

# Criminological Analysis of Psychological Trauma and the Behavior of the Victim of Childhood Maltreatment

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**ABSTRACT:** This study analyzes psychological trauma as a unique, devastating, suffering-filled experience that the victim experiences and cannot escape from. The consequences of childhood sexual abuse fundamentally change the victim's perception of social values, forming a devalued perception of their own identity. The history of the victim's behavior is represented by a chain of moral feelings and experiences, with the survivor's personality defined by the essence of these emotions, hidden and separated in another identity for fear of not having discovered the truth of their trauma. Out of the desire to escape the unbearable guilt complex, the victim, who has become a young adult, renounces the moral function and objectifies his will within the criminogenic process in order to satisfy the demands of uncontrollable destructive drives. An unusual transference process takes place: the young adult, a victim of sexual abuse in childhood, discovers in his affective memory a compulsive admiration for the will to power of the one who mistreated him. The aggressor is perceived by the traumatized one in a distorted way as an individual who will never know suffering because he uses violence and has absolute power over the victim. By taking action, the victim who has become an aggressor tries to escape the trauma and humiliation.

**KEYWORDS:** psychological trauma, maltreatment, homicidal ideation, will objectification

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## Introduction

For psychologist Franz Ruppert, the word trauma means injury, and when the processes of perception, emotional experience, thinking, memory or imagination are affected and no longer function normally, then we have a psychological trauma (Ruppert 2012). A traumatic experience causes a lasting change in the body, mind, and soul; the consequences of a traumatic experience never completely disappear (Ruppert 2012). The neural representation of complex events experienced and

imagined reflects the unique experience of each individual; personal memories provide neural signatures of individual identity when events are reimagined and relived (Anderson et al. 2020). Memories of pleasant or traumatic experiences can be activated by the brain and relived, through the neural reading of the information that the person activates in mental images; Neuroimaging studies of brain activity have identified a core network of neuroanatomical regions that are activated during memory and imagination (Anderson et al. 2020). These data prove that psychological trauma is a real wound, neurally activated by brain activity. Traumatic experiences can lead to significant psychological difficulties for many individuals; various psychological issues may develop after trauma in some of those exposed, including anxiety disorders, depressive reactions, suicidal ideation, alcohol and other substance abuse, obsessive-compulsive disorders, psychotic reactions, aggression (Roberts et al. 2010). As individuals we are authentic, we experience and imagine social events differently.

The psychic apparatus retains representations of the world and transforms them into neural representations, each being having its own neural signature of its individual identity. The episodic memory network includes regions of the medial parietal cortex, inferior parietal cortex, medial prefrontal cortex, medial and lateral temporal lobes (Anderson et al. 2020). The traumatic experience fundamentally changes the life of the victim, who faces difficulties in terms of the perception of his own personality and the perception of the social world. For the victim, the world, as a social experience, seems a very dangerous place, distrust, vulnerability, weakness and loss of control are the feelings that overwhelm him; the consequences of psychological trauma are essential, vital consequences that negatively transform the life of the victim (Ruppert 2012). Trauma, as something that happens in the psychic reality, can appear suddenly, as a short-term, devastating event that endangers the victim's life (work and traffic accidents, criminal violence - attempted murder, rape, robbery), but there are also traumas that represent events that last longer and are repeated, producing feelings of helplessness, abandonment, suffering in the victim, such as torture, mistreatment, sexual and physical abuse (Ruppert 2012). After exposure to exceptional, threatening and terrifying events, the victim can develop a post-traumatic stress disorder; this mental disorder can appear after a single traumatic event or from prolonged exposure to trauma - childhood sexual abuse (Bisson 2015). Symptoms in the emotional, behavioral, cognitive and physiological spheres can cause dysfunction and disrupt the victim's social activity; interpersonal relationships, social involvement in the community, productivity, quality of life and health are affected (Yard and McCutcheon 2019). Traumatic events that trigger PTSD are events that go beyond the scope of ordinary life experiences and can include sexual assaults, combat in a war zone, and natural disasters (Yard and McCutcheon 2019). PTSD is associated with substantial psychiatric comorbidity, an increased risk of suicide, difficulties in integrating into social life and financial problems; patients present with cardiorespiratory,

immunological and gastrointestinal disorders (Bisson 2015). 10% of women and 5% of men are affected by posttraumatic stress disorder and present symptoms such as reliving the traumatic event (the appearance of nightmares), avoiding any existential situation or internal and external stimuli that would vitalize the traumatic event in consciousness, negative thoughts (ruminations), irritability, aggression and insomnia (Yard and McCutcheon 2019).

### **Criminological aspects**

The abused child, a victim of violence (rape, incest, bodily harm) suffers in silence and is helpless in the face of the aggressor's attack. Very often, the victim perceives himself as a weak creature, unprepared to sense the danger and incapable of preventing the criminal will of the perpetrator. His individual unconscious records the pain and his existential state of fear and despair, but his unconscious also records and perceives the will and power of the perpetrator, the hatred, violence and satisfaction that the criminal act exerts. The perpetrator appears in the visual and affective memory of the victim as an omnipotent individual, impossible to avoid, with an intimidating physical force that puts his life in danger. Brain imaging studies have found that intense emotional experiences stimulate the degree of activity in the left amygdala and improve memory in relation to the emotional intensity of an experience (Canli et al. 2000). The victim's affective memory will deposit in the depths of the unconscious the feeling of hatred towards his own self, towards his own being incapable of opposing, a creature frightened by the criminal act, too weak to initiate a retaliation. The victim will constantly reproach himself for his weakness, will have low self-esteem, and will hate and despise himself for not being able to confront the criminal. In certain situations, during a critical period of personality formation, the perpetrator acquires an oversized dimension and begins to be admired by the victim's confused Self. Although the traumatic event has faded and a period of time has passed since the criminal act, the image of the aggressor is temporarily fixed in the layers of memory and can follow the victim in the psychic activity of the individual unconscious (an abyssal area where drives are formed and repressions and suffering are closed). The perpetrator, who abused the child victim, later awakens in the confused Ego of the adolescent-young person a feeling of admiration for the dark force of evil and a feeling of disgust for the weak Ego of the creature who suffered and who was permanently lost in the terrible world of ruminations and psychic traumas. The omnipotent criminal is admired unconsciously because he holds control over the victim's life by force; he decides whether the victim must suffer, whether the victim must die, or whether the victim will survive the criminal act.

The child victim will retain the traumatic social event that will give rise to a devastating emotion, that is, a complicated internal sensory event, with repercussions on brain development and consequences in DNA methylation. The

child victim will be overwhelmed by the negative emotions of sexual abuse and maltreatment, will withdraw into his own solitude, and will seek to respond to aggression through self-destructive acts. Submissive and frightened, the victim will consider himself a weak person who deserves his punishment, and sometimes it is possible that suicidal ideation will materialize the transition to the act. Psychological trauma will create suffering, the traumatic social event will produce a neural signature of the victim's individual identity because neural fingerprints are unique to each individual's remembered experience (Anderson et al. 2020). Criminal behavior begins to be admired because it becomes an alternative to the powerless attitude of the child-victim, an alternative to the weak Ego that tends towards transformation, towards accepting the extrahuman will to power (Nietzsche 1999) of an aggressive Ego.

From a criminological point of view, through the will to power, the perpetrator wants to exercise the force of his destructive drive, possessing the entire being and corporeality of the victim, obtaining for himself the profound sensory experience of the criminal act. Heidegger in his study, *Nietzsche's Metaphysics*, considers that "the will to power is an aspiration towards the possibility of exercising force, an aspiration towards the possession of power" (Heidegger 2005). The perpetrator desires the power to control the victim's destiny, and, at the same time, forces the victim to experience the nightmare of the experiences that caused his traumas and the ordeal of his existence. The ego affected by the guilt complex represses its memories and experiences of the existential ordeal in order to distance itself and renounce the victimogenic behavior; the weak ego desires change and the transfer of forces. The victim inhibits its shyness and moral function, but desires to obtain as compensation - the force of the abusive perpetrator who destroyed his life. Thus, an internal conflict arises between the destructive drive of the aggressive ego, which wants to satisfy its immediate physical demands, which begins to grow to occupy vast spaces in the personality of the adolescent or young adult, and the frail resistance of the Superego, the psychic moral instance, which was unable to protect him from sexual abuse, injuries physical and traumas of the being, child victim. Self-punitive paranoia imposes the abolition of the moral court and forces the Superego to decompose in the darkness of the abyssal unconscious, because, although it respected all the rules, although it committed and wanted only good, the child was mistreated and suffered the abuses of the perpetrator-criminal. The child-victim considers himself abandoned because the moral function (guilty for the lack of anticipation of the evil act), the divinity, the parents, relatives, the school, the members of society, were all absent and allowed the violence (in psychotherapy sessions the victim blames himself, has a low self-esteem and devalues himself; no force of good prevented the perpetrator from attacking the innocent child). Thus, the transfer and dissociation of the ego takes place, the innocent child who has become a young adult, a victim of injustice, confused and vulnerable, chooses to obtain the absolute power of the one who abused him; the victim's affective

memory has kept alive the force of the omnipotent individual, who cannot be stopped by the instruments of good, obtaining for himself only satisfaction and the desire to subjugate and mistreat the victim; in the individual unconscious of the victim, the emotions have distorted reality and describe the aggressor as a person who dominates and controls the world through the force and presence of evil. The abused victim will change roles and become the aggressor; he will choose his innocent and vulnerable victims, to punish them because of their weakness and inability to fight and defend themselves. The perpetrator wants revenge because he actually hates and despises the hypostasis of the child-victim of childhood abuse; The criminal ego is free from the censorship of the superego and desires to satisfy the demands of the destructive instincts, as well as the satisfaction of the will to power of the one who abused him. From an analytical point of view, the criminogenic process in this situation is a transference process.

### **Psychoanalytic aspects**

Transferentially, the criminal can vent his anger and hatred on the victim, instead of putting it into action in a self-destructive way; by committing the criminal act, the anger at having been abused, which he was never able to express openly during childhood abuse, also takes place (Davies and Frawley 2017). If he had undergone psychotherapy, the open verbalization would have been positive; the patient (the dissociated child) would go through a phase of intense mourning for the lost childhood, as well as for the loss of good parents, his parents, before the abuse, compensatory phantasies (Davies and Frawley 2017). Freud believes that the symptoms of psychological trauma are residues of intense emotional experiences, their particular character is explained by the connection with the traumatic scene that caused them, they are commemorative symbols of traumatic psychological events (Freud 1992, 2014, 2017). In psychoanalysis, transference accompanies the exercise of speech, the one who analyzes is the guarantor of a good order of things and can play the role of healer (Chemama 1997). It is possible that sometimes the perpetrator, in a state of sensory and intellectual confusion, wrongly appreciates the silence, the moment of cataleptic horror of the victim's body as a consent, the scream, the spasm and the tears as an accepted violent pleasure, depending on the emotions he experienced in childhood as a child-victim. By objectifying the criminal will and transposing it into the expressed antisocial behavior, the perpetrator wants to stop the delirium and suffering caused by the guilt complex, he is unconsciously attracted to the satisfaction of the punitive destructive drive; by taking action, he abuses the victim regardless of the moral and social consequences (Tănăsescu 2012a, 2012b).

## Psychological aspects

Memories of physical and psychological violence create panic attacks and feelings of anxiety in the victim. Depersonalization and derealization are very common symptoms of panic attacks and are more common when anxiety symptoms follow a traumatic stressor, as in the case of posttraumatic stress disorder (American Psychiatric Association 2003). Derealization disorder is characterized by a feeling of detachment or alienation from oneself, the external world appears strange or unreal, and people are perceived as non-familiar beings; major depressive disorder, anxiety disorders, and personality disorders coexist with depersonalization disorder (American Psychiatric Association 2003). In the criminal's consciousness, the delusional system will collapse when excessive homicidal ideation (as a psychic process of forming criminal motivation) will move to the act, and thus the criminal will be objectified, that is, it will be expressed behaviorally; the perpetrator looks his enemy in the eye, and by moving to the act transforms the persecutor into a victim (Costello 2017). The structure of the paranoid being has performed an act of self-punishment (self-punitive paranoia, a term introduced by Jacques Lacan), because the perpetrator feels a state of relief at the moment of his capture and conviction; the target of the attack was himself, with the aim of diminishing and destroying the guilt complex (Costello 2017).

The perpetrator's antisocial personality manifests itself through an egocentric and aggressive attitude, emotionally unstable; the world as reality is perceived through the experiential flow as a sensory and intellectual construction of the Ego, the knowing subject, who mentally creates only the representations he needs, refuses the social world and does not accept the needs and social values of others. Criminal ideation can also be revealed in being as a brutal image of the violent act, an image that awakens the sensory will to experience the imagined act with intensity. The image of the criminal act can be stimulated by the appearance in the consciousness of the criminal ego of the visual representation of the vulnerable victim, who does not perceive the danger nor anticipates his role in the criminal project (Ted Bundy, diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder, confessed that he was sometimes stimulated by violent pornography, by the bloody scenes of magazines and detective stories, which presented the victims of homicides; there are serial criminals who have sexual fantasies before conceiving and materializing the criminal acts). From a psychoanalytic point of view, the decision to act is also determined by the lack of self-control of the perpetrator, the drive to destroy being much stronger than the censorship of the Superego, the moral function is missing and any resistance of the ethical is exhausted. The perpetrator uses emotional experience, memory and imagery to construct the experience of violent sexual fantasies or to conceive the emotionally intense scene of the murder of the victim (the case of Joshua Komisarjevsky, a victim of childhood rape, sentenced to death for rape and homicide in the Cheshire murders). The death drive is linked to early

psychic trauma, which tends to repeat itself throughout life; the repetition compulsion is basically an instinctual tendency towards the restoration of normal psychic functioning based on primary identification (Salonen 2006).

### **Philosophical aspects**

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer considers that the blind will (probably created by the impulses of the unconscious), active only in its original essence as a blind impulse, an unconscious volitional impulse, can intersect in its actions with the actions of the will illuminated by knowledge (the self-conscious will); the two forms of the will can mutually invade each other's domains in the form of two types of phenomena (Schopenhauer 2019). For Schopenhauer, the will is the thing in itself, the intimate content and the universal essence, while the visible world (the phenomenon) represents the mirror of the will as a manifestation of life; the will and the world coexist and are inseparable. According to Sandel (2009), in *The Moral Side of Murder*, consequentialist moral principles locate morality in the consequences of an act (utilitarianism), and categorical moral reasoning (Kantian moral philosophy) locates morality in certain absolute moral requirements (fundamental rights and duties) regardless of the consequences. The lack of moral function creates difficulties for the individual in understanding social values, the lack of moral reasoning leads the perpetrator's will to blindly satisfy the demands of the drives, without anticipating the immoral consequences and legal effects. For Jung (2004), the will is a psychological phenomenon from the sphere of the conscious Ego, a psychic energy at the disposal of consciousness; the volitional process is an energetic process, triggered by conscious motivation; culture and moral education influence and condition the will as a psychological phenomenon; will is not a psychic process driven by unconscious motivation.

Cognitive control refers to the mental processes that allow behavior to vary adaptively according to current goals; it is multidimensional, and one of its main functions is to restrain or inhibit undesirable but dominant response tendencies (Inzlicht, Bartholow, and Hirsh 2015). Cognitive control confers substantial benefits to individuals and society, including the prospective prediction of better health, higher academic performance, reduced substance dependence, improved personal finances, and lower crime rates (Inzlicht, Bartholow, Hirsh and 2015). Violence produces antisocial behavioral consequences through the perpetrator's lack of inhibition and through deficient cognitive control. Instinctive and emotional levels have their own dynamic energy, which can trigger behavior; unlike the former, the cognitive and spiritual value levels, which do not have an efficient energetic substrate, must be supported by the will to trigger behaviors; motivational instances are those forces capable of generating behaviors (Tănăsescu 2018). Psychiatry and forensic medicine describe deviance as a subsequent concept of behavioral and personality disorders or as a symptom of other psychiatric

pathologies; this field offers a more complicated description of what deviance is, depending on the individual situational and pathological context (Heghes and Şchiopu 2020).

The sensory event, as a deep emotion (catharsis) that disturbs the criminal ego (the perpetrator is aware that carrying out the act represents a tragic moment for the victim) is triggered by an opportunity – the presence of the victim or a social event that allows the perpetrator to proceed to the act. At the interoceptive level, the homicidal ideation awaits the impulse of the social event to develop the work of the criminal will (Travaglio – the creative moment of the expulsion of the act). The will conscious of carrying out the criminal act, but dominated by the disturbance of the sensory event (the emotional factor) uses the visceromotor regions of the brain and creates predictions; predictions are concepts necessary in the construction of perception, physiological regulation and guidance of action (Barrett 2017).

In the mind-body interaction, sensory processes can be identified as associations between the sense organs and the peripheral levels of the nervous system, while perceptual processes are those associations that take place at the higher levels of the central nervous system; sensations represent experiences with simple stimuli, and perceptions are integrations of these sensations (Atkinson 2002). The volitional factor belongs to the conscious criminal-ego and is guided by the conscious area of the being, of the psychic apparatus. In the egocentric and aggressive attitude of the perpetrator we also discover solipsism, as an attitude of his own personality; the world as reality is perceived only as a sensory and intellectual construction of the individual, the knowing subject, who mentally creates only the representations he needs, refuses the social world and does not accept the needs and social values of others. The unconscious is not the second personality, but probably a decentralized summation of psychic processes; under these conditions, the criminal unconscious, dominated by the destructive drive and psychotic contents, is able to take over the role of the conscious Ego, the consequences of this transfer being the emergence of confusion and delirium (Jung 2014).

There is a previous state of the criminal's will ready to react to the appearance of the victim. Mental states and physical states interact constantly; when the perpetrator acts - causal chains can be initiated that do not have sufficient physical antecedents (Popper 2002); by the perpetrator's act (the appearance of the vulnerable victim, the absence of the protector) - creates the physical causal chain (Popper 2002). David Eagleman argues that the visual system first scans the scene of reality. The prefrontal cortex generates signals on its way to the motor cortex, which precisely coordinates muscle contractions - through the perpetrator's trunk, arm, forearm and hand; by touching the victim (the object targeted by the objectification of the will) the nerves send a lot of information to the brain and the psychic apparatus (about the weight of the object, its place in space, temperature) about the victim's state of confusion and agitation, about the shock of the moment and the emotional crisis; the



information goes up the spinal cord and enters the brain, and at the same time compensatory information goes down as on a two-way circuit; the whole process is invisible to the mind of the conscious Ego (Eagleman 2018).

## Conclusions

Homicidal ideation intensifies its presence in the intellectual area of the criminal ego, but in order for the criminal to be objectified, the thought affected by the influence of sensory perceptions, the thought altered by the experience of the demands of aggressive drives must move away from the decomposed image of hallucinations and leave the world of violent sexual fantasies. The objectification of the criminal will is part of the criminogenic process, which, when activated, becomes a representation of the intention and reality of the criminal act. Homicidal ideation can constitute only a provisional stage at the level of thought; the dysfunction of the orbitofrontal cortex can cause an imbalance in the antisocial personality.

Analyzing the psychic processes of guilt, professor George Antoniu considers that guilt is a process of consciousness formed by the intellectual factor, with a significant role in the formation of homicidal ideation, and the volitional factor, very important in the process of taking action. The criminogenic process takes place in consciousness, where the representation of the act, the result of the criminal action and the existential consequences are analyzed (Antoniou 2006).

The genesis of the criminal will, as the production and manifestation of the final act of the reality of the criminal act (the volitional factor), represents the phase of the birth of the crime by associating the force of the homicidal ideation (the intellectual factor) with the occurrence of the sensory event (the emotional factor), a birth triggered by the victim as a component part of the social event (the social factor) and encouraged by the lack of the protector of the social order (the conjuncture, the opportunity); the behavioral expression of the will represents the last phase of the criminogenic process.

Freud claims that the victim of childhood sexual abuse is in a confused conflict state and can transform hatred and repulsion towards the pedophile perpetrator into desire and pleasure; disgust and horror are transformed into a scene of sexual passivity (Chemama 1997).

There are situations when sexual incidents may not have occurred, and in the case of hysterics, sexual abuse belongs to the realm of fantasy (Chemama 1997). The loss of innocence is a loss of moral function (loss of childhood due to sexual abuse or mistreatment) and can cause a depressive state similar to the loss of a loved one; a process occurs through which the perpetrator fights against the reaction of suffering and despair of the Ego decomposed into manic-depressive existential states; an intrapsychic work (work of mourning) is necessary to overcome the pain of the being engulfed in anguish and aggression, a detachment from reality and an

escape from trauma (Chemama 1997). Metaphorically, the minor can be described as a crystal object, which shatters and cracks following the traumatic event and it is possible that the cracks will never heal.

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