

## A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE OF PRISONERS IN ROMANIAN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

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### Abstract

**Objectives.** The aim of the study is to create a psychological profile of inmates by assessing personality dimensions based on the duration of their sentences, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of incarceration on individuals' psychological aspects.

**Material and methods.** The data used were collected between July 2021 and August 2022. A total of 857 participants were selected from prisons. The data were stored in the EXCEL 2019 program and processed in the SPSS 26.0 statistical program. All data were analyzed at the group level. The instruments used in the study were: the Freiburg Personality Inventory revised form (FPI-R) that contains 12 dimensions and an item from the Omnibus questionnaire (duration of sentence).

**Results.** In order to compare the effect of the duration of incarceration on personality, a statistical ANOVA analysis was performed. The 857 participants were divided into three groups based on the duration of their sentence. According to the results, inmates with a sentence duration of less than 3 years indicated significantly higher levels of life satisfaction and social orientation scales, compared to respondents with a sentence duration over 3 years ( $F(2,844) = 13.460, p = .000$ ). Regarding the dimension of solicitation, inmates with a sentence duration of less than 3 years scored significantly higher than those with a sentence duration over 3 years ( $p = .000$ ).

**Conclusions.** The research results show that support and rehabilitation interventions should take into account the relationship between personality dimensions and the duration of sentence.

**Keywords:** personality, inmates, incarceration, prison.

## Introduction

According to Homel and Thomson (2005), the prison represents one of the most complex social organizations. This place has its own history and specificity, being designed to be a punishment space. The inmates transferred here often have a long history of violence and are brought into a closed environment against their will. A study by Howell (2022) shows that contact with the criminal justice system has significant effects on individual health, with a strong association between imprisonment and poor health.

As the prison environment plays an important role in individual development, it is essential to take into account the personality of the inmates according to the length of their sentence (Friestad and Hansen, 2005). The study aims to create a psychological profile of inmates based on the dimensions of their personality, according to the length of their sentence. The concept of personality is one of the most intensively studied and theorized approaches globally. According to Bergner (2020), personality is defined as a set of durable styles and traits that reflect an individual's uniqueness. For a behavior or emotion to be considered characteristic of personality, it must manifest over an extended period, and if it occurs episodically, it is considered a disposition (McAdams, 2009).

One of the elements frequently addressed in connection with criminality is aggression as a trait or behavior. One of the questionnaires that evaluate aggression as a trait is the Freiburg Questionnaire. Statistics conducted in various countries reveal a worrying increase in violent acts. Leblond and colleagues (2015) conducted statistics on violent acts in the United States, which showed that a rape occurred every 6 minutes, a person became a victim of an attack every minute, a theft occurred every 23 seconds, and a murder occurred every 26 minutes.

A relevant study in the field of inmate personality was conducted by Vize and Williams (2020), which examined the relationship between inmate personality and recidivism. Their research showed that personality traits such as impulsivity, lack of conscientiousness, and neuroticism were associated with a high level of recidivism. Additionally, another study conducted by Goldweber and colleagues (2019) examined the personality traits of inmates and showed that they presented significantly higher levels of narcissism, psychopathy, and machiavellianism compared to the general population. These results have significant implications for the development of rehabilitation and reintegration programs for inmates into society.

The personality of criminals has attracted the attention of researchers and has been studied from multiple perspectives. Recent research has focused on exploring the relationship between personality traits and criminal behavior. A study conducted in Poland (Leszko, Iwanski & Jarzebinska, 2020) found that certain personality traits are associated with specific styles of adaptation to stress among incarcerated individuals.

Another study (Martin et al., 2019) aimed to investigate the relationships between impulsivity, aggression, and recidivism in inmates with or without Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD). The study found that impulsive aggression and attentional impulsivity were only related to recidivism in inmates with ASPD. In addition, psychopathy was associated with recidivism, while impulsivity and aggression were central to recidivism in these individuals.

A systematic review (Tharshini et al., 2021) also explored the link between personality traits and criminal behavior. The authors found that personality traits that contribute to criminal behavior are psychopathy, reduced self-control, and difficult temperament. They suggest that greater attention should be given to personality dimensions as a notable risk factor for criminal behavior.

The results showed that neuroticism predicts emotion-oriented adaptation, while conscientiousness predicts task-oriented adaptation strategies. This information can help in the development of targeted psychological interventions to improve the stress adaptation capacity of inmates.

In light of this findings, it can be appreciated that the study of the personality of inmates is particularly important for understanding criminal behavior and developing appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

### **Objectives**

The objective of the study was to identify the relationships between personality dimensions and the length of time that inmates spend in prison, and to create a profile of the participants based on their personality dimensions.

### **Instruments**

To achieve the objectives, the Revised Freiburg Personality Inventory (FPI-R) (Fahrenberg, Hampel and Selg, 2001) was used, as well as an item about the length of the sentence from an Omnibus questionnaire.

The Revised Freiburg Personality Inventory (FPI-R), created by Fahrenberg, Hampel and Selg (2001), is a validated instrument in the Romanian population by Pitariu and Iliescu (2007), which contains 138 items scored on a 5-point scale. FPI-R evaluates 12 scales: life satisfaction, social orientation, achievement orientation, inhibition, excitability, aggressiveness, solicitation, somatic complaints, health worries, sincerity, extraversion, emotionality. Although the Freiburg Questionnaire is mainly used in health psychology and clinical psychology (Rada et al., 2023), it can also be useful in other areas such as therapy, development, educational psychology, and human resources.

### *Research hypotheses:*

H1: There are significant differences in the personality dimensions of life satisfaction and social orientation between inmates with a sentence length of less than 3 years and inmates with a sentence length greater than 3 years and over 5 years;

H2: The mean responses to the inhibition dimension are higher for inmates with a sentence length greater than 3 years in prison;

H3: There is a significant difference in the solicitation dimension between individuals with a sentence length of less than 3 years and inmates whose sentence length is greater.

### **Procedure**

Within each penitentiary unit, work was done on detention sectors. The regimes for executing custodial sentences are maximum security, closed regime, semi-open regime, and open regime. The application program was designed based on the schedule of each sector. Participants were invited, in each detention section room, to participate voluntarily in the testing sessions.

Registration for the study was based on volunteerism, and before participating, each person signed a consent form. Participants were informed about the possibility of withdrawing from the research at any time without any repercussions on them.

The data was stored in the EXCEL 2019 program and processed in the SPSS 26.0 statistical program.

To compare the impact that the duration of incarceration has on the twelve personality dimensions, one-way between groups ANOVA statistical analysis was applied. Participants were divided into three groups using the criterion of the duration of the sentence (Group 1: 0-3 years; Group 2: 3-5 years; Group 3: over 5 years). The criteria in the Penal Code were considered to determine these three categories based on the severity of the offense: small sentences (traffic offenses, theft, computer fraud, incitement to abuse of office) are up to 3 years, medium sentences (qualified theft, fraud, usurpation of official qualities, bribery, drug trafficking) are between 3 and 5 years in prison, and large sentences (murder, robbery, blackmail, attempted murder, deprivation of liberty, minor trafficking, human trafficking, pimping) are considered any sentence with over 5 years of imprisonment.

To test the hypotheses and research objectives, the following statistical analyses were consecutively applied:

- I. Levene's test - to test the homogeneity of the variance of the tested dimensions;
- II. One-way between groups ANOVA test - to identify significant differences between the means of the three groups;
- III. Scheffe's post-hoc analysis - when a difference between the means was observed, the identification of which groups have this difference was performed.

## Results

Of the subjects, 42% (360) were not visited by friends and 9.8% (84) were not visited by family members. Approximately 80% (690) of the participants are not recorded with a chronic or psychiatric illness, and 22.5% (193) take medication for the respective medical condition. Over 30% (281) of them witnessed arguments between parents or witnessed aggressive behavior between them, and 77.5% (664) reported that their parents did not consume alcohol.

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the study participants.

**Table 1**

*General characteristics of study participants*

	N	%
Residence		
Urban	562	65,5
Rural	295	34,4
Marital status		

	N	%
Married	218	25,4
Married without papers	243	28,4
Divorced	119	13,8
Widowed	37	4,3
Single	230	26,8
Education level		
No education, primary school (four grades)	29	3,4
Secondary school, professionals, apprentices	479	55,9
High school	252	29,4
Post-secondary education, skilled trades	18	2,1
Higher education, postgraduate	79	9,2
Medication consumption		
No	653	76,2
Yes	193	22,5
Don't want to declare	11	1,3
Incarcerated relatives		
No	593	69,2
Yes	256	29,9
Don't want to declare	8	0,9
Family reputation has been affected		
No	408	47,6
Yes	396	46,2
Don't want to declare	53	6,2

The distribution among the three analyzed groups is as follows: 20.4% have a sentence of up to three years, 23.3% have a detention between three and five years, and 53.4% have a sentence of over five years of execution.

**Hypothesis 1:** *There are significant differences at the level of personality dimensions, life satisfaction, and social orientation between prisoners with a sentence duration of less than 3 years and prisoners with a sentence duration greater than 3 years and over 5 years.*

The means, standard deviations, and number of respondents per group are presented in Table 2. The Levene test ( $F(2,850) = 3.406, p = .034$ ) showed that the dimensions of life satisfaction and social orientation  $F(2,844) = 13.460, p = .000$  have statistically significant variance.

**Table 2**

*Mean, standard deviation, and number of respondents by sentence length*

Groups by sentence length	M	SD	N
Gr.1 (0-3 years)	31.28	5.463	175
Gr.2 (3-5 years)	32.24	6.148	200
Gr.3 (>5 years)	30.69	7.022	482
Total	31.17	6.554	857

By using the ANOVA test (Table 3), a statistically significant difference was identified between the means of the groups. The significance value is 0.019 ( $p = .019$ ), which is below 0.05, and therefore there is a statistically significant difference between the three punishments.

**Table 3**

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for life satisfaction, social orientation, and length of sentence*

	df	F	p
Life satisfaction between groups	2	15.647	.000
	850		
Life satisfaction between	2	8.327	.000
	844		

\*Note. N = 857

The table below shows a significant difference between group 1 and group 3, and between group 2 and group 3, in terms of the dimension of life satisfaction.

**Table 4**

*Scheffe's test on the three groups for the life satisfaction dimension*

(I) Groups based on sentence length	(J) Groups based on sentence length	M difference (I-J)	Standard error	p
Gr.1 (0-3 years)	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.08	.179	.887
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	.61*	.153	.000
Gr.2 (3-5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	.08	.179	.887
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	.70*	.145	.000
Gr.3 (>5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-.61*	.153	.000
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.70*	.145	.000

\*0.05

The Scheffe test on the three groups for the social orientation dimension is presented in the table below. There is a difference between group 1 and group 2 and between group 1 and group 3 at the level of social orientation dimension.

**Table 5**

*Scheffe test on the three groups for the social orientation dimension*

(I) Groups based on the length of the sentence	(J) Groups based on the length of the sentence	M difference (I-J)	Standard error	p
Gr.1 (0-3 years)	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.83*	.204	.000
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	-.47*	.175	.024
Gr.2 (3-5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	.83*	.204	.000
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	.35	.167	.105
Gr.3 (>5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	.47*	.175	.024
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.35	.167	.105

**Hypothesis 2.** *The mean of the responses for the inhibition dimension is higher for inmates with a sentence of more than 3 years in prison.*

At the level of the Levene homogeneity of variance test ( $F(2,854) = 2.289, p = .102$ ), no statistically significant difference was identified,  $p = .102$ . The ANOVA test identified a significant difference in the inhibition dimension of the FPI-R questionnaire. The significance value is below 0.05 ( $p = .002$ ).

The Scheffe test identified between which groups there is a statistical difference. Post hoc analysis showed a statistically significant result at the level of group 1 and 2 ( $p = .019$ ) and at the level of group 1 and 3 ( $p = .004$ ). The result in table 6 confirmed hypothesis 2 and showed that there were statistically significant differences in the inhibition dimension of the FPI-R questionnaire among the groups of participants. The other results are shown in the table below.

**Table 6**

*Analysis of variance on the personality dimension of inhibition and duration of punishment*

	(I) Groups based on duration of punishment	(J) Groups based on duration of punishment	M difference (I-J)	Standard error	p
Inhibition	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	.745*	.264	.019
		Gr.3 (>5 years)	.755*	.225	.004
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-.745*	.264	.019



	Gr.3 (>5 years)	.010	.214	.999
Gr.3 (>5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-.755*	.225	.004
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.010	.214	.999

**Hypothesis 3.** *There is a significant difference in the level of the solicitation dimension between individuals with a sentence duration of less than 3 years and inmates whose sentence duration is greater.*

The Levene's homogeneity of variance test showed that there is no difference between groups ( $F(2,850) = .996, p = .370$ ). ANOVA analysis identified a significance value of  $p = .000$ , which is lower than 0.05, and therefore a post hoc analysis was necessary to examine between which of the three groups this difference existed.

As the three groups were not balanced in structure, the Scheffe test was applied, and Table 7 shows a statistically significant difference. A statistically significant difference was observed between group 1 and group 2, as well as between group 3 and group 2 in the solicitation dimension at the  $p = .000$  level. There was no statistically significant difference between group 1 and group 3 ( $p = .339$ ). Thus, hypothesis 3 is confirmed.

**Table 7**

*Analysis of variance on the personality dimension of solicitation and duration of sentence*

	(I) Groups based on sentence duration	(J) Groups based on sentence duration	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	<i>p</i>
Solicitation	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	1.435*	.311	.000
		Gr.3 (>5 years)	.389	.264	.339
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-1.435*	.311	.000
		Gr.3 (>5 years)	-1.045	.254	.000
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-.389	.264	.339
		Gr.2 (3-5 years)	1.045*	.254	.000

\* $p < 0.05$

## Discussions

The research results reveal the complexity of the connections between the duration of the sentence and personality dimensions. The subjects in the analyzed sample, who were in a situation of deprivation of liberty, largely experienced a conflicted family climate, even delinquent, in their family of origin. A problematic history (disorganized family) combined with alcohol abuse in the family of origin, witnessing physical or verbal aggressive episodes, represent predisposing factors for delinquency (Rocheleau, 2015). Several studies (Ille et al., 2004; Roff, 1992; Brook, Whiteman and Finch, 1992; Brook, Whiteman and Finch, 1996) show that childhood aggressiveness is a predictor of adult criminality.

One of the major results is the fact that, in hypothesis 1, a significant difference was identified at the level of personality dimensions of *life satisfaction* and *social orientation*. These results confirm the research conducted by Sroka, Isemann and Walther (2017) on juvenile inmates and thus confirm the formulated hypothesis. Inmates with long-term incarceration periods (over 5 years) are more dissatisfied with their lives, more pessimistic, and have a darker vision of their lives and future compared to those with medium and short sentences, but more socially responsible, altruistic, and friendly towards others. According to Sigler and Robertson's research (2015), inmates with longer periods of incarceration may have lower life satisfaction and less positive social orientation, while inmates with shorter sentences may be more optimistic and socially oriented. Probably, the experience in the prison environment provides them with the informational baggage necessary to be a support for other inmates. Inmates with sentences between 3 and 5 years and with short sentences (up to 3 years) may be dissatisfied with present or past living conditions. In another study, conducted by Hovee and colleagues (2014), it was found that inmates with shorter sentences may have more regrets about their past and missed opportunities, while inmates with longer sentences may have a darker perspective on their lives in general. They believe that they did not have the opportunity to demonstrate what they are capable of and relive past events evaluating what they could have done better. In general, this attitude is optimistic, but given the inmates' criminal past, this process could be an explanation for the development of experience behind bars and for future recidivism.

The results confirm the second hypothesis (*the mean response score for the inhibition dimension is higher for inmates serving sentences longer than 3 years in prison*) and show significant differences in personality dimensions between the group with sentences up to 3 years and the group with sentences over 5 years, and between respondents with sentences between 3 and 5 years and those from the group with sentences over 5 years. This shows that inmates with smaller sentences (up to 5 years) are more satisfied with their lives, have a good time, and are optimistic about their future, unlike offenders with longer sentences. The results highlight a potential difference between inmates with small and large sentences. Age may also influence respondents (Macabo et al., 2020). High scores on the *inhibition* scale correlate with low values on the *life satisfaction* and *achievement orientation* scales, which means that more inhibited individuals have a lower desire to generate personal achievements with lower life satisfaction. According to Huta and Ryan's study (2010), individuals with an achievement orientation (eudaimonic motives) tend to have greater life satisfaction than those with a pleasure orientation (hedonic motives), and this is partly associated with their low level of inhibition. At the same time, according to the studies by Corr (2017) and Kim and Cheon (2018), individuals with high scores on the inhibition scale tend to have more avoidance orientation than approach orientation and greater sensitivity to punishment than reward, which can lead to lower life satisfaction.

No differences were identified between groups in terms of aggressiveness, regardless of the sentence received or the violence of the crime, a result that differs from others (Toch and Tupers, 2007; Einat and Suliman, 2021). It is possible that impulsivity and aggressiveness are a transgenerational trait that underlies both childhood abuse and the manifestation of adult impulsivity traits (Sargentanis et al., 2014), exacerbated by experiences in the prison environment. Despite some positive correlations between sentence and childhood maltreatment (Mandelli et al., 2011), the results of this study indicated null associations between these factors and sentence duration.

The results confirm the third hypothesis (*there is a significant difference in the level of solicitation between individuals with a sentence duration of less than 3 years and inmates whose sentence duration is longer*) and show that the stress experienced by inmates is much higher for those with shorter sentences and does not decrease with the duration of the sentence. There is a statistically significant difference for inmates with a sentence duration between 3 and 5 years compared to the other two groups. Luke and colleagues (2020) identified several factors that were associated with high levels of stress, including a history of childhood abuse, low education level, financial problems, and pre-existing mental health issues. One possible explanation for the results could be that the impact of the prison environment raises the level of insecurity for inmates with shorter sentences, and the long duration they have to spend there overwhelms and increases the stress level for inmates in the group with sentences over 5 years. An argument for this explanation could be the study conducted by Lambert and colleagues (2020), which shows that organizational support is negatively associated with high levels of stress. Respondents who have to serve long sentences face the stress of difficult demands from the prison environment and personal life. Additionally, interactions with correctional staff and health services can help eliminate stress factors and inherent risks in prisons for inmates (Canada et al., 2022).

The psychological tension that characterizes them can lead to symptoms such as lack of energy, stress, exhaustion, or nervousness. Subsequent problems that may arise must be addressed in psychosocial programs in the prison environment. There are studies (Lambert et al., 2018; Lambert et al., 2022; Lambert et al., 2018) that address the concept of life satisfaction from the perspective of employees in the prison environment, but not from the perspective of inmates, and this aspect is a plus of the present research.

## **Conclusions**

According to the study conducted in the Romanian prison environment, it can be observed that inmates with short and long sentences exhibit different behaviors regarding their abilities to relate to other inmates. Inmates with short sentences are characterized by active interaction with others and a more relaxed approach, while inmates with sentences over 5 years are described as withdrawn and shy individuals who prefer solitary activities and avoid interpersonal relationships.

From these findings, it can be deduced that inmates with sentences over 5 years need to be encouraged to develop their social skills and seek interactions with other inmates, in order to avoid uncontrolled behaviors that can lead to social conflicts. Therefore, the use of psychotherapy can be recommended to help develop the inmates' relationship and adaptation skills to life in the prison environment. This research can be considered innovative not only in terms of approaching personality dimensions based on the duration of sentences in the prison environment, but also in combining these concepts to identify the issues of individual adaptation to the prison environment.

However, the study has some limitations, such as the low educational level of the participants, which may influence their understanding of the items and increase the risk of erroneous responses. Despite these limitations, the study represents a starting point for future research in the Romanian prison environment and offers an interesting perspective on addressing the problem of individual adaptation to life in prison.

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