

PERSONALITY DISORDERS TRAITS AMONG PRISONERS IN THE POLISH SAMPLE

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to establish the prevalence of personality disorders among a group of prisoners and to show the demographic correlates of the specified personality disorder traits. The study involved 754 adults from the prison population (all participants were men) aged 19 to 46 years. The author measured personality disorder traits using the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-4 Axis II Personality Disorders. The results indicate that the most common specified personality disorders in the prison population were antisocial, narcissistic, and borderline, and the co-occurrence of these pathological traits was noted. The prevalence of personality disorders differs from that of the general population in Poland and in other countries in that obsessive-compulsive personality disorder is the most prevalent. The specified personality disorder traits are not related to age nor to the education of prisoners. However, the severity of crime differentiates the offenders' personality disorders and traits. The more severe the crime committed by a given person, the more it is associated with the antisocial personality disorder traits.

Keywords: *Personality disorders, prisoners, offenders, crime.*

1. Introduction

Personality disorders (PDs) are defined as enduring patterns of human inner experience and behavior that deviate from the norms and expectations of the culture in which people live. They manifest at least two of the following areas: cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and control of impulses (DSM-5, 2013, p. 311). Studies focusing on the prevalence of personality disorders report that these are widespread in both clinical and general populations (Zimmerman, Rothschild, & Chelminski, 2005). They are commonly observed in criminal offenders and prisoners. Prevalence rates reported in the literature show that 65% of male prisoners are diagnosed with a PD, including 47% with antisocial PD, and 42% of female prisoners are diagnosed with a PD, including 21% with antisocial PD (Fazel & Danesh, 2002, p. 545). PDs among prisoners are associated with drugs, alcohol, a risk of self-harm, violent behavior, accidents, and mortality, as well as criminal and suicidal behaviors (Tyrer et al., 2010). Research on the relation between PDs and criminal offenders is mainly focused on antisocial personality disorder, which was found to be the most prevalent PD in the offenders' populations (Fazel & Danesh, 2002). However, other personality disorders from Cluster B such as narcissistic, borderline personality disorders, are significantly associated with criminal behaviors (Czubak & Gawda, 2020). Due to the lack of data on the prevalence of PDs in the prison population in Poland, the current study focuses on filling this information gap. It is also important to determine whether the incidence rates are similar to those in other countries and whether PD occurrence is related to any demographic variables.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The study involved a sample of 754 adults (men) aged between 19 and 46 years. All of them were prisoners and were tested in eight state prisons in the psychological offices in different parts of Poland. Mean age is 28 years ($SD = 10$). All participants committed serious offences, as well as they met the criterion of an absence of acute psychotic and neurological disorders, and absence of pharmacological treatment for at least one month. They had been convicted of multiple crimes against health, life, and public order; felonies, i.e., murder, aggravated assault, felony assault, assault and battery, assault with weapons, fraud, burglary, rape, and larceny. Mean number of years of education is 13,5 years.

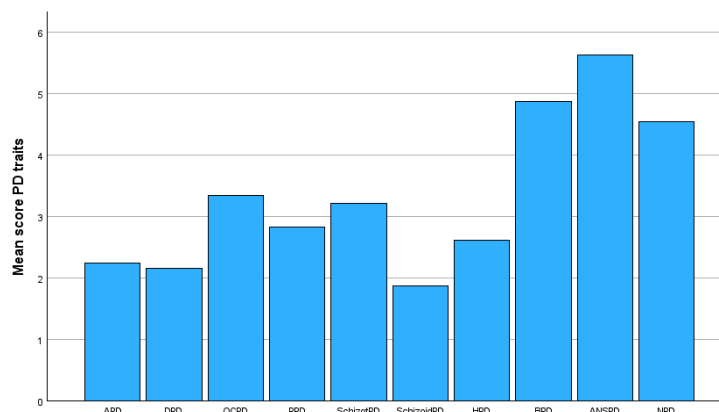
2.2. Measures

Demographic and other data about criminal history are based on the screening questionnaire. The severity of crimes committed was measured by the number of years of imprisonment. To assess PDs' traits, the Structured Clinical Interview for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition Axis II Disorders was used (Polish adaptation of First et al., 2010). All DSM-4 PDs were included in the interview. It is a standardized tool that allows the diagnosis of 10 personality disorders according to the DSM-4 criteria and two additional disorders. The psychometric properties of this tool are appropriate (First et al., 2010). It has good reliability; a Cronbach's alpha is in the range between .72 and .81 for different PDs' subscales. We used the Polish version of the SCID-II, translated and adapted to the Polish language. Reliability in this study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha measures, which range between .701 (dependent PD) and .853 (borderline PD). The SCID-II was used because the research started in 2012. However, the specified PDs in the DSM-5 are the same as in DSM-4.

3. Results

To establish the occurrence of PDs' traits in the prisoners' sample, the descriptive statistics were calculated as the mean and standard deviation. Figure 1 presents these results. This shows that the highest level of PD traits among prisoners is antisocial (ANSPD), borderline (BPD), and narcissistic (NPD). The lowest level of personality disorder traits among prisoners is schizoid, avoidant, and dependent traits.

Figure 1. Mean PDs traits in prisoners.



To check whether PDs' traits are related to age and education, Pearson's correlations were calculated between the number of years of education, the number of years of life, and PDs' traits. All correlations were weak and non-significant. Similarly, to establish relationships between PD traits and the severity of crime, Pearson's correlations were calculated between PDs and the number of years of imprisonment. The results were following: antisocial ($r = .355$ $p < .001$), avoidant ($r = .01$ ns. [non-significant]), dependent ($r = .02$ ns.), schizoid ($r = .01$ ns.), schizotypal ($r = .04$ ns.), paranoid ($r = .02$ ns.), narcissistic ($r = .01$ ns.), histrionic ($r = .07$ ns.), borderline ($r = .133$ $p < .05$), obsessive-compulsive ($r = .008$ ns.). The only antisocial and borderline PD traits significantly correlate with the severity of crime, which is associated with the number of years of imprisonment. Both correlations are positive; however, the correlation with BPD traits is weak, while with ANSPD is moderate. It means that the higher the sentence, the more severe the crime, the more it is associated with the antisocial PD traits.

4. Discussion

The results presented here indicate that antisocial PD traits are the most common among the prisoner population in Poland. The Cluster B traits, such as borderline and narcissistic PD, are also highly prevalent among prisoners. The higher rate of antisocial PD traits is associated with the severity of crime. Prisoners with antisocial PD commit more severe crimes. The results presented here are in line with other cross-cultural studies, indicating that the prevalence of antisocial PD and other PDs is stable across cultures among offenders (Fazel & Danesh, 2002; Gawda, 2018). The high occurrence of Cluster B PDs and particularly antisocial PD is typical for prisoner populations in the world (Czubak & Gawda, 2020; Tyrer et al., 2010). This trend differs from the general population's trends, being that research shows that obsessive-compulsive PD is most common in the general population (Gawda & Czubak, 2017).

In various countries around the world, OCPD is identified as the most common personality disorder. In Europe, North America, this trend occurs. For instance, research conducted with the use of the DSM-IV tool in Great Britain showed that the most frequent are cluster C disorders, including obsessive-compulsive (Coid et al., 2006). It is worth noting that the prevalence of PDs in Europe is closer to that in the USA than in Latin America (Gawda, 2018; Huang et al., 2009). The high incidence of PDs, such as antisocial or borderline, in prison populations contributes to a variety of problems. It has negative consequences for the functioning of inmates in prisons, causing self-destruction, faulty forms of adaptation, and other mental health problems (Czubak & Gawda, 2020). Particularly, antisocial PD traits impair the emotional and social functioning of prisoners. Antisocial PD was found to be related to the severity of crime. People with this personality disorder dominate the prison population, which significantly determines the process of their rehabilitation. The characteristics of this personality make the rehabilitation process particularly difficult. People with this disorder are irritable, impulsive, and aggressive, characterized by a persistent pattern of disrespect for other people and a tendency to violate their rights and property (Gawda, 2018). The most extreme examples of this type of behavior are fights, theft, robbery, rape, lying, and fraud (Czubak & Gawda, 2020). Individuals exhibiting antisocial PD pose a huge challenge for both clinicians and the entire justice system. They receive the most severe penalties for serious crimes. They also have the highest recidivism rates, which means that they are extremely resistant to therapeutic and rehabilitation interventions.

5. Conclusions

The most common specified personality disorders in the prison population were antisocial, narcissistic, and borderline, and the co-occurrence of these pathological traits was noted. The prevalence of personality disorders differs from that of the general population in Poland and in other countries in that obsessive-compulsive personality disorder is the most prevalent. The specified personality disorder traits are not related to age nor to the education of prisoners. However, they are associated with the severity of crime. The more severe the crime committed by a prisoner, the more it is associated with the antisocial personality disorder traits.

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