AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SELF-ESTEEM IN DETENTION

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Abstract: The study of penitentiary specific phenomena did not aim just the environmental dimension. Most approaches, mainly in the last decade were centred on the individual. The researched dimensions focused on the prisoner personality traits, the roles they assume, psycho-affective vulnerabilities, types of crimes, socio-familiar context and behavioural management.

Imprisonment has a powerful influence upon the prisoner's personality. Among the characteristics subjected to influence we name: self-esteem, agressiveness, honesty, frustration, emotional instability, pathologic tendencies (schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteric tendencies, psychopathy, and depression). Studies revealed that there are differences between male and female prisoners in the development of aggressive behaviour patterns, as well as crime types: burglary or homicide. it is common knowledge that personal history has a big say in the development of pathologic tendencies.

Key words: self-esteem, imprisonment, agressiveness, behavioral patterns, pathologic tendencies

Theoretical frame

The penitentiary is a strict environment, characterized by a limitation in the person`s rights and a drastic change in the lifestyle. Thus, major difficulties can emerge in preserving relationships and adjusting to the norms and requests of life in prison. Moreover, the reason for the penitentiaries' existence as an institutionalized framework is in a permanent state of conflict with the phenomena that comprise the detention environment, despite the fact that detention is regulated by executioner-penal legislation. As a consequence, penitentiary becomes a pathogen environment, which no longer serves the initially stated purpose, that of readjustment to norms of social acceptance. Sociologists call the phenomenon "the pervert effect" of imprisonment and it can explain the emergence of negative effects in the process of reintegration.

The study of penitentiary specific phenomena did not aim just the environmental dimension. Most approaches, mainly in the last decade were centred on the individual. The researched dimensions focused on the prisoners` personality traits, the roles they assume, psycho-affective vulnerabilities, types of crimes, socio-familiar context and behavioural management.

We notice that prison has the task to discipline the individual, but not in a coercive sense, it has to correct moral approach. In fact, if it were limited to a severe punitive system, the results would show an increased rate of relapse and delinquency, because the aggressor or the accused could not really reintegrate in the community (Butoi, and Butoi, 2006).

Life in a drab environment every day for 17 hours, lack of private space but also endless discussions with the same colleagues on the same topics can provide an explanation for nervous breakdowns, degradation of self-esteem and pathological adjustments that many

convicts face.

Prison neurosis can be characterized by lack of initiative, loss of interest things, people and events, apathy, affective anaesthesia, inability to make plans, fatalist resignation. Therefore, we can state that "out of the poverty of a prisoner's « role » the self whose structure is so complex, can no longer emerge (L'Ecuzer, 1978).

The consequences of prison neurosis are materialized in individual and collective dysfunctional behaviours such as: suicide, refusing food, rumours, rebellion etc.

Correction is the joint work of the prisoner, namely his willingness, and the person who helps him understand the mistakes, the reason s/he committed the crime (certain personal unfulfilled needs) and the impact upon his own being, the victim and other indirect participants (the victim's family, the aggressor's family, etc.). In other words, the aim of this action is to make the prisoner understand the crime and not commit it anymore.

Gottraux made some observations of ethological nature in his work „Prisons, droit penal : le tournant?": the territorial instinct is diminished at prisoners because they cannot mark the territory given to them (the bed is often shared with another prisoner); revalue of the living space – so visible with free people – is brought forward by the frustrations registered at the level of all other needs; aggressiveness has also other forms except violence and namely addiction, manipulation of information, distribution of food packages, impeding other prisoners to take part in recreational activities, attribution of penal clothes in better condition, etc. Inhibition of aggression Inhibition of aggression is determined mainly by guardians that constantly emphasize the formal hierarchy from prisons and demand prisoners to keep it (Gottraux, 1991).

Regardless of the approach preferred by researchers, one of the common goals is the identification of factors that contribute to prisoners` adjustment to prison life and to the society.

Imprisonment has a powerful influence upon the prisoner's personality. Among the characteristics subjected to influence we name: self-esteem, aggressiveness, honesty, frustration, emotional instability, pathologic tendencies (schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteric tendencies, psychopathy, and depression).

Studies revealed that there are differences between male and female prisoners in the development of aggressive behaviour patterns, as well as crime types: burglary or homicide. it is common knowledge that personal history has a big say in the development of pathologic tendencies.

The analysis of the phenomenon of crime, according to the defendant's gender starts by equalling crime and danger – people that are labelled as criminals are regarded by the public and the penal justice as deserving to be controlled, inducing the fear of victimization in citizens who obey the law. Female criminals are generally involved in less severe crimes than men. Moreover, in many cases of severe crimes committed by women (such as killing their partners), crimes were committed because they thought their lives or their children's lives were in danger. Nowadays, it is believed that female criminals are dangerous and deserve to be imprisoned. Discussions are also led on the topic that dangerous prisoners are not regarded as human beings that can have relationships with members of the community that obey the law.

Statistics on homicide (Vintileanu, 2000, p.65-75) show that in 1997, 82 women were imprisoned, in 1998- 58 women, in 1999 - 54, and in 2000 (in the first 9 months) 43 women. Infanticide is a special chapter

in women criminality and according to the penal regulatory document it is a crime exclusively attributed to women. Data presented by the author show that the number of women accused of infanticide is relatively low, namely 0,3% of all imprisoned women. The dynamics of this number is inhomogeneous: in 1997-36 women committed infanticide, in 1998 their number decreases to 23, and then in 1999 it increases again to 30. We also observe an increase in the age of women committing infanticide: if in 1997 they were mostly women under 40 years old, in 2000 they were in their 40s and above that age, a spectacular growth being visible at women over 50 (from 18% in 1997 to 37% in 2000). As far as the marital status of these women is concerned, women who commit homicide, death causing injuries and injuries are mostly women with a husband or a partner. In cases of infanticide, women are mostly single, but we notice a growth in the number of women living with a concubine. Women who were physically and emotionally abused for a longer period of time were actually subjected to events that traumatized them. From a psychoanalytical perspective, trauma was considered an "event in the subject's life that is defined by its intensity, the subject`s inability to respond accordingly, disturbance and lasting pathogen effects that are brought about in the mental organization. Certain psychoanalysts consider that post-trauma disturbance is caused by certain psychological bias, and trauma only accelerates the emergence of such disturbance described in psychoanalytical terms as „post-trauma neurosis". Of course, most studies are headed towards the discovery of the most effective methods and technologies to reduce and combat female crimes and crimes in general. (Laplanche, Pontaks, 1994).

The objectives of the study

Our research objective was the identification of differences that occur in prisoners, according to gender and committed crime.

Research hypothesis

1.   According to gender, there are differences between subjects on the following dimensions: honesty, personal history, psycho-asthenia, depression, immatureness and emotional instability, schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteric tendencies, psychopathy, mental level, frustration, emotional equilibrium, motivation, self-esteem, anxiety. Female participants have a superior level of dimensions compared to male participants.

2.   There are differences according to the type of crime committed on the following dimensions: honesty, personal history, psycho-asthenia, depression, immatureness and emotional instability, schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteric tendencies, psychopathy, mental level, frustration, emotional equilibrium, motivation, self-esteem, anxiety. Participants ranked at homicide have a registered level superior to participants ranked at burglary.

3.   Personal history correlates positively with the scored registered at manifested aggression.

Methodology, variables, subjects

To verify the research hypothesis we have used the following tools: SP13 Questionnaire, Rosenberg Scale and S.T.A.I.X2 Questionnaire.

Dependent variables are: affiliation to gender and the type of crime – homicide or burglary.

The selected sample is heterogeneous and contains 60 prisoners, chosen randomly according to their willingness to take part in the research: 30 women and 30 men half ranked according to the type of crime committed: homicide or burglary.

1. **SP13- Pathological Tendencies of Personality**

The condition to interpret the questionnaire is that the factor of honesty contains less than 5 symptomatic answers. Above 5 answers the questionnaire is annulled because the information is given rationally, the answers are thought, and they do not mirror the subject. The ranks are from 0 to 10. No reference is made to pathologic personalities. Tendencies are encountered only starting with 5 symptomatic answers.

Symptomatic factors are commonly and more intensely found in women.

Self-esteem is a deep and strong human need, essential for the individual's healthy adjustment, namely for an optimal functioning and fulfilment. In other words, self-esteem is confidence in one's own mind and judgement. It means confidence in the ability to make proper decisions and choices.

Self-esteem is one of the fundamental dimensions of personality.

It refers to the relationship each individual has with himself. It is a judgement about ourselve, vital for our mental equilibrium. When it is positive and relatively high it allows us to act effectively, to face the difficulties of existence. Moreover, specialists state that of all judgements we make in a lifetime, no is that important as the one about ourselves.

According to G. Albu (2002), self-esteem refers to trust in one's ability to judge, to face challenges in life, to confidence in our ability to be successful and happy, to the feeling that we are entitled to state our desires, to fulfil our values and enjoy the results of our efforts.

Self-esteem correlates ration, creativity and ability to handle change with the availability to spot and correct possible errors. The global level of a person's self-esteem influences the choices s/he makes in his/her lifestyle. In this context, a high self-esteem is associated with strategies of searching personal development, risk taking, errors while a low self-esteem involves more likely strategies of defence and avoiding risks and failure (Albu, 2002).

We classified self-esteem into four categories, by correlating the level and stability of self-esteem, so that we understood better certain reactions and different moods we experience. Thus, there is high stable self-esteem and high instable self-esteem; there is also low stable self-esteem and low instable self-esteem (Andre, 2003).

2. The Rosenberg Scale indicates the level of self-esteem. The sample contains 10 items, each item being assessed by the subject on a scale from 1 to 4 (1) – absolutely agree; (4) absolutely not. The scale is made of 5 directly marked items and 5 inverted items (3, 5, 8, 9, 10).

3. S.T.A.I X2- Inventory for Anxiety

Anxiety is an affective disorder manifested by feelings of restlessness, fear and unjustified concern in the absence of causes. Anxiety is defined as "fear without purpose" unlike phobia which is "fear with purpose" (Neveanu, 1978).

It is necessary to make a clear distinction between well-defined notions such as **anxiety – state and anxiety – trait**. The notion of emotional state, as indicated by its name, corresponds to a temporary situation that could occur at any time in any individual. Contrary, anxiety – as trait is an individual, apparently inborn characteristic that is manifested in two ways: predisposition to feel fear when certain stimuli occur, which stimulate other individuals less or not at all and the

predisposition to develop conditional fears in the presence of stimuli which are not anxiety causing. A high level of anxiety – trait has a pathological character (Larousse, 2000).

State Trait Anxiety Inventory (S.T.A.I.)

S.T.A.I. is made of two self-assessment scales to measure two distinctive concepts of anxiety: the state of anxiety as state (A – state) and anxiety as trait (A – trait).

Scale A – state or S.T.A.I. - X consists of 20 descriptions which are the basis for the subjects` description of the way they feel at a certain point. Scale A – trait or S.T.A.I. – Form X-2 consists also of 20 descriptions but the instructions ask the subjects to point out how they generally feel.

It is a self-assessment questionnaire, adapted for self-administration. The examiners attention is focused on the fact that instructions are different for the two parts of the inventory. Anxiety as state is conceptualized as a transitory emotional state or a condition of the human body, characterized by conscious experiences as well as an increased activity of the autonomous nervous system. These states can vary in intensity and fluctuate over time. Anxiety trait refers to relatively stable differences in the tendency to respond to situations perceived as threats, with increase in anxiety state.

Observation grid of aggressive behaviour

In the development of observation grid of aggressive behaviour we started from 20 aggressive behaviours common for imprisoned persons.

We have designed an observation grid that contains 20 aggressive behaviours: the behaviour has been ranked from 1 to 4, 1 being given for lack of aggression, 2 for low aggression, 3 for medium and 4 for high

aggression. The final score was obtained by summing up the scores of all 20 manifested behaviours. Scores range from 20 to 80. Subjects whom received scores below 50 manifest low aggression and those with over 50 manifest high aggression tendencies.

Research Results and Their Interpretation

In this research we have tried to identify the differences that occur between prisoners based on gender and crime type on the following dimensions: honesty, personal history, psycho asthenia, depression, immatureness, emotional instability, schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteric tendencies, psychopathy, mental level, emotional balance, motivation, self-esteem, anxiety. We have used the **SP13 Questionnaire**, the **Rosenberg Scale, STAI - X2 Questionnaire and the Observation Grid of Aggressive Behaviour.**

After finalizing the **SP13 questionnaire,** we consider useful to compare scores obtained by the subjects on the following dimensions: frustration and schizophrenia, shown **Figure no 1**.
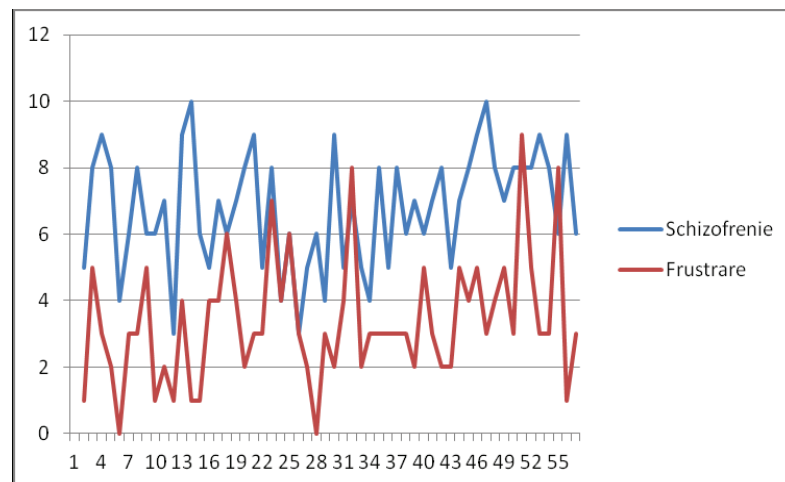

Figure no1: Correlations on the dimension **Schizophrenia and frustration**

We can notice that the level of frustration that comes from imprisonment is lower than their bias for schizophrenia disorders.

In **Figure no 2**, we can see the same bias, namely the tendency to develop pathological disorders is higher than the level of frustration.
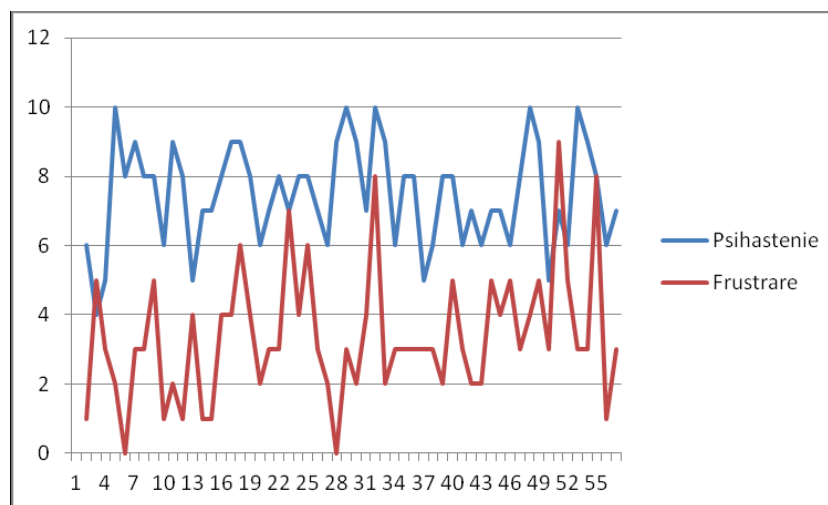
Figure no 2: Correlations on the dimension
Psycho-asthenia and frustration

From F**igures 1 and 2**, it is interesting to see the low level of frustration compared to the tendency to develop pathological disorders. It can be associated with the attempt to hide or to ignore the feeling of frustration. Due to the fact that this research had an applied character, we have not insisted on quality. If discussions with the prisoners had been more thorough, we could have registered the level of frustration more precisely.

Table 1 reveals statistic values of used scales.

The descriptive analysis of data revealed medium scores for depression **(M=4.72)**, immatureness, instability **(M=4.93)**, hysteric tendencies **(M=5.42)** and anxiety **(M=50.00)**. The scores are above average in what concerns psycho-asthenia, schizophrenia, paranoia,

psychopathyy, emotional stability and aggression.

Honesty obtained an average score of **1.33**, which indicates a low level of honesty. The same situation is encountered with personal history, where **M=3.35** is a low score. Mental level also has low rates. Frustration has a low medium value of **M=2.30** and so has motivation **M=2.32.**

Table 1

Statistic values of used scales

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
Honesty	60	1	4	1,33	1,052
Personal history	60	1	9	3,35	2,049
Psycho asthenia	60	1	9	6,37	2,178
Depression	60	1	10	4,72	2,478
Immatureness, emotional instability	60	1	10	4,93	2,254
Schizophrenia	60	1	9	6,20	2,227
Paranoid trends	60	1	10	5,70	2,452
Hysteric tendencies	60	1	9	5,42	2,173
Psychophaty	60	1	10	5,62	2,656
Mental level	60	1	9	3,52	2,411
Frustration	60	1	7	2,30	1,898
Emotional stability	60	1	10	5,93	2,342
Motivation	60	1	8	2,32	2,167
Self-esteem	60	16	39	28,77	5,209
Anxiety	60	28	73	50,00	8,741
Aggressiveness	60	33	78	55,5	6,653
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Affection, as personality trait bears the brunt of frustrations imposed by imprisonment. It is the source of many subjective upheavals and interpersonal conflicts. Affectionate manifestations are a sensitive detector of the prisoners` soul throughout their detention. Another personality trait is motivation. it is very complex with prisoners:

- a first group of issues includes reasons for committing the crime, as presented by the subject;
- a second group refers to reasons for dysfunctional behaviour, as well as sources of satisfaction – dissatisfaction throughout detention period.

We can distinguish between reasons before committing the crime and reasons elaborated after committing it.

The first research hypothesis refers to the fact that: There are differences between gender on the following dimensions: honesty, personal history, psycho asthenia, depression, immatureness, emotional instability, schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteric tendencies, psychopathy, mental level, emotional balance, motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, aggression. Female participants have a superior level to male participants for the above mentioned dimensions.

Table 2

Gender differences for analysed dimensions

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									% Confidence Interval the Difference	
		F		t	df	Sâg. 2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error difference	Lower	Upper
Honesty	Equal variances assumed	7,437	,008	1,317	58	,193	-, 356	,270	, 897	,185
	Equal variances t assumed			1,300	48,035	,200	-, 356	,274	, 906	,195
Pers. history	Equal variances assumed	2,666	,108	-, 862	58	,392	-, 457	,530	1,519	,605

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		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
	Equal variances not assumed			-,856	54,070	,396	-,457	,534	1,528	,614
cho asthenia	Equal variances assumed	1,038	,313	-,633	58	,050	-1,548	,566	1,490	,774
	Equal variances not assumed			-,636	57,902	,050	-1,548	,564	1,486	,770
Depression	Equal variances assumed	,899	,347	-,437	58	,664	-,281	,645	1,572	1,009
	Equal variances not assumed			-,439	57,609	,662	-,281	,641	1,565	1,002
nmatureness and emotional instability	Equal variances assumed	,325	,571	-,677	58	,501	-,396	,585	1,567	,775
	Equal variances not assumed			-,679	57,988	,500	-,396	,583	1,564	,772
chizophrenia	Equal variances assumed	,201	,655	-2,220	58	,030	-1,348	,607	2,564	,133
	Equal variances not assumed			-2,222	57,893	,030	-1,348	,607	2,563	,134
Paranoia	Equal variances assumed	,013	,910	-2,618	58	,011	-1,582	,604	2,791	,373
	Equal variances not assumed			-2,615	57,349	,011	-1,582	,605	2,793	,371
Hysteric endencies	Equal variances assumed	,063	,803	-1,936	58	,058	-1,062	,549	2,161	,036
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,940	57,993	,057	-1,062	,548	2,159	,034
sychophaty	Equal variances assumed	,779	,381	-,301	58	,053	-1,202	,691	1,592	1,176
	Equal variances not assumed			-,302	57,775	,054	-1,202	,688	1,586	1,170
Mental level	Equal variances assumed	1,057	,308	-1,977	58	,765	-,208	,608	2,420	,015
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,969	55,909	,764	-,208	,611	2,426	,021

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Frustration	Equal variances assumed	,654	,422	,911	58	,366	,447	,491	, 536	1,430
	Equal variances not assumed			,903	53,219	,370	,447	,495	, 546	1,440
Emotional stability	Equal variances assumed	2,241	,140	1,324	58	,191	-, 796	,601	2,000	,407
	Equal variances not assumed			1,331	57,733	,189	-, 796	,599	1,995	,402
Motivation	Equal variances assumed	,354	,554	,734	58	,466	,413	,562	, 712	1,538
	Equal variances not assumed			,737	57,980	,464	,413	,560	, 709	1,534
Self-esteem	Equal variances assumed	,357	,553	2,879	58	,006	3,655	1,269	6,196	1,114
	Equal variances not assumed			2,875	57,292	,006	3,655	1,271	6,201	1,110
Anxiety	Equal variances assumed	,626	,432	-, 176	58	,861	-, 400	2,277	4,958	4,157
	Equal variances not assumed			-, 175	54,825	,862	-, 400	2,290	4,991	4,190
aggressiveness	Equal variances assumed	,358	,555	2,881	58	,010	3,125	1,271	6,200	1,117
	Equal variances not assumed			2,877	57,292	,010	3,125	1,276	6,209	1,111

After applying the **T Test**, the results contained by **Table no 2**, have proven that **hypothesis no 1** is partly valid, namely that not all dependent variables are sensitive to gender influence. Although research has assumed that being a woman requires a higher level of anxiety, motivation, emotional balance, frustration, mental level, depression, personal history, emotional immatureness and honesty, the **T Tests** does not indicate difference, consequently the hypothesis is not confirmed.

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We can state for sure that being a woman brought about significant differences in the level of: psycho-asthenia, self-esteem, hysteric tendencies, psychopathy, paranoia, schizophrenia, and not at last aggression, unlike men who obtain lower score. Therefore **hypothesis no 1 is partly confirmed.**

2. There are differences according to the type of crime committed by the subjects on the following dimensions: honesty, personal history, psycho asthenia, depression, immatureness, emotional instability, schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteric tendencies, psychopathy, mental level, emotional balance, motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, and aggression. Participants convicted for homicide have a higher level at the above mentioned dimensions than those convicted for burglary.

Table 3

Differences according the type of crime committed

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F		t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Honesty Equal variances assumed	,437	,008	1,317	58	,193	356	,270	897	,185
Equal variances not assumed			1,300	3,035	,200	356	,274	906	
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	Equal variances not assumed			1,331	7,733	,189	796	,599	1,995	,402
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After applying the **T Test** (results are revealed in **Table no 3)**, we notice that **hypothesis no 2** is only partly validated, namely that not all dependent variables are sensitive to the influence of crime type: **homicide and burglary.** Although research has assumed that subjects convicted for homicide have a higher level of honesty, personal history, psycho-asthenia, depression, immatureness and emotional instability, schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteric tendency, psychopathy, mental level, frustration, emotional balance, motivation than those convicted for burglary, **T Test** does not prove these differences, consequently the hypothesis is not confirmed at this level.

We can state for certain that belonging to the homicide convicted category brought about significant differences at the level of: self-esteem, anxiety and aggression, unlike those imprisoned for burglary who obtained lower scores. Thus, **hypothesis no 2 is partly confirmed.**

The last hypothesis discussed in this research refers to the fact that self-esteem correlates positively with the score registered for aggression.

The aim of correlation studies is to measure and determine the way of association and co-variation of certain mental traits. In these studies we can determine predictive relations by measurements and assessment of co-variation between variables, as they naturally evolve.

Table 4 Pearsons Correlations

	Aggression	Anxiety	ycho-asthenia	Motivation
Personal history	-.087, p=.482	=.008, p=.948	=.024, p=.701	-.022, p=.626
Honesty	-.034, p=.786	=.055, P=.656	=.022, p=.820	- 242, p<0.05
Frustration	=.027, p=.826	=.038, p=.756	=.396, p<0.01	=.042, P=.621
Self-esteem	=.322, p<0.01	=-.057, p=.659	=.042, P=.546	-.054, p=.376

After applying the Pearson correlation between research variables, we have obtained the following significant results that validate **hypothesis 3 (Table 4).**

The correlation coefficient **r=.322**, significant at a threshold **p<0.01**, proves that the **2 variables: self-esteem and aggression** strongly correlate positively which means that along with a growing self-esteem, the tendency to aggression also grows in prisoners. This fact validates **hypothesis no 3.**

We also have to remind that frustration correlates positively with psycho-asthenia **r=.396, p<0.01**, namely a growth in the level of frustration would determine a growth in the tendency to develop psycho-asthenia. Another correlation obtained at the level of variables is the interdependence between honesty and motivation **(r=. - 242, p<0.05),** namely the honest the person is, the lower is the motivation to commit crimes.

Conclusions and practical implications

This research tried to prove that imprisonment has a powerful influence on the prisoner's personality. The characteristics under our attention are: self-esteem, aggression, honesty, frustration, emotional instability such as pathological disorders (schizophrenia, paranoia, hysterical tendencies, psychopathy, depression).

The results concluded the following practical implications:

- Anxiety and aggression are increased in cases of homicide. Therefore, we can initiate a programme of psychological counselling, whose aim would be to reduce tension accumulated in prison and facilitate future socio-professional reintegration

- Women record higher scores than men on the following dimensions: hysteric tendencies, psychopathy, paranoia and schizophrenia, which make them more vulnerable and amenable to pathological disorders. Therefore, we suggest thematic groups of psychological counselling, aiming to develop personality and help them be aware of their tendencies to pathological disorders.

To conclude, the research and the practical activities highlight that the hypothesis on which we have developed our research are valid, in what concerns the aim of our research. They also prove that custody taking faces certain issues in respect of the beneficiaries of this institution. Justice is acknowledged as an act of trying to discover the truth about those who committed certain crimes. Therefore, it is clear that justice, in its attempt to discover the criminal reality is not about abstract concepts but about the doer's reality and his perspective on guilt. From this perspective, penitentiary as institution regulates certain requirements. If they are not fulfilled, everything remains merely theoretical, lacking credibility and power, consequently becoming ineffective.

I also consider that the offender's supervision should be adapted to his needs. For this reason, legislation should clearly stipulate the necessity to develop varied schemes that would fulfil the offender's needs. Among these schemes we mention: subject centred therapy, group therapy, residential therapy, as well as treatment for different categories of criminals. Efforts should be made to understand a prisoner's history, every time a certain treatment is administered.

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