



*Original Contribution*

**PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF ANGER AND AGGRESSION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Risk assessment linked to anger management difficulties is important for clarifying criminal behaviour and reducing aggression. Poor anger management may result in physical and mental ill health of the individual. An assessment interview, psychometric methods and self-monitoring were offered to make psychological evaluation of anger and aggression. 32 murderers and sex offenders and 38 healthy individuals as a control group were investigated. Significant differences in anger expression between both groups by sex and age were found. Anger management difficulties were discussed as significant signs of aggression in criminal behaviour.

**Key words:** risk assessment, anger management, criminal behaviour, aggression.

**INTRODUCTION**

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Canon (1915) stated that the stimuli causing emotions lead to activation of two independent systems in the human body. The first one is the vegetative nervous system that causes a rise in the physiological activity of the organism. The second one is the perceptual system, given that the brain interprets the external events, which leads to the appearance of different emotional states [1]. The reactions "fight or flee" to the emotionally activating events can be connected to the emotional responses to anger or anxiety.

In the 1960s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a special attention is paid to the cognitive mediation of the emotional states and the cognitive estimate of the events becomes a central point of the contemporary theories of the emotions [2, 3, 4].

**FUNCTIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ANGER**

The most prominent figure in the development of anger control is R. Navaco. A central part of his work on anger control involved the

understanding of the functions of anger. According to him, anger serves 6 functions: 1) energising; 2) destructive; 3) expressive; 4) defending; 5) arising; 6) differentiating [5].

Navaco and Welsh [6] developed the notion of anger by including the assessment of the processes of social acquiring. They think that the episodes of provocation can be understood better using the terms of the perceptual mistake.

Anger is a secondary emotion. It can arise as a reaction to other emotions as fear, insecurity, anguish and other tormenting emotions. If someone concentrates on the negative emotion instead of the primary, there is no way for him to deal with that primary emotion. That way he will not cope with the negative emotional condition and will stay stagnated. In this way, the personal development stops and what remains is anger.

**EXPRESSING ANGER**

It is very important to make a distinction between experiencing and expressing anger [7]. Anger is one of the emotions, characterised by high levels of activation and specific cognitive models. Anger is often constructively motivated. People share that the reason for their anger has been the aim to

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assert their authority or to boost their image. The functions of anger in that case can be considered to be the instigation and asserting one's own self.

One of the key difficulties of the people with defiant behaviour is in the selection of an appropriate way of expressing the anger.

### **SEMI-STANDARDIZED INTERVIEW FOR ANGER ESTIMATE**

The client may fill in an anger- measuring questionnaire in the beginning. For instance, that can be The Spielberger test, measuring anger as a personality trait and as a psychological condition [8]. After that, the interview begins with exploration of the reasons that make the client angry. Questions like "What?", "Where", "Why", "With Whom?", "When?" and "How?" may be useful for mapping the anger emotions of the individual.

"What?" It is important to get as many answers of those questions as possible. One way of making the process easier is asking the question "What makes you most angry?" and after that "Which things from the every day life make you angry?" In that way the task of filling in the anger emotions between the two states is made easier. Another method (possibly as complementary) is asking the client to describe what has made him angry in the last month.

"Where?" The client is invited to define where, in which places, he has been angry. For instance, at home, at a bar etc. as well as where is the most frequent place he gets angry at and where is the place he has never been angry.

"Why?" That is maybe the most important part of the estimating process because it helps understanding why the client experiences anger from his own perspective. The following questions are very important. For instance, some clients share that they experience anger when the others do not treat them with the necessary respect. In that case, it is important to clarify what does "necessary respect" mean.

"With whom?" People most often experience anger with the ones that are closest to them. They may as well be certain types of people; for instance, the authoritarian individuals accelerate the appearance of the anger emotions.

"When?" The most important here is to delineate what foretells the anger or to put it in another way, to clarify the rhythm of the anger experience.

"How?" These are groups of questions that help clarify precisely how the client expresses his anger. In that case, questions like "What is the most aggressive thing you have ever done?" and "Which are the usual aggressive acts for you?" are very useful.

After having delineated the full picture of the characteristics for a given individual ways of experiencing anger and anger in its worldly and social conditions, a clarification of the motivation for the behavioural change can be done.

### **METHODS**

Thirty-two criminals and 38 healthy individuals as control group were studied.

Semi-standardised interview for estimate of the experience, expression and control of anger was employed.

A test for estimate of anger as a personality trait and psychological condition was done [8].

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The interview showed that there were significant differences between the criminal group and the control group; most of all in the answers to the questions "Why?" there has been an experience of anger and aggressive behaviour and "How?" they have expressed their anger.

The most common reasons for experience of anger amidst the criminal offenders are: 1) reaction impulsiveness, 2) necessity to express their protest to someone's behaviour, 3) egocentric over- exigency to the others combined with over- engagement of own problems, and 4) all that is simplified by alcohol usage.

In the control group the most common anger- provoking situations are the ones in which the individual experiences 1) authority threatening, 2) necessity to boost his image amidst the others, and 3) interest threat.

### **ANGER EXPRESSION IN BOTH GROUPS**

The criminals obviously due to significant difficulties in the control of anger experience express that emotion most often in the form of physical aggression, which frequently is in the form of explosion reaction without accounting for the possible outcomes.

The individuals from the control group express their anger verbally and/or often resort to social forms of aggressive behaviour such as passive aggressive behaviour, denying etc.

The test for estimate of anger as a personality trait and psychological condition [8] shows that there is a significant difference in the levels of anger, estimated as a personality trait ( $t=3.98$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). In the personality profile of the criminals there is a greater anger pre-disposition, which can be discussed as a pre requisite for their weaker tolerance to frustration as well as difficulties in the process of the experience mostly of anger control.

## CONCLUSION

Clarifying the mechanisms of experiencing, expression and control of anger requires in-depth and in many cases difficult work with the client, which includes semi-standardised interview, apart from the standardised methods.

The criminals differ from the representatives of the main population mostly in the reasons leading up to anger experience and the ways of its expression.

The psychological interventions directed towards behavioural change at potentially dangerous group of individuals, which control their anger difficultly has to be oriented towards reconstruction of their cognitive estimate of the provoking factors and to controlling a wider repertoire of behavioural models and anger expression.

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