observer. Empathy is a good determinant of pro-social behaviours and a buffer when it comes to going beyond the norms of social life (negative transgression). It has been proven multiple times that shortage of empathy leads to aggressive and criminal behaviours and to breaking the rules of the interpersonal and social sphere. Among other studies, an overview article by Jolliffe and Farrington (2004) focused on sexual offences and theft. A much earlier study among 14-year-old children indicated that a feeling of guilt and fear of punishment stops them from engaging in negative transgression (cheating, mocking others). However, they are motivated to engage in such behaviours by the need to stand out from their peers, for example at school or while working together (Hoffman, 1975). Similarly, Gini (2006) observed that preadolescent boys exhibit certain deficiencies in their social-cognitive functioning. This functioning is the basis for building empathy and moral feelings, for example shame. If empathy was lacking, the boys examined were able to break the rules of social cohabitation (negative transgression) by using intimidation, social isolation, and gossiping against their peers, which we now call bullying. They also showed emotional indifference and low interest in other people as well as a low level of altruism and empathy (Bartkiewicz, 1996; Węgliński, 1989). Another study also found that adolescents serving time in prisons with heightened psychopathy levels engaged in more moral and social transgression than the control group (Dolan & Fullam, 2010). A similar study dedicated to inmates and their potential to return to crime highlighted the important role of empathy. It showed that low levels of empathy, especially of one of its components—perspective taking—were conducive to making the decision to choose the path leading back to crime (Lauterbach & Hosser, 2007). Similar results were obtained in Polish studies on prisoners. People punished for violence or murder showed lower levels of empathy in terms of personal distress and taking perspective than prisoners convicted of theft (Lewicka & Lisiecka, 2010). Another study concerned

relational aggression (blaming, criticising, harassing, isolating) among students and verification of the role of empathy and social anxiety. The level of relational aggression—a term close to negative transgression—is much lower when it is accompanied by a high level of empathy and low level of social anxiety (Batanowa & Loukas, 2011; Fraczek, 1996; Lewicka, 2010; Lewicka-Zelent, 2012; Lewicka-Zelent & Huczuk, 2016; Loudin, Loukas, & Robinson, 2003). However, it should be remembered that more than 4% of people with intellectual disabilities are in prisons (González Collado, Iglesias Garcia, & Sabin Fernández, 2019). And in previous experimental studies on the perception of emotions by people with Down syndrome, it was shown that they reproduced the expressive emotions worse than the control group, which is the basis for empathy (Kasari, Freeman, & Bass, 2003).

Therefore, on the basis of the personal transgression concept established by Koziński (2001) and the research discussed, we can point out the aspects of an individual's emotional functioning which contribute significantly to the occurrence of negative transgression. This applies, for example, to anxiety which, according to Kepiński (1977), is especially related to anger and despair and serves as the basis for aggression against oneself and others. In addition, research on crime perpetrators, carried out over several years, indicates that anxiety, often unconscious, plays an important role in generating aggression and, consequently, in breaking social norms and committing serious criminal acts (Majchrzyk, 1995; 2008; Ostrowska, 2014; Yochelson & Samenow, 1982). Especially that about 69% of the prison population associated with aggression and violence experienced traumatic stress as a result of emotional, physical or sexual abuse. In these negative experiences, the most common emotions are anxiety, anger, and terror (Sarchiapone, Carli, Cuomo, Marchetti, & Roy, 2009). Anxiety is also a component of borderline disorders that occur in prisoners who use reactive aggression towards their partners. The above-mentioned anxiety related to impulsivity triggers sudden attacks of violence in 70% of the perpetrators of these crimes (Casares-López, González-Menéndez, Torres-Lobo, Secades-Villa, Fernández-Hermida, & Álvarez, 2010).

Based on the above data, empathy may be a buffer against negative transgression. The research mentioned above was dedicated to breaking the boundaries of the interpersonal sphere, for instance by committing theft or by mocking, and it clearly shows the positive effect of empathy on decreasing negative transgression.

This research focuses on only part of the individual transgression concept, i.e. an individual's emotional functioning. Therefore, based on theoretical and empirical analysis, we expect differences in negative transgression levels and in emotional functioning between the test group (violent prisoners—characterised by a high level of anxiety as a trait and as an emotional state, a high level of negative transgression, and a low level of empathy) and the control group. We also expect a positive correlation between negative transgression and emotional state

(anxiety as a trait and anxiety as a state), and a negative correlation between negative transgression and empathy in a group of violent prisoners.

METHODS

Participants

Test participants from the male inmates group ($N = 50$) were recruited at a prison in Poland, where they were being held for the crime of domestic violence (wife or female life partner). Their age ranged from 21 to 50 years, while their sentence was between 8 months and 2 years. However, people from the control group ($N = 48$) were recruited taking into account the following aspects. These people were convicted of non-payment of maintenance, of similar age from 23 to 47 and of the same sex, and the sentence was from 6 months to 2 years.

The subjects were informed about the goals of the study and agreed to it. Over a dozen people in total from the study and control groups refused to participate in the research. Paper-and-pencil tests were conducted individually and anonymously.

Measures

List of Alternative and Negative Behaviours. In order to verify the hypotheses, an appropriate questionnaire was prepared to measure transgressional behaviours, called the List of Alternative and Negative Behaviours—LoAaNb (Ślaski, 2013), in which the scale of negative transgression has been against oneself (three items, e.g. *My aggression towards myself is growing*), against others (five items, e.g. *Making new problems for others gives me pleasure*), and against the environment (four items, e.g. *My ideas on how to destroy different things are nearly limitless*). The LoAaNb questionnaire was created on the basis of Koziński's negative transgressional behaviours concept (2001). This psychological concept talks about going beyond one's abilities by engaging in destructive behaviours towards oneself, others, and the environment. The revised psychological tool contained 12 items, and the answers were given according to a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (*total inadequacy*) to 4 (*absolute accuracy*). The psychometric indicators of the tool on the test sample— $N = 210$, women 50%, aged 19–27 years ($M = 23.92$, $SD = 2.12$), with secondary (60%) and higher (40%) education—were the following: reliability measured by Cronbach's α reached from 0.77 to 0.87, while validity with regard to aggression was from $r = 0.43$ to $r = 0.56$, and absolute stability by the test–retest method on 80 people after 2 weeks was from $r = 0.72$ to $r = 0.82$, $p < 0.01$. In this study, the measured reliability of Cronbach's α was from 0.70 to 0.80. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was also performed, and the value of $\chi^2(51) = 103.61$, $p < 0.001$ turned out to be significant. Other indicators of goodness of fit were as follows: GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) = 0.93, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = 0.94, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = 0.07, and RMR (Root Mean Square Residual) = 0.05.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index. It was decided to use the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) to measure empathy, which consists of four scales measuring different aspects of empathy:

- perspective taking measures the tendency to adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life (item example: *I try to look at the misunderstanding on all sides before deciding what my opinion is*);
- empathic concern assesses the tendency to feel sympathy and concern for suffering people (*People who are worse off arouse in me tenderness and caring*);
- personal distress concerns the tendency to feel sadness and discomfort in response to strong suffering of others (*In difficult situations, I am tense and apprehensive*);
- fantasy measures the tendency to transpose imaginatively into fictitious situations with others (*Quite often I happen to dream and imagine things that can happen to me*).

The internal reliability factor (Cronbach's alpha 0.70–0.78) and test–retest stability (0.61–0.81) values were acceptable (Davis, 1999). The IRI in the translation of Wroclawska and Rowinski (2008) was used in this study. The internal reliability of Cronbach's alpha of individual scales was from 0.67 to 0.78. The theoretical validity calculated with the use of factor analysis (EFA) with oblimin rotation produced a solution with four factors, which explained 41.5% of total variation. The questionnaire contained 22 items, and the answers were given according to a 5-point Likert scale from A (*completely compatible*) to E (*completely incompatible*). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal reliability index ranged from 0.62 to 0.77.

State–Trait Anxiety Inventory. In order to measure anxiety, the State–Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) was used, which measures anxiety understood as a temporary

state of an individual, determined by the situation, as well as anxiety understood as a relatively constant personality trait. The inventory was created by adapting the questionnaire developed by Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene to measure anxiety (1964, as cited in Sosnowski, Wrześniewski, Jaworowska, & Fecenec, 2011). It contains 20 items on a scale, e.g. state anxiety items include *I am tense* and trait anxiety items include *I worry too much over something that really doesn't matter*; answers were given according to a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*). Test reliability reached 0.89–0.94 and absolute stability was 0.79. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal reliability index ranged from 0.81 to 0.87.

RESULTS

The results of the study concerning differences between the participants from the two groups (violent and non-paying maintenance) were fully consistent with our expectations (Table 1). The violent group showed lower levels of perspective taking and empathic concern than did the control group. Moreover, the violent group showed a higher level of anxiety as a trait and as a state than did the control group. In terms of negative transgression, the violent group also scored higher than the control group in terms of transgression against oneself, others, and the environment.

In terms of the prevalence of negative transgression in the violent group, our expectations were only partially met (Table 2). There were only negative correlations between negative transgression against the environment and perspective taking and empathic concern, as well as positive correlations between negative transgression against the environment and anxiety as a state and trait.

Table 1 Differences in levels of empathy, anxiety, and negative transgression in the study and control groups

Name of Scale/Variable	Study group		Control group		<i>t</i> (96)	<i>d</i> Cohen
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
<i>IRI</i>						
Perspective taking	15.54	3.53	17.67	4.04	-2.91*	.56
Empathic concern	15.56	3.65	18.35	5.05	-2.81*	.63
Personal distress	16.23	4.01	16.42	3.32	-0.25	.05
Fantasy	18.87	3.37	18.05	4.24	0.11	.20
<i>STAI</i>						
Anxiety state	47.76	9.22	37.62	6.66	5.57***	.96
Anxiety trait	45.71	7.47	36.35	9.65	4.79***	.96
<i>LoAaNB</i>						
Transgression against oneself	9.09	3.79	4.71	2.99	5.69***	.99
Transgression against others	18.55	3.38	10.62	3.78	9.27***	1.16
Transgression against the environment	4.47	2.11	2.52	1.56	4.71***	.98

* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2 R-Pearson's correlation factors for empathy, anxiety, and negative transgression in the group of prisoners with violence (N = 50)

Name of Scale/Variable	Transgression		
	against oneself	against others	against the environment
<i>IRI</i>			
Perspective taking	-.15	.12	-.38**
Empathic concern	-.11	.19*	-.36**
<i>STAI</i>			
Anxiety state	-.13	.19*	.36**
Anxiety trait	-.12	.21*	.22*

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; one-tailed test

There was also a positive correlation between negative transgression against others and empathic concern and anxiety as a state. In the violent group, our expectations concerning correlations between negative transgression against oneself and empathy, in all its dimensions, as well as anxiety as a trait and as a state, were not met.

DISCUSSION

The present article presents a new concept of negative transgression according to Koziński's (2001), which refers to overcoming successive steps in breaking social norms and crossing the limits of destruction by an individual. The term "negative transgression" was specified by Ślaski (2013), who distinguished among three types: negative transgression against oneself, against others, and against the environment. On the basis of the concept, the author developed a questionnaire to study specific types of negative transgression. Research confirms that certain people, and in this case inmates held for violence towards people they remained in close relationships with, as compared to individuals convicted for non-payment maintenance, use negative transgression in all specified areas.

Research confirms the legitimacy of distinguishing a new psychological dimension – negative transgression. It is characterized, among others, by transgressing social norms, as indicated by Miller et al. (2007), using aggression (Bandura et al., 2001), harming a partner (McCullough et al. 2003), violating privacy and intimacy (Metts, 1994), failure to respect moral principles (Wojciszke, 2005), using nonsensical destruction or self-destruction (Fromm, 1996).

The participants also differed when it came to showing empathy, especially in terms of perspective taking and empathic concern. The results are consistent with earlier studies which showed the role of one of the components of empathy—perspective taking—in decreasing aggression (Lauterbach & Hosser, 2007) and empathic concern (Lewicka & Lisiecka, 2010; Węgliński, 1989).

However, results also showed an ambiguous role of empathic concern, i.e. a tendency to feel sympathy and

compassion for people who are suffering. Violent prisoners exhibited a lower tendency than the control group, but correlation studies indicated a positive correlation between empathic concern and negative transgression against others. Most likely a phenomenon occurred which had been previously observed by Mehrabian and Epstein (1972, who showed that more reactive individuals may also be more empathic. However, activation of defence mechanisms of the ego in behaviours occurring at a specific moment in time may generate a tendency to distance oneself from emotions showed by others or to negate strong emotions experienced by other individuals. This may have happened in our case, as the study participants used violence towards their loved ones, so they could be more reactive—quick to react to external or internal stimuli. They had a problem with controlling their negative behaviour and went beyond social and legal norms. However, in order to justify their behaviour they had to rely on a tendency to disable any feelings towards the victim. This strategy was probably not entirely successful, as the correlation tests showed a correlation between empathic concern and negative transgression against others. It appears that in the face of the suffering of their loved ones, the participants experienced a little bit of sympathy. The mechanism discussed above was confirmed by Sutton, Smith, and Swettenham, (1999) in their research on adolescents, as well as by Gini (2006). The researchers proved that aggressors had a cognitive ability to assess the situation of the persecuted individuals, but they had difficulty with experiencing and expressing emotions. That is why it was easy for them to use verbal abuse towards their victims. This is confirmed by experimental studies that aggressive prisoners have the ability to recognize emotions and take perspective, but show deficits in the affective reaction measured by SCR indicators, which results in a lack of positive behavior towards others. The authors of these studies suggest the biological determinants of these deficits (Seidel, Pfabigan, Keckeis, Wucherer, Jahn, Lamm, & Derntl, 2013). However, other researchers (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011) studying empathy in adolescents who used intimidation and bullying against their victims confirmed the results obtained in our study.

They found that only males who bullied others experienced anxiety and affective empathy, including empathic concern towards the victim, while this was not observed among females. Previously this phenomenon was highlighted by Batson, Fultz, and Schoenrade (1987), who found that if the observer and the observed, at the time of a stressful/conflict situation, show certain psychological similarities, an empathic process is activated in the observer, which involves perspective taking and empathic concern. However, whether an act of physical or mental abuse will occur depends on the behaviour of the observed. In our case, it might have been similar: the observer/prisoner felt empathic concern for the observed/victim of abuse. However, perhaps provocative behaviour of the victim of abuse or, for example, excessive impulsiveness of the perpetrator led to the occurrence of negative transgression against the life partner. This is confirmed by a study by the authors (Martin, Zabala, Del-Monte, Graziani, Aizpurua, Barry, & Ricarte, 2019), which showed that impulsivity plays a significant role in the formation of aggression and criminal acts. Emotional instability, which is one of the symptoms of borderline personality disorder and often occurs in perpetrators of aggressive criminal acts, also plays a significant role in acts of violence (Casares-López, et al., 2010; Ruiz-Hernandez, Garcia-Jimenez, Llor-Esteban, & Godoy-Fernandez, 2015; Værøy, Western, & Andersson, 2016).

It is, however, worth analysing the results obtained, especially the positive correlation between empathic concern and negative transgression against others, from the perspective of attribution processes. It mainly concerns a situation where, for example, one attributes to oneself more virtues than to the observed person, and where the perpetrator explains their negative behaviours by the circumstances of the situation. A similar process may have occurred in our study, namely prisoners attributed to themselves a significant level of empathic concern, at the same time using negative transgression against their life partners. In such a situation, in order to reduce cognitive dissonance the other person/victim needs to be attributed with negative traits, for example a low level of empathy and tolerance. One's negative behaviour can also be self-justified by the circumstances of a specific situation, such as, "I've been under tremendous stress at work and my life partner did not want to see that". This may result from the cycle of violence, in which the phases of remorse, tension and emotional reactivation are constantly intertwined and each behavior of the partner in the tension phase is a good pretext for the outbreak of reactive aggression in the perpetrator of violence (Beck, Anderson, O'Hara, & Benjamin, 2013; Casares-López, et al. 2010). In such situations, there may also be emotional instability resulting from the abuse of psychoactive substances and occurring in more than 30% of aggressive prisoners (Fazel, Bains, & Doll, 2006; Sarchiapone, et al. 2009). Also at the time of committing the crime, the perpetrator of violence could have been under the influence of psychoactive substances (alcohol, drugs), which greatly facilitate the emergence of aggression towards other people.

Moreover, the results obtained, indicating a negative correlation between empathy (perspective taking and empathic concern) and negative transgression against the environment, i.e. inanimate objects, confirm that empathy acts as a buffer. This is consistent with earlier surveys conducted by Vachon, Lynam, and Johnson (2014), who showed that in cases of verbal and physical aggression, both of the abovementioned components of empathy—perspective taking and empathic concern—act as buffers. However, we should remember that experiencing empathy with growing destructive behaviours towards inanimate objects seems rather illusive. We should rather look at the results obtained in the context of aggression defined by Buss and Perry (1992), who distinguished between verbal and physical aggression, as well as emotions such as hostility and anger. According to the researchers, such emotions are most often the source of direct or indirect aggression towards other people or objects. Anger is especially linked to affective excitement and may quickly contribute to the occurrence of destructive behaviours, including negative transgression, against the environment. This fact is also confirmed by studies on anger and rage, which make it difficult to adopt a perspective towards other people, which especially concerns prisoners with psychopathic features, perpetrators of aggressive criminal acts (Seidel, et al., 2013). Impulsiveness plays a similar role to anger in generating negative behaviours, at least as suggested by theoretical data from an overview article written by Jolliffe and Farrington (2004) and empirical research by Martin et al. (2019).

We should also remember that empathy was measured as an inclination which comes to light in nearly all situations encountered by the test participant. In our study this was not necessarily the case, as in the presence of violence towards the life partner empathy did not have to be present in any form at all. Or perhaps it was present, but on a level too low to stop the inmate from engaging in negative behaviours.

The test participants also differed in terms of anxiety experienced as a state and as a trait, which is consistent with the established hypothesis. The results indicate that individuals using negative transgression against others and the environment show an increased level of anxiety as a trait and as a state in comparison to the control group. The results validate earlier studies which found that anxiety or unconscious anxiety is a source of destructive behaviours towards oneself or others, which often lead to criminal acts (Majchrzyk, 1995; Ostrowska, 2014; Yochelson & Samenow, 1982). Similar conclusions were presented in a monograph dedicated to manslaughter, written by Majchrzyk (2008), who empirically distinguished a multitude of motives to take another person's life. He showed that anxiety in crime perpetrators plays the main role in killing another individual. In our research, anxiety as a trait may play a similar role, as this emotional state remains present for long periods of the inmate's life and may often moderate negative transgressive behaviours. This is also confirmed by other research (Kubak & Salekin, 2009) which proved empirically that adolescent criminals

of both sexes show high levels of anxiety, separation anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders. Such anxiety is not very susceptible to changes, even under the influence of special therapeutic programs among junior high school students (Lewicka-Zelent, 2012). Also in the population of adult prisoners, it has been shown that anxiety and depression disorders as well as traumatic stress experienced in childhood play a significant role in the development of proactive aggression towards relatives or strangers (Azevedo Vieira-Coelho, Castelo-Branco, Coelho, & Figueiredo-Braga, 2020; Driessen, Schroeder, Widman, Schonfeld, & Schneider, 2006; Sarchiapone, et al. 2009). Research on perpetrators of domestic violence also shows an increased level of fear and jealousy towards victims of aggression (Loinaz, Ortiz-Tallo, & Ferragut, 2012).

In our research, anxiety as a state is also significant. Its characteristic feature is that it involves a great deal of concern and tension and is a response to a subjectively perceived threat at a given moment. Therefore, in the research discussed, anxiety as a state seems to be determined by the situation in response to a threatening relation with other inmates or with regard to a personal relation with the life partner. It appears that anxiety as a state also plays a similar role in generating negative transgression against the environment. Being in a situation of deprivation of liberty is often frustrating, which is not conducive to revealing empathy and causes in prisoners various negative emotions, including anxiety and fear. Such emotions can be experienced in various ways, for instance by engaging in negative behaviours towards oneself, other inmates, and inanimate objects. This is evidenced by the history of prison riots on record, as all inmate protests started with the destruction of movable and immovable property (Bedyński & Wołowicz, 1989). This is also confirmed research on aggression prisoners, of which some portion (approx. 9-24%) will always react with aggression towards each other and the environment when staying in prison (Arbach-Lucioni, Martinez-Garcia, & Andrés-Pueyo, 2012; Sarchiapone, et al. 2009)

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The presented work introduces the concept of transgressive behaviour of Koziellecki's (1987; 2001), which was created much earlier than similar concepts established by American authors. It indicates the mechanism of the appearance of behaviours that exceed subjective or objective boundaries in a given sphere, most often personal. Transgression can refer to positive and negative behaviours.

An important contribution to the development of science is not only the distinction of a new psychological dimension but also its development and operationalization in the form of a questionnaire. It measures three types of negative transgression: towards oneself, towards others, and towards the environment. It also meets basic psychometric criteria calculated by advanced statistical methods.

The presented study also confirms the significant role of empathy and anxiety in the development of negative behaviors, in this case negative transgression in the framework of Koziellecki's model of psychotransgression (2001).

Nevertheless, one must also remember the limitations of these studies. This is the first study on negative transgression, and it requires further research in clinical and non-clinical groups. This is indicated by the selection of the study group, which was deliberate and therefore not very objective. Other shortcomings of this research were the size of the group, and the age and education of the respondents, which limit the scope of drawing generalized conclusions.

A number of variables, such as the type of personality disorder, alcohol and drug use, impulsivity or intellectual deficits, which could have been important in the formation of negative transgression, were also not controlled. It should also be taken into account that it was a retrospective study, which may be burdened with an error resulting from the passage of time and problems with the memory of the respondents. Collecting data on violence and experiencing anxiety may also be burdened with the error of social approval, because it is difficult to recall experiences that reduce the self-esteem of an individual.

CONCLUSIONS

Research can provide psychologists who work with prisoners as a clinical group with valuable clues. Individuals from this group show a tendency in their behaviour to intentionally grow their personal sphere in a negative manner. Therefore, the aim of the prisoner rehabilitation process should be to encourage such individuals to refocus on crossing their individual boundaries (transgression) positively, without harming their own or other people's health.

Further research should cover the entire model of negative transgressive behaviors according to Koziellecki's (2001) concept, taking into account the mental needs, emotional functioning and self-esteem of the individual.

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