

Assessment of personality in forensic expertise

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Assessment of personality is an important, if not the principal component of psychological expert opinion. The way an individual experiences the world and himself, his interpersonal relationships and his behaviour, are the expression of personality, presenting a totality of relatively stable human psychological characteristics. It is on the individual's personality that his adaptability and efficacy in different social environments, such as family and professional environments, depends. If we want to explain the psychological meaning of an individual's acts, his capacities to discern reality, the influence of mental disorders and injuries, the impact of traumatic events and other questions posed to the mental health experts, it is necessary to know the personality of a perpetrator. Mental health and legal professionals are confronted with a concept of personality mainly when dealing with people with personality disorders. In order to understand the significance and impact of mental troubles on the experience and functioning of an individual, we should know his personality as a totality.

This is a task for a clinical or forensic psychology expert, who by the use of various measurement methods and techniques makes an assessment of personality, his characteristics and disorders. The term assessment is used because there is always an approximation of measurement, since measurement in psychology, as in other human sciences, is based on objective as well as subjective procedures, providing qualitative and quantitative results. Assessment of personality is a demanding and complex process, requiring knowledge of general psychology, psychopathology, psychodynamics, statistical and psychological methodology and in the case of forensic expertise, also a certain amount of legislation. A good assessment of personality depends on a number of factors, such as: a) the nature of the problem to be assessed in the frame of personality; b) the characteristics of the measuring instruments; c) the proficiency of the person making the assessment to interpret correctly the results and to integrate them into the framework of the problem posed and d) the characteristics of the person subject to assessment.

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