

# Family factors in formation of mental states in persons accused of terrorism

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**Abstract.** The paper discusses the results of an experimental study to investigate the products of such mental states as anxiety, frustration, aggressiveness and rigidity as exemplified by persons accused of committing terrorist attacks, through a lens of certain family conditions including marital status, parental status, as well as living conditions with their close relatives. The findings suggest that certain mental states exhibited by persons prone to commit especially dangerous crimes against the society can be related to family reasons, in particular parental status of criminals.

## 1 Introduction

Terrorism today is viewed as one of the most dangerous phenomena threatening public security and stability. This is due not only to numbers of actual or potential victims injured in terrorist attacks, but also to negative implications for social, political and psychological situations in society. Moreover, it is impossible to effectively combat terrorism by force alone, without the use of so-called “soft power”. In this regard, scientific community and representatives of various humanitarian scientific fields involved in the development and implementation of methods for preventing extremism in society plays a significant role in countering the phenomenon.

With this in view, one of the urgent tasks within the development and implementation of preventive methods is to study psychological characteristics of the personality of a terrorist, as this, primarily should help to understand and predict their antisocial behaviors, and therefore take preventive measures to stop extremism and terrorism. It can also contribute to more effective community outreach aimed at preventing, primarily, young people from being involved in terrorist activities, predicting a propensity towards such ideas in young people, carrying out psychological and pedagogical measures.

With regard to the factors that determine the involvement of a person in terrorist activities, there are different points of view in the scientific community, which vary subject to the details of a subject addressed within a certain scientific dimension.

Thus, some authors believe that one of the main causes of terrorism are economic factors. Lack of employment and, consequently, a large amount of free time is one of the reasons that young people unite in various social groups and take part in their activities. Then, subject to some personal qualities of a group,

desire for quick profits, desire to attract attention and become popular, the group may form a certain stance towards extremist and even terrorist actions [1, 2].

Besides, socio-psychological economically charged factors also play an important role in involving a person in terrorist organizations. This is primarily poverty, low education, unemployment, lack of life prospects, etc. [3].

According to a number of researchers, one of the most important factors of involvement in terrorist activities is religion, which plays a huge role in shaping personal worldview, value-semantic attitudes. Given that a system of religious dogmas declared by ideologists contains some provisions that allow violence, they can cause the development of extremist and terrorist attitudes in the minds of believers. Accordingly, the very practical use of violence will be seen by religious extremists as a morally permissible phenomenon, if the “religious values” “saved” with its help are higher than the harm caused to them [4].

In addition, the literature also provides many individual factors in the development of extremist ideas and terrorist intentions, including personal grievances, envy, inferiority, sadistic inclinations, emotional affects, etc. [5].

According to V.V. Vityuk, the roots of extremist and terrorist activities are aggressiveness and instincts. Thus, depending on upbringing, cultural characteristics, moral and legal norms accepted in society, the impacts of innate aggressiveness and instincts on human behavior are different. A low level of control over emotional reactions, intolerance, limited thinking and worldview are also favorable grounds for promoting the ideas of violence, for the development of behavioral patterns that involve the use of violence to achieve one’s goals [6].

One way or another, despite different incentives, terrorists are classified as a special type of people who nearly lack rational behaviors, while emotions prevail to the extent that they become affective. Terrorists’ psyche

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is primitive to the limits of the psyche of a “mass man”. A low level of culture and distorted ideas about the world around, about justice, legality, tolerance, that only violence and threats are the most effective ways to transform the world, make the personality of a terrorist a special socio-cultural phenomenon [7]. Moreover, antisocial human behavior that includes extremist and terrorist activities may be attributed to some psychological factors like, anxiety, aggressiveness, frustration, rigidity, narcissism [8].

Humans to have such mental states and certain mental characteristics perceive themselves and the world around differently [17], which, under certain conditions, can cause personality abnormalities and develop feelings of superiority and exclusivity [9]. This way of personality development can entail inability to perceive your ideas and actions critically, denial of an alternative point of view on issues of paramount personal significance [10].

Thus, one of the personality traits that largely triggers extreme violent inclinations is an acute feeling of dissatisfied human natural needs – frustration [11], in which internal attitudes of an individual, its ideological orientation become primarily rigid – if people around do not share this outlook, they are exposed to contempt, persecution and hatred [12].

According to Yu.M. Antonyan, personal anxiety expressed in low resistance to uncertainty is of particular importance among the psychological characteristics of individuals prone to extremism in its extreme forms [13]. The same point of view is shared by S.E. Voronin who in his studies of religious extremist crimes found that people who committed them are characterized by uncertainty, frustration and anxiety [14].

What is more, another feature of persons prone to extremist and terrorist activities, apparently, is rigidity (from Latin: *rigidus* or *rigiditas* – hard, firm, frozen), expressed as discomfort when a person encounters something new or changing, with a prevailing need to follow a well-worn way of living. The consequences of rigid purposefulness are a limited, focused interest in the outside world, perceiving it through the prism of prejudice.

As D. Shapiro reminds, with rigidity a psychological portrait of individuals is dominated by features of masochism – a careful, accentuated, and attentive attitude to all injustice done to themselves, to personal humiliations, insults, concessions, and capitulations, which is all associated with a demand of sympathy and increased public attention. However, this does not leave an individual in the humility of a martyr; on the contrary, they experience irritation, anger, bitterness, a sense of unfairness [15].

Earlier studies show that a dominant mental state of people who used to have problems with the law related to their terrorist activities is anxiety, while young people who are not involved in such crimes are more prone to rigidity. People detained for participation in terrorist acts also have more pronounced feelings associated with having to wait for a long time, with a sense of hopelessness, irascibility and weak desire to take a risky act [16].

M.I. Maryin and Yu.G. Kasperovich, highlighting various factors that contributed to the involvement of a person in terrorist activities, developed a classification of types of terrorists. According to the authors, there are three types of terrorists: a psychopathic fanatic, a person from a disadvantaged family, and a frustrated type [17].

The first type includes terrorists encouraged by ideological, religious, political and other types of beliefs. Their main feature is that they sincerely believe they are right in their intentions and actions, that society benefits from their actions. This certainty, unshakable beliefs narrows their consciousness, which allows them to perform any action in order to achieve the great goal [17].

In the second type, the roots of antisocial tendencies and, consequently, the likelihood of being involved in terrorist activities, are family factors like parental cruelty in childhood, social deprivation, a lack of positive emotions, etc. [17].

The third type includes people whose aggressiveness is exhibited as a reaction to frustration, inability, for one reason or another, to achieve the most important life goals [17–19]. Meanwhile, a number of researchers also believe that the formation of destructive psycho-emotional states (which in turn act as triggers for extremist and terrorist behaviors) is greatly influenced by the family environment [20–22].

Thus, according to N.V. Lukyanchenko, personal development, especially the development of emotional sphere is due to the conditions of family education. The emotional and personal characteristics of children have qualitative distinctions depending on whether they were brought up in a complete or incomplete family [21].

M.M. Dzhabrailova, M.M. Dalgatov in their studies emphasized a certain dependence of anxiety and aggressiveness of teenagers on the type of family they were brought up in. Thus, high levels of anxiety and aggressiveness are shown by teenagers who grew up in single-parent and mixed families. The authors suggest that the development of teenage psycho-emotional sphere is greatly influenced by a socio-psychological atmosphere in the family [23].

Family atmosphere that conveys relationships in the family, the totality of emotions and experiences, has a beneficial or destructive effect not only on children brought up in such conditions. Family climate also plays an important role in the mental development and well-being of adults, especially young people who have created their own families. Given that family relationships are healthy and the psychological atmosphere is favorable, proper conditions are created to ensure harmonious psycho-emotional development of an individual. However, unfavorable family relationships can cause increased anxiety, feelings of alienation and emotional discomfort. Moreover, if some members are put under psychological pressure, they can respond aggressively, and, once long, aggressive behaviors can turn into an increased level of human aggressiveness [22].

Based on the above, the paper aims to study the features of mental states (anxiety, frustration, aggressiveness and rigidity) in persons accused of

committing terrorist crimes, through a lens of certain family factors-conditions including marital status, parental status, as well as living conditions with close relatives.

## 2 Material and Methods

Research methods involve clinical and demographic chart, Eysenck personality questionnaire.

A drug rehabilitation centre in the Chechen Republic was used to conduct an experimental study that involved a pool of persons detained by law enforcement agencies and special services of the Russian Federation for preparing and committing terrorist crimes. A total of 32 people were examined – mostly men aged 19 to 45 years.

## 3 Results

The features of emotional reactions depending on individual family factors were studied.

**Table 1.** Dependence of mental states on marital status of defendants accused of terrorism

Mental state / Marital status	N	Average	Significance
Anxiety	single	21	5.29
	married	10	8.80
Frustration	single	21	3.95
	married	10	7.30
Aggressiveness	single	21	2.57
	married	10	5.80
Rigidity	single	21	5.19
	married	10	7.40

As shown by a comparative analysis of rank differences, the examined married criminals with a terrorist past were more prone to aggressiveness. What is more, there were no significant differences in such emotional states as anxiety, frustration and rigidity in the marriage differentiated groups of criminals, although all of them were prevalent precisely in married extremists.

Based on the findings for the relationship between mental states and parental status, the criminals with 2 children are more anxious, frustrated, aggressive and rigid, while the criminals with 1 or 3 children have lower values. Thus, the lowest values for anxiety and aggressiveness are found to be present in criminals who are parents of 1 child, while criminals with 3 or more children have lower values for frustration and rigidity.

Based on the dependence of mental states of the accused on living conditions, it was found that those living with their families they formed and other relatives show more anxiety, frustration, aggressiveness, and rigidity, while those living with their parents and other relatives have these states less pronounced, and, finally, those living only with their own family were found to have the lowest values. However, the differences found in the indicators of mental states, through a lens of certain family conditions, do not have static significance.

**Table 2.** Dependence of mental states on parental status of defendants accused of terrorism

Mental state / Parental status	N	Average	Significance
Anxiety	No children	20	5.50
	One child	1	1.00
	Two children	5	<b>14.00</b>
	Three or more children	5	3.60
Frustration	No children	20	3.85
	One child	1	6.00
	Two children	5	<b>11.00</b>
	Three or more children	5	3.60
Aggressiveness	No children	20	2.70
	One child	1	0.00
	Two children	5	<b>10.00</b>
	Three or more children	5	1.60
Rigidity	No children	20	5.15
	One child	1	6.00
	Two children	5	<b>12.00</b>
	Three or more children	5	2.80

**Table 3.** Dependence of mental states on living conditions of defendants accused of terrorism

Mental state / Living conditions	N	Average	Significance
Anxiety	Live with their parents and other relatives	8	7.00
	Live with their own families	18	5.22
	Family and relatives	3	9.67
Frustration	Live with their parents and other relatives	8	6.38
	Live with their own families	18	3.61
	Family and relatives	3	8.67
Aggressiveness	Live with their parents and other relatives	8	4.25
	Live with their own families	18	3.11
	Family and relatives	3	7.33
Rigidity	Live with their parents and other relatives	8	4.50
	Live with their own families	18	5.56
	Family and relatives	3	8.67

## 4 Discussion

The resulting data on psycho-emotional reactions show a statistically significant dependence of aggressiveness on marital status. The terrorists examined had a higher level of aggressiveness if they were married. Thus, the unmarried accused had a level of aggression of 2.57 against 5.80 for the married accused. In this case, we see

more than a twofold superiority. This result may be due to the fact that the accused were dissatisfied with their marriage, as well as psychological pressure from a partner, which causes an emotional response in the form of an excessive level of aggression.

The resulting data on psycho-emotional reactions depending on the number of children is also interesting. High values of all target reactions, if there are two children in a family, may not only and not so much indicate a higher level of negative emotional states, but the dependence of these parameters on the stage of family life matching or slightly exceeding childbearing time considered to be appropriate to have this number of children.

## 5 Conclusion

Foreign and domestic literature on the problem of social and psychological conditioning of being involved in terrorist activities assume that there are certain psychological characteristics of a person prone to terrorist activities. These features can be expressed in the fact that terrorist's profile may be dominated by aggressive motives, feelings of frustration and anxiety against the background of low cognitive-behavioral flexibility. These psychological features, in turn, are determined by family climate and relationships with significant relatives.

Based on the results, married persons have a higher level of aggressiveness due to certain factors, while terrorists who have 2 children show negative mental states (aggression, frustration, anxiety and rigidity) as compared to criminals with both more and less numbers of children.

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