AN ATTEMPT TO SUMMARIZE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PORTRAIT OF PERPETRATORS OF ORGANIZED CRIME

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Summary: The summary psychological portrait of organized crime perpetrators includes a synthesized characteristic of their motivation, attitudes and values. It presents the specifics of their self-esteem, mental states and personal defences. The report analyses empirical data of organized crime individuals obtained through the Dark Triad questionnaire. The overall psychological portrait of organized crime perpetrators is oriented towards supporting the operative-investigative, investigative-judicial and penitentiary activities with them.

KEYWORDS: ORGANIZED CRIME, VALUES, MOTIVES, ATTITUDES, MENTAL CONDITIONS, PERSONAL DEFENCE, MACHIAVELLISM, NARCISSISM, PSYCHOPATHY.

1. Introduction

In today's high-tech and global society, organized crime is successfully adapting, effectively and illegally possessing and managing considerable financial and material resources, corrupting many governmental and municipal officials. [7, 8, 5]

The tasks related to scientific and applied psychological research to support the police, investigative and penitentiary activities, which are directly involved in countering and limiting the scope of organized crime, are becoming increasingly relevant and socially important. In this context, an important place is occupied also by the study of personal and psychological specifics of persons from organized crime groups and the creation of a comprehensive, integrated portrait thereof to facilitate the hard and strained work of operative officers, investigating policemen, magistrates and penitentiary employees.

2. Prerequisites And Ways To Solve The Problem

Various attempts have been made and different approaches have been implemented to describe, analyse and interpret the individual-personal characteristics of organized crime persons. [14, 12, 20, 22, 17]

A number of publications [22, 23, 13, 19] emphasize the importance of the group context for the structuring and functioning of organized crime, but its full, consistent and meaningful impact on the offender’s personality is not sufficiently clarified.

Most authors [10, 16, 21, 18] make a functional criminological and sociological characteristic of the organized criminal group. In this presentation of its phenomena, the personality is blurred and disappears in the group, and its psychological specificity is not interpreted. In fact, it functions in a group context that enhances or suppresses some of its specific qualities, characteristics and behavioural features. Undoubtedly, the organized criminal group creates a sense of security, initiates and maintains high claims, self-respect and self-esteem. It increases risk and adventure optimism, increases aggression and cruelty, helps to intensify mercenary and utilitarian motivation, develops loyalty and identification with the other members.

In most criminal-psychological publications [10, 21, 17, 12] on organized crime groups, the personal characteristics of the persons involved therein are reduced to presenting the personal qualities and characteristics of their leader. Most often they are characterized as inventive, ambitious, decisive. The leader of an organized crime group is fast in finding ways in the situation and making decisions in complex situations. Under the guise of benevolence and decency, they often conceal their cruelty, prudence, injustice, vindictiveness. The leaders of an organized crime group are able to influence its members and obey them at will. They seek out and establish socially prestigious contacts with reference persons. This type of criminal leaders try to hold on to their position, maintain their image, displaying refined manners and communication skills in different situations. [10]

We can assume that the analysed leaders express a number of qualities inherent in the people of the organized criminal group and in this sense their personal characteristics are universal. To some extent, this statement may be true, but in the creation of a generalized portrait of the offender of organized crime, some of the personal characteristics will disappear, others will not play a leading role. All this is important in order to direct the police, judicial and prison staff immediately involved with specific offenders more accurate.

Organized crime publications [15, 17, 12, 20] address personal psychological characteristics, but do not refer to an overall portrait of the offender, which includes many interconnected components that influence the unfolding of criminal activity. Particular attention is paid to the motives for participating in various organized crime groups. A priority in this area is to emphasize the role of beneficial incentives, expressed in the pursuit of fast and unscrupulous enrichment, greed, parasitism or hopeless financial condition, due to lack of means of subsistence, multiple debts, the acute need for financial resources due to the need to satisfy alcohol or drug addiction.

An important motivation for the participation in organized criminal groups is the dependence on an influential person from the group associated with the sense of duty, fear of retribution, wish to obtain criminal authority, friendly relations, striving to support a particular group member, common spending of time, shared entertainment, increased sensitivity to risk and adrenaline experiences, infestation with criminal romance.

Some of the members of organized crime groups are motivated by the seeking of self-affirmation, the acquisition of autonomy, proving that they are no worse than others, the emphatic desire for revenge, earlier promises made, the specific obligations of the individual from other influential participants in the group. [15] Studies by individual authors [6, 2, 7, 8] explicitly or implicitly promote the idea that individual psychological and behavioural characteristics typical of traditional crime have more intense and hypertrophied manifestations of organized crime offenders.

Differentiation of personalized roles in organized criminal groups leads to highlighting the personal characteristics of their holders [11, 19, 23, 13].

Despite the peculiarities of their group status, functional roles and commitments, the participants in organized criminal groups have common universal personal features, qualities and characteristics that to a certain degree are typical of them all. In our opinion, based on existing research, conceptual statements, practical observations and numerous publications, the universal, generalized personal features and components inherent in the psychological portrait of the offender of organized crime should be formulated in priority. Once this has been done, passing from the general to the private, we can seriously work to their further specification, with due regard for the role of the group context.

3. A Solution To The Studied Problem

The complete generalized psychological portrait of an organized crime offender should include the following interrelated components:

* The value orientations of the persons of organized criminal groups are mercenary utilitarian. [1] They are dominated by hypertrophied
consumer attitudes that are structured based on nihilistic attitude towards others’ property and the pursuit of luxuriant life and parasitism of a compensatory nature because of experienced shortage, misery and narcissistic trauma. [9]

The mercenary values tendency positively corresponds to the features of narcissism and Machiavellianism in persons of organized criminal groups. [4] Therefore, they tend to overestimate their uniqueness, to disrespect property rights and personal autonomy of others, to combine violence and cruelty with manipulation in order to achieve criminal goals;

* The mercenary motivation of enrichment is actually an expression of the desire for domination, power, control and retribution. It is characterized by elitist attitudes, representing involvement with the elect, for whom criminal activity is a profession and a way of life that they systematically pursue in order to be protected, inaccessible and secure in their actions. The high motivation for material prosperity and well-being masks, and in fact provides, a large space for the realization of great egocentricity, the strong desire to emphasize one’s own uniqueness, superiority and elitist orientation;

* Self-esteem of persons from organized crime groups is compensated and inadequately increased due to their criminal status and activities and the financial resources, property and ownership acquired with their help. Maintaining high self-esteem is a leading and sustainable motive among organized crime participants, actively using the material and financial attributes received from the criminal activity;

* The problematic socialization of offenders from organized crime groups, the specifics of their motivation and self-esteem condition the frequent occurrence of such mental states as high social anxiety, frustration, anger, affectionation. Organized crime representatives are in a compensatory vigorous search for relaxation, emotional excitement and adrenaline experiences, both in the high risks of criminal activity and in the violent-sadistic behaviour towards their victims.

* Organized crime persons apply a number of psychological protections typical of them in their criminal activities and interactions. They do not subordinate or retain their negative emotions, but rather easily direct them to the people with a lower social status around them. Representatives of organized crime groups quickly shift, transform and rationalise their negative experiences. They are able to quickly reduce their own guilt and pass it on to the victim, the situation and the law enforcement system. Offenders of organized crime groups strongly reject any attempt to identify themselves as a criminal.

* Our research [4] on the personal features of convicted organized crime prisoners in Sofia prison showed that in conditions of isolation and external control, their high narcissism and psychopathy (disregard for existing legal and moral standards) manifest in indirect and conspiratorial forms. They disguise and express themselves through their inherent high Machiavellianism representing their tendency to manipulate other people and treat them primarily as a means to achieve their own goals.

4. Results And Discussion

Mercenary-utilitarian value orientation of offenders of organized crime determines their greed, covetousness and mercantilism which materialize in their destructive attributes to property of others and sustainable antisocial desire for its seizure and possession. [3] These personal features and attitudes express the outer and peripheral layers of the value orientations of the analysed group of offenders. In its deeper and central layer, the basic values of superiority, uniqueness and elitism can be identified. These are protected and poorly reflected value constructs are the result of the compensation for the difficulties, deficits and traumas of the sensitive periods of socialization of persons in organized crime groups. [9]

Mercenary-utilitarian value orientation of offenders of organized crime is related to the entire spectrum of mercenary motivation whose presence is found in intensive user-consumer attitudes, the underlined striving to ensure luxury, material prestige and in the rigid fixation on the external attributes of material status and prosperity. All these tendencies are the external projection of the motivation for self-assertion, domination, control and achievement of retribution. The specified types of motivation are based on the final results achieved. However, in the organized crime groups there is also a game type of motivation, where the offender is focused primarily on the very process of the criminal activity and the risks and dangers causing adrenaline experiences involved therein.

Organized crime perpetrators’ self-esteem is sustainably maintained as being inadequately heightened to offset inferiority experiences, personal insecurity and social anxiety. In reality, this is achieved by actively engaging in criminal actions, risky adventures, by identifying with the group, by demonstrating their own pretentiousness and by successfully coping with various difficulties. The personal specifics of persons from organized crime are generalized, but more flexible and cognitively complex than traditional criminal offenders. They are structured and function on the basis of a positive self-image, serious group support and inadequate heroization of this type of offenders in the criminal world as well as in society and the media.

The psychological protections of individuals from organized crime reflect their philosophy about their prestigious business activities, their significant public role, and their presence in the community as respectable citizens.

Representatives of organized crime in the course of their criminal activity develop effective coping strategies, transformation of their negative emotional and guilty experiences into positive, affected and ensuring their internal comfort. Thus, they contribute to the stabilization of self-esteem and the successful unfolding of criminal motivation and the exculpation defences of organized crime representatives.

Organized crime group persons possess high Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy. At their communication with police, court, and prison officials, they tend to conceal and disguise these personal specifics. Then Machiavellianism comes to the fore, through which narcissism and psychopathy receive mediated and indirect explication. [4] Thus, offenders of organized crime realize some more socially acceptable behaviours, allowing them to secretly and consistently perform their criminal conceptions in penitentiary facilities as well.

5. Conclusion

Mercenary and utilitarian values representing the personal significance through the possession of other people’s property and hypertonphied consumption are leading among organized crime persons. Personal significance is embodied in the experiences of utilitarianism and superiority, which fully function as the elitist attitudes characteristic of organized crime groups.

The utilitarian-mercantile motives for ownership, possession and parasitic consumption in their real psychic nature express the desire for self-assertion, which we identify in the desires for ruling, domination, control and influence of participants in organized criminal groups.

Even in cases of retribution, which we consider to be a specific asocial form of self-assertion, there are ruling intentions and the exercise of control and influence.

Self-realization motives are another important part of utilitarian-mercantile motivation. They, more than the motives for self-affirmation, are fixed on the criminal process itself. An essential part of them are game motives, thanks to which we observe risky adventures, ingenious and heuristic solutions in criminal activity and the enjoyment thereof.

The self-esteem of the organized crime groups representatives is compensatory inflated and its maintenance is a kind of self-motivation, closely linked to criminal activity.

Inadequately high self-esteem determines pretentiousness, high self-respect, positive self-image, demonstration of well-being and prosperity. In most cases, it is based on engaging in long-lasting and successful criminal activity, identifying with a prestigious
community and group and receiving protection, approval, support and solidarity therefrom.
Representatives of organized crime are both able to relax their negative emotional states and successfully transforming them into emotional and adrenaline experiences.
The mental protections of offenders from organized crime groups are cognitively complex, plastic and ensuring their successful exculpation. They function through the mechanisms of rationalization, projection, substitution and negation.
The mental defences of persons from organized crime groups guarantee their positive self-perception, keeping distance from the identification with the criminal role, and their legitimate social presentation in society.
The offenders of organized crime are characterized by high scores on the scale of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy. In the event of difficulties and dangers in their criminal activity arising from their specific interactions with police, judicial and prison system they tend to disguise their high manifestations of narcissism and psychopathy behind their Machiavellianism.
The uniqueness, superiority and elitism of organized crime representatives support their high motivational standards for self-affirmation and self-realization. They are also the basis of their increased self-esteem, which stimulates aggressiveness, adrenaline experiences and successful relaxation in the course of the organized criminal activity realization.
Mental protections, with their orientation, way of functioning and flexibility, preserve the asocial values, motivation and high self-esteem. Thus, they contribute to the sustainable reproduction of criminal activity that is typical of participants in different types of organized crime groups.
The uniqueness, desire for superiority, elitism, the motives for self-affirmation and self-realization, inadequately inflated self-esteem, aggression-adrenaline experiences, flexible adaptive and exculpatory defences directly correspond, nurture and receive expression in Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy in organized crime offenders.
The proposed generalized psychological portrait of organized crime offenders is not just a theoretical abstraction, it is a synthesized conceptual model, reached through the analysis of numerous publications, empirical studies and practical observations. In this sense, it can be widely used in the development of various methodological aids and didactic forms, directly oriented to support the operative-investigative, investigative-judicial and penitentiary practice with representatives of organized crime.

6. Literature
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