

Exploring Guilt and Shame among Violent Criminals

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore Shame and Guilt among Violent Criminals. The main objective was to determine whether criminals feel shame? Another objective was to assess whether old criminals feel less shame? First, the profile of violent criminals was made who were currently incarcerated. The profile included age, crime, marital status, education, occupation, victim, crime occurrence (1st time, 2nd time) and circumstances of the crime. Semi-structured interview design was used to assess moral emotions. Self made questionnaire was developed for this purpose. A sample of 10 criminals was taken from District Jail Kotlakhpat Lahore. Interview was conducted with criminals individually. Content analysis of the data was carried out. Frequencies and percentages of the data were obtained. For further analysis data from 20 policemen and 10 lawyers was also taken, to determine if they noticed feelings of shame and guilt among criminals. Another self made questionnaire was developed. Analysis was carried out through Spss (16.5). Frequencies and percentages of the data were obtained. The finding of the results showed that criminals had feelings of guilt as well as shame, whether they were first time offenders or re-offenders. Furthermore, the perception of policemen and lawyers was different. According to them, criminals had no feelings of guilt and shame. The findings of this work have important implications for Researchers who should also study various aspects of criminal's behavior. It is also important for Policemen and Lawyers that they should behave with criminals generously as they are also human being and have feelings. In addition, it is important for our Government who must take some serious step for reducing crime rates. Above all, the research is important for our society that people should not negatively labelize to criminals because criminals are also human being.

Keywords: Guilt; Shame; Violent; Healthy Guilt; Criminals

Introduction

The present study was conducted to Explore Guilt and Shame among Violent Criminals. The chapter focuses on moral emotions. Moral emotions represent a key element of human moral apparatus influencing the link between moral standards and moral behavior. It also reviews current theory on researches on moral emotions. The researcher first focuses on a triad of negatively valence self-conscious emotions guilt and its types, shame and its types and guilt, shame vs. embarrassment. Then, review current thinking on the distinction between shame and guilt, guilt and shame are not morally equal. Finally, discuss social psychological theories on criminal behavior.

Guilt

Guilt can be described as “a bothered conscience” or “a feeling of culpability for offenses.” A person feels guilty when he feels responsible for an action [1]. People consider that guilty feelings are negative emotions feelings of embarrassment, blame and responsibility for negative circumstances that or someone else faces. The feelings of guilt are powerful when a person feels responsible condemned and deserving of punishment. It can make a person's ill, depressed and unable to relate to people. Broadly it can be said that when person acts against the moral values of society this emotional state is called guilt. Individuals feel guilt by recognizing the moral values of a society. So it is differentiated from fear of punishment from external source. Guilt is considered to be self-administrated punishment. Guilt feelings in its normal expression are a feeling of shame in proportion to actual violations of responsibility or ethical codes. Pathological guilt is highly exaggerated reaction. Guilt is an emotion of self-blame that can arise in response to emotions of failure and social blunders [2].

Healthy guilt

Healthy guilt is the feeling that occurs when the person has actually done something wrong such as deliberately harming someone. This is

an essential feeling that results from having developed a conscience which is concerned with highest good and the highest good of all. People who never developed a conscience and feel no guilt or remorse over harming others are called sociopaths. These people have no loving adult self and can wreak havoc stealing, raping, and killing without ever feeling badly about it [2].

Shame

Shame is variously an emotion, cognition, state, or condition. The roots of the word shame are thought to derive from an older word meaning “to cover”; as such covering oneself, literally or figuratively is a natural expression of shame [3]. Shame is an emotion that is closely related to guilt. Shame can be defined as “a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety.” Others have distinguished between the two by indicating that “We feel guilty for what we do. We feel shame for what we are.” Shame is often a much stronger and more profound emotion than guilt. Shame is when an individual feels disappointed about something about his basic nature. The following is a list of common shame-driven behaviors.

Original shame

It is born in us as a neural or biological affect and shame has a link to joy and pleasure so that at most vulnerable to shame when something interferes with the stimulus of an ongoing feeling of pleasure,

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excitement or joy. In this situation, the shame response triggers very easily. Children understand words long before they can speak themselves. If the infant was never helped to understand the meaning of his or her needs by parental empathic and verbal communication then, as an adult, the child might never achieve a sense of where he or she ends emotionally and where the rest of the world starts. It is very easy in early infancy to internalize all shame. The infant may feel everything is caused by him or herself and understand the concept of "outside myself".

Theoretical Background

Social learning theory

Social learning theory is more generally associated with the American psychologist Bandura who contends that much of human behavior is initially acquired by watching others, who are called models. Therefore explanation for crime will be found via the behavior modeled within families, by peer groups, on television and so on. Once learned behavior may be reinforced or punished by its consequences. People who observe aggressive acts not only imitate the observed behavior but also become generally more hostile [4].

There are a number of theories regarding how social learning affects criminal behavior. One of the social learning theories related to criminal behavior is criminal behavior theory. This means that human actions are developed through learning experiences and intimate relationships. People learn behavior patterns or change their behavior based on the reaction which they receives from close ones. Criminals learn how to become a criminal by either watching others or being taught how to commit crimes. Gangs and peers show members and friends how to steal, rob, sell and use drugs, kill and commit other types of crimes.

In a study, they structured the guilt and shame reactions were investigated in three cultural groups (Peru, Hungary, and Belgium) using two newly constructed scenario-based inventories. Results show that it is possible to distinguish between a structure of guilt and shame reactions based on person variation and a structure based on situation variation. Moreover, both the person-based and the situation-based structures of shame and guilt are very similar across the three cultural groups, whereas within cultural groups, the two structures are quite different. The dimensions guilt versus shame and interpersonal versus intrapersonal orientation spanned the situation-based structure, whereas the dimensions control versus lack of control and appraisals versus subjective experiences and action tendencies spanned the person-based structure.

Investigations examined whether the antecedents and facial expressions of embarrassment, shame and guilt are distinct.

In Study 1, participants wrote down events that had caused them to feel embarrassment, shame and guilt. Coding of these events revealed that embarrassment was associated with transgressions of conventions that govern public interactions, shame with the failure to meet important personal standards, and guilt with actions that harm others or violate duties.

Study 2 determined whether these three emotions are distinct in another domain of emotion namely, facial expression. Observers were presented with slides of 14 different facial expressions, including those of embarrassment, shame and candidates of guilt (self-contempt, sympathy, and pain). Observers accurately identified the expressions of embarrassment and shame but did not reliably label any expression as guide.

Weiss [5] had focused on the positive consequences of guilt as opposed to shame. The study investigated the relationship between interpersonal guilt related to the fear of harming others and various measures of psychological distress and symptoms. The interpersonal guilt questionnaire, the guilt inventory, the test of self conscious effect, the brief symptom inventory, the beck depression inventory, cooper-smith self esteem inventory were administered to 100 college students. The results suggested that interpersonal guilt was elevated and linked to pathogenic beliefs and associated with psychological problems. It was also indicated that there was a down side to guilt.

Rationale

The present research focuses on the moral emotions regarding guilt and shame among violent criminals. The study develops through personal experiences and on the basis of previous researches. The researcher feels that there is a great need to document the criminals' behavior in Pakistan as there is very little descriptive information in this area. This study aims to draw a profile of male violent criminals and to explore the feelings of guilt and shame among them. To know the various reasons of criminals for committing their crime. It is also an attempt to investigate the old criminal's behavior and new criminal's behavior towards crime. Do the criminals own feeling differs from others? Do the perception of police officers, lawyers similar with criminals?

Objectives

1. To assess the criminal's feelings of pre-countenance regarding their crime.
2. To assess the old and new criminal's behavior.
3. To assess the perception of policemen and lawyers.

Research Question

1. Do criminals have feelings of guilt or shame?
2. Do Old criminals feel less shame?

Materials and Methods

Sample

The sample comprises of 10 criminals (N=10) that was taken from District Jail Kotlakhpat, Lahore. The responses from 20 policemen and 10 lawyers were also taken.

Measures

The present study was conducted to measure the guilt and shame among violent criminals. Guilt involves feelings of tension, remorse, and regret, but does not affect one's core identity. Shame is associated with the desire to undo aspects of the self, whereas guilt is reported to involve the desire to undo aspects of behavior.

Study 1 was based on exploratory interviews and item generation. A questionnaire was developed to investigate the profile of criminals.

Study 2 was based on a self made scale of moral emotions. A semi-structured interview was used to explore guilt and shame. Semi-structured interviews are somewhere between structured and unstructured interviews in format meaning researchers set up interviews guides that consist of a set of questions [6]. The guides allow researchers to generate their own questions to develop interesting areas of inquiry during the interview. This type of interview is widely

used as the qualitative interview. Each response would be noted and categorized afterwards. There was not any time limit for the interview.

Scale development

Item generation: The items were generated on the basis of previous researches. Numerous standardized questionnaires were assessed to generate some new questions. The definitions of moral emotions were analyzed to generate questions. Guilt has been defined in a variety of ways. In classic psychoanalytic theory, it is viewed as a superego response to one’s own unacceptable impulses, often based on anxiety caused by childhood conflicts over such issues as abandonment and punishment by parents. This type of guilt generally is seen as causing psychological distress and problems with adjustment, and today it is not viewed as playing much of a role in moral behavior [7]. In contrast, in developmental and social psychology, guilt often refers to regret over.

Analyses: Analysis was carried out in two phases. In first phase the data from policemen and lawyers were taken and analysis was carried out through SPSS 16. Frequencies and percentages of data were obtained. In the second phase qualitative analysis was done through content analysis. Individual interviews responses from participants were transcribed using content analysis. Content analysis had been defined as systematic replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. The specific coding techniques used for content analysis included word repetition, the compare and contrast technique and Key Word in Context Technique KWIC. Words that occur a lot are often seen as being salient in the mind of respondents. Frequencies of specific responses were record using informal method of Word Repetition technique. In the informal mode, the investigators simply read the text and note word or synonyms that people use a lot [8]. KWIC is based on simple observation. In this technique researchers identify key words then systematically search the body of the text to find all instances of the word phrase. The compare and contrast approach is based on the idea that themes stand for the ways in which texts are either similar or different from each other.

Results

The research was conducted to explore the guilt and shame among violent criminals. Interview design was used to assess moral emotions. Five questions were asked from 10 criminals (Table 1).

Table 2 shows the description of their responses.

When question was asked “When you convicted to the jail first time and what your crime was?”

5 criminals responded that they had come to jail second time, 4

responded that they came first time and 1 of the criminals respond that he had come to the jail many times.

When another question was asked “In which crime you came to jail at this time?”

Their responses were categorized into two categories, Violent crimes and Financial crimes. 1 of the criminal was indulged in violent crimes such as rape, 1 was involved in kidnapping who kidnapped a girl for selling her and the 2 criminals were involved in murder. In the financial category, 2 criminals robbed a house, 2 were involved in smuggling of drugs, 1 was a professional gambler and 1 was involved in fraud.

When third question was asked “Do you think about your crime? If yes then what do you feel?”

It was a close ended question. Criminals were bounded in five categories in which one category they had to choose. 3 criminals selected the regret option, 2 criminals chose the shame category, 1 of the criminal felt that it was a bad act he should not do this. 4 of the criminals were not shameful for their act.

By asking them another question “Do you think to commit any crime in future?”

7 criminal showed the shameful behavior that they will not do the crime again, 2 criminals replied that they would never come out from jail then how they may be able to commit any crime in rest of their life. 1 criminal showed the negative response and said he was habitual of committing crime.

Table 3 compares the information between new and old criminals. There is a little discrepancy between the numbers of new and old criminals yet it can clearly identify that old criminals also feel shame for their act. There were 6 old criminals out of 10 and 4 of them had feelings of shame while 2 of them had no feelings of remorse. There were 4 new criminals, 2 of them had feelings of regret and 2 of them had no feelings of remorse.

In Table 2 the data were taken from different policemen and lawyers the result shows that there were 9 Asi, 11 Si participated. Furthermore, 10 lawyers took their responses. The job duration was varying from one another.

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Four questions from policemen and lawyers were asked. Table 5 illustrates the detailed description of their responses. The result shows that 12 participants had rarely heard criminals talking about their

Age	Crime	Marital status	Education	Occupation	Crime occurrence	Area
20	Robbery	Married	Uneducated	Self business	Second time	Urban
38	Kidnapping	Married	Under Metric	Electrician	Second time	Rural
28	Fraud	Married	F.A	Estate agent	Second time	Urban
28	Rape	Married	Middle	Painter	First time	Rural
65	Murder	Married	B.A	Govt employee	First time	Urban
36	Smuggling	Married	Uneducated	Self business	Second time	Urban
42	Murder	Married	Primary	Farmer	First time	Rural
28	Gambling	Unmarried	Metric	Painter	Many times	Urban
32	Robbery	Married	Primary	Unemployed	Second time	Urban
45	Smuggling	Married	Uneducated	Self business	First time	Rural

Table 1: Profile of criminals (n=10).

Variables	f		%		f		%		f		%	
	Second Time		First Time		Many Times							
Admission in jail	5	50	4	40	1	10						
	Rape		Kidnapping		Murder							
Violent crimes	1	10	1	10	1	10						
	Hopelessness		No		Reluctant							
Crimes in future	2	20	7	70	1	10						
	Robbery		Smuggling		Gambling		Fraud					
Non-violent crimes	2	20	2	20	1	10	1	10				
	Regret		Shame		Bad Act		Nothing					
Thought regarding crimes	3	30	2	20	1	10	4	40				

Table 2: Responses from criminals (n=10).

Variables	f	%
Old criminals		
Yes feelings of shame	04	40
No feelings of shame	02	20
New criminals		
Yes feelings of shame	02	20
No feelings of shame	02	20

Table 3: Old vs. new criminals (n=10).

Variables	f	%
Designation		
ASI	09	30
Si	11	37
Lawyers	10	33
Duration of job		
1-10	07	24
10-20	17	57

Table 4: Data from police men and lawyers (n=30).

crime while 18 participants had heard almost every day talking about their crime. In addition, asking about the feeling of regret was noticed in criminals or not? 8 participants noticed that rarely criminals felt regret while 22 participants noticed that they never felt regret. Besides it, questioning about feeling of shame, 8 participants noticed that the criminals felt shame while 13 participants noticed that they never felt ashamed. To know about the perception of policemen and lawyers about old criminals it was asked that old criminals feel less shame is it true? The response of 29 participants was that old criminals felt less shame while 01 participant noticed that they felt shame.

Discussion

The research was conducted to explore some crime related information and perception of law enforcing agency and lawyers about criminals moral emotion. We were curious to know through first hand data whether people who commit crimes feel shame or repent at their misdeeds. Therefore, semi structured interviews were also conducted with 10 criminals in the presence of one security guard, police men and male relative. Questions were open ended as well as close ended. Data was taken from District jail Kotlakhpat, Lahore. First of all the profile of criminals were made by documenting their age, crime, marital status, education, occupation, victim, crime occurrence (1st time, 2nd time) and circumstances of the crime. Moreover, interview was conducted to assess the elements of feeling and shame. The results indicates that whether the crime most of the criminals feel the remorse. After the crime they expressed intention not to carry with their criminal acts. However, out of ten, four did not express any repentance or guilt and

Variables	f		%		f		%	
	Rarely		Almost Everyday		Never			
Dialogue between criminals	12	40	18	60				
	Rarely		Never					
Feeling of regret	8	27	22	73				
	Yes		No					
Feeling of shame	8	27	13	43				
	Yes		No					
Old criminals feel less shame	29	96	1	4				

Table 5: Data from policemen and lawyers (n=30).

gave some justification for their actions. The police officers (20) and lawyer (10) responded to the questionnaires. The lawyers were the ones who dealt with criminal cases. The perception of police officers and lawyers were different from criminals. According to them criminals did not feel shame or guilt whether they were old or new. After committing any crime they made lame excuses. They did not have empathy and moral emotions.

Most interestingly for shame question three criminals said that they felt regret about their crime. Two of them were shameful; one of them said whatever he did it was bad and four of the criminals respond that they had no sense of shame.

As far as intention to commit crime again in future, varied responses were appeared. Two said that they would never come out from jail so there is hardly any chance to committing crime. Seven of the criminals said they would never do any crime again and one of the criminals responded that he had committed crime many times and was habitual and felt nothing. The response of criminals reveals that they have feelings of shame and countenance.

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