

CHAPTERS ON PSYCHOLOGY AND LAW

VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS



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CHAPTER 5

Adaptation to prison and psychopathy

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Psychopathy is a widely used concept in forensic and correctional settings. Many prison wardens don't hesitate to call their most difficult inmates psychopaths, due to their continuous breaking rules behaviour, their violence and their apparently endless incapability to learn from punishment. Also psychopaths have been described as human predators who take and do what they want to do without any respect, sense of regret or guilt, for others or for social norms (Hare, 1993, 1996). Although these individuals represent only about 1% of the general population and between 15 or 20% of the prison population, nevertheless they are by far the group of offenders who commit more crimes and remain criminally active for the largest periods of time.

In Portugal, the diagnosis of psychopathy or antisocial personality disorder is based on DSM or ICD criteria. However, reliance only on diagnostic criteria without more objective testing has been controversial (e.g., Hare, 1996; Hare & Hart, 1995; Hare, Hart & Harpur, 1991; Livesley, 1998; Widiger & Corbitt, 1995). The most widely used and cross-culturally valid measure (see Cooke, 1998; Fulero, 1995), the Psychopathic Checklist-Revised (Hare, 1991), has not been translated into Portuguese. One objective of the present study was to translate this measure and test it in a sample of prison inmates in Portugal.

There is considerable evidence that psychopaths are more likely to misbehave or cause disturbances while they are under custody. Using the previous version of the PCL-R — the PCL — Wong (1984, quoted by Hare & Hart, 1993) found that psychopaths had a four times higher rate of institutional offences than non-psychopaths, while Hare and McPherson (1984) also showed that psychopaths were more likely to perpetrate aggressive acts than other inmates, obtaining a correlation of .46 between PCL scores and global ratings of institutional violence. The same correlation value was obtained between the number of institutional charges for aggressive behavior and the scores of a modified version for youths of the PCL-R in a study by Forth, Hart, and Hare (1990). Serin (1991) reported that the psychopaths identified by the PCL-R in a sample of 87 male inmates, were more

likely to display aggressive behaviors towards other prisoners. These findings encompass the well established profile of the psychopath who portrays a person who engages in more violent crimes mostly against strangers urged by immediate goals or motives such as the lack of money (Hart, 1996, 1998). This, in turn, supports the evidence that the great majority of psychopaths' victims are not familiar with them becoming objects of instrumental (predatory) violence as opposed to those who get involved in actions related with reactive (emotional) violence (e.g., Cornell et al., 1996). Exhibitionism, lack of remorse and incapability to feel regret or sympathy towards the victim are the remaining features in a long and lasting criminal career (Hare, McPherson, & Forth, 1988).

Since the classical works of Sykes (1958) and Goffmann (1961/1986) that the various ways that inmates adopt to serve their time in prison has always been a considerable field of research, both for sociologists and psychologists (e.g., Carbonell, Moorhead, & Megargee, 1984; Johnson & Toch, 1982; Toch & Adams, 1989; Zamble, 1992; Zamble & Porporino, 1988) either for inmate classification/typology or treatment purposes (e.g., Kette, 1994; Megargee & Bohn, 1979; Quay, 1984). Therefore, a good classification system should be clear, complete, economical, internally consistent, simple, feasible, valid, reliable and dynamic thus providing treatment and custody recommendations. In short, "identification + separation = reduced problems" (Meyer, 1992, p. 33).

Adaptation or adjustment to prison still remains an important issue for corrections since it is assumed that serving a prison sentence implies obedience to rules and conforming behavior. Generally one can say that prisoners succeed in his process of adaptation when there are no disciplinary charges against them, indicating an acceptance of the institutional routines to lead their lives in such a way that may be helpful to regain freedom through parole or conditional release. The disciplinary record remains as the most powerful indicator of the prisoner's adaptation to prison and has been consistently used as a cross validation measure of other instruments, the majority of them extracted from the MMPI (cf., Brodsky & Smitherman, 1983; Carbonell, Moorhead & Megargee, 1984; Megargee & Carbonell, 1985). However, other indicators, such as the number of days the prisoner stays in his/her cell or the number of medical calls can also be very important. Additionally, evaluating prison adaptation on the basis of self-report data can be misleading due to the notorious manipulative and insincere lifestyle that the majority of antisocial personalities display. In short, the best way to provide sound data regarding the issue of prisoner's adaptation is to gather file information that can account for his institutional behavior since entering prison. In this paper we looked at the relationship between degree of psychopathy (measured by the Portuguese version of the PCL-R) and the degree of adjustment to prison (measured by the Prison Adjustment Index — PAI), a measure developed by Wolfgang (1961). In order to understand the procedure a brief description of both instruments follows.

I. | PCL-R

Hare's PCL-R (Hare, 1991) is commonly accepted as the most powerful instrument to detect and measure psychopathy and there is a wide consensus that, for the moment, there is no other procedure that can be so accurate and so well correlated with antisocial variables (e.g., Fulero, 1995; Gacano & Meloy, 1994; Hare, 1991, 1996). Steaming from rich clinical tradition (e.g., Cleckley, 1941/1976; McCord & McCord, 1964) the PCL-R encompasses a dimensional measure of the disorder with two correlated factors, one related to personality traits (being self-ish, callous and remorseless) and the other portraying an antisocial lifestyle. Only three items — numbers 11, 17 and 20 — don't load on either of the two factors (see Table I).

Table 1 - Items and factor structure of Hare's PCL-R (Hare, 1991)

FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2
1 - Glibness/Superficial charm	3 - Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom
2 - Grandiose sense of self worth	9 - Parasitic lifestyle
4 - Pathological lying	10 - Poor behavioral controls
5 - Conning/Manipulative	12 - Early behavioral problems
6 - Lack of remorse or guilt	13 - Lack of realistic, long-term goals
7 - Shallow affect	14 - Impulsivity
8 - Callous/lack of empathy	15 - Irresponsibility
16 - Failure to accept responsibility for own actions	18 - Juvenile delinquency
	19 - Revocation of conditional release
11 - Promiscuous sexual behavior 17 - Many short-term marital relationships 20 - Criminal versatility	

Items are scored from 0 (the characteristic is not present) to 1 (some features are present but not the whole description) and 2 (the characteristic is fully present), through the combination of the results of a long semi-structured interview with file consultation in different institutional sources. According to Hare (1991), total scores can be divided into three groups: Less than 20: non- psychopaths; 20-29: moderately psychopaths; and 30 or more: psychopaths.

The results obtained with the Portuguese version of the PCL-R showed a similar factorial structure of the original instrument (cf., Gonçalves, 1999a), providing confirmation for cross cultural use of this device in forensic settings (e.g., Cooke, 1998).

2. | PRISON ADJUSTMENT INDEX (PAI)

The Prison Adjustment Index (PAI) was developed by Wolfgang (1961) to measure inmates' behavioral adaptation to prison on the basis of empirical criteria. The author suggested that there were three indices that could be used to reach a behavioral portrait of the inmate. The first one is "the number of jobs and the length of time a job was held by each inmate in prison"; the second one was "the number of times an inmate was discharged from his or her job because of misconduct" and the third one is "the number of bad statements recorded by cell block guards" (Wolfgang, 1961, p. 611). The scoring of these indices is made solely on the basis of prison files but since each one of the three categories is influenced by the time spent in prison, standardization is achieved by calculating the mean number of months per score. Therefore, the number of months per job is compared to the mean number of months per job for a total group of inmates. We then use one-quarter standard deviation to indicate one unit of departure from the mean which provides a scale that ranges approximately from -3 through 0 to +3. So, in this case, a score of -3 signifies that an inmate had scored three-quarters of a standard deviation below the mean number of months spent by the reference group on a prison job and the contrary is valid for a score of +3. The same procedure is used for the other two indices, with a larger number of job dismissals for misconduct or a larger number of cell block disciplinary statements receiving minus quarter deviation scores, since both of them indicate poor adjustment. A total score is obtained by adding the quarter deviation scores from each of the three categories, with a total score higher than zero meaning good adjustment and a total score less than zero bad adjustment. Obviously, the inmates who present the worse profiles of adaptation are the ones who had spent less time in prison but nevertheless show a high rate of job changes, a high rate of job dismissals for misconduct and are more often indicated in disciplinary reports of the cell block guards. Wolfgang (1961) provided data for 44 murderers whose average incarceration time was 8.65 years and found significant associations between positive adjustment to prison and an age of 35 years or older, being married, murder was other than felony murder and previous incarceration. No relationship was found between adjustment to prison and race, length of incarceration, intelligence, achievement or personality attributes. According to Brodsky and Smitherman (1983, p. 174) "the PAI has provided evidence for validity by demonstrating predicted relationships from theoretical positions," although no measures of reliability were provided by the author. Nevertheless, the indices used are clear and make sense for correction personnel, provided that a balance between offering and demanding for prison jobs is effective, which may be difficult to achieve when we face crowded institutions. However that was not the case in the prison where this research was conducted. Additionally, this procedure can be also criticized by the fact that it doesn't take into account other important indicators of adaptation to prison, like the number of medical calls or physical and psychological problems presented by the inmates, but it provides sound data due to the fact that the items considered are always actualized and kept in order by the guards.

3. | SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

A sample of 76 male inmates from a medium security prison (in Portugal there are no maximum security prisons) for convicted offenders, served the purposes of this research. All inmates were picked randomly or were presented following indication of the psychiatrist, without any previous knowledge of the researcher. They were all asked if they wanted to take part in a study concerning the characteristics of imprisoned people so that one could learn more about the prison and the prisoners in general and of the possible ways to ameliorate these environments.

The age ranged from a minimum of 19 to a maximum of 71 ($M = 34$, $SD = 9.5$). More than one third came from urban areas, their average academic level was low (65% had only the 4th grade), 42% of them were married while 49% were single and 9% divorced or other. They were serving sentences for crimes against persons (43%), namely murder and sexual crimes, crimes against property (40%), theft and robbery being the most representatives, and crimes against the society (17%) where drug traffic played the major role. Their sentences ranged from one to 25 years ($M = 9.3$, $SD = 5.2$). Recidivists accounted for 46% and only 13% of the whole sample didn't work in the prison. Nearly 57% of the offenders had no institutional infractions.

The administration of the PCL-R was made alone, in a private room and inmates were assured of the purposes of the study and confidentiality of the results. No video recording was allowed but inter rater correlation yielded an $r = .57$ and Cronbach's Alpha was .84. Concurrent validity was also assessed by matching the subjects identified as psychopaths according to PCL-R scores with the diagnosis of dissocial personality disorder (ICD-10, World Health Organization, 1987) made by the prison psychiatrist. A positive and strong correlation ($r = .83$) was obtained. PAI values were reached by a thorough consultation of prison files.

4. | RESULTS

Following Hare's cut-offs we came to a differentiated group of results in terms of the PCL-R scores (see Table 2), and 22.4% of our subjects are considered psychopaths (scores ≥ 30). A value between 15% and 25% would be expected in forensic settings (cf., Hare, 1991; Forth, Brown, Hart & Hare, 1996). The PCL-R total mean score nearly reached 23 which is quite similar to results presented by Hare (1991) in his standardization sample ($M = 23.6$; $SD = 7.9$). We think that our results may be influenced by the fact that the sample, other than smaller is over-represented with offenders who have committed crimes against persons and therefore the prevalence of psychopaths may be enhanced by both of these issues. In fact, in another study with a larger sample ($n = 150$) only 22 (14.7%) offenders were considered psychopaths (see Gonçalves, 1999b).

Table 2 - Average levels of psychopathy obtained through PCL-R scoring

PCL-R	< 20	20 - 29	≥ 30	TOTAL
M	14.7	24.7	32.5	22.9
SD	3.6	3.0	2.5	7.5
N	27	32	17	76
%	35.5	42.1	22.4	100

On the other hand, Table 3 presents the average results obtained in each one of the three indices considered in the PAI and also its final score, while Figure 1 shows the frequency distribution of the scores. Only 16 subjects (21.1%) had negative scores and so according to Wolfgang they should be considered maladjusted. Four subjects (5.3%) obtained a score of zero and the rest of them presented a positive adjustment. These results are in a certain way expected since, in general, the majority of persons who are incarcerated try to "do their time" without having problems with the staff or other fellow inmates, although it is recognized that this process is not linear and psychological breakdowns, disturbances and acts of violence or self-injuries do occur in most prisons (e.g., Bukstel & Kilman, 1980; Johnson & Toch, 1982; Toch & Adams, 1989; Zamble, 1992; Zamble & Porporino, 1988).

Table 3 - Average values obtained in the three indices and in the PAI total score

	M	SD
Duration of jobs (in months)	10.9	7.7
Dismissals for misconduct	.06	.13
Disciplinary reports	.13	.03
PAI Total	2.16	4.68

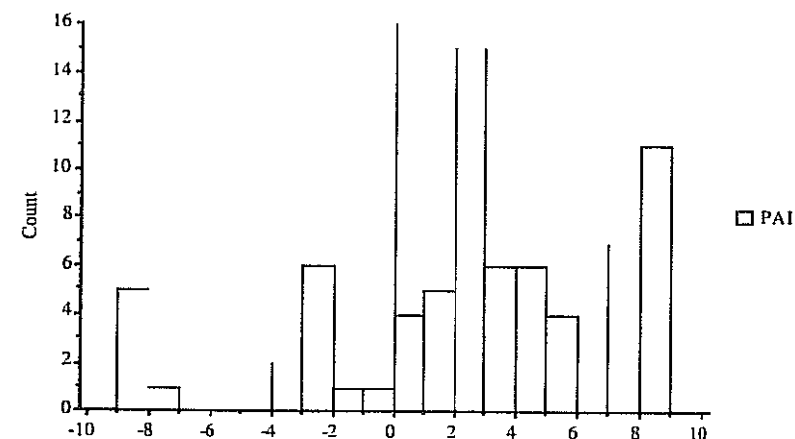


Figure 1: Frequency distribution of PAI scores.

Let us now take a look in the relationship between the degree of psychopathy and the scoring in PAI levels. Table 4 presents the distribution of the subjects in the five levels of PAI scores considered, that is, those two who represent a negative adaptation (≤ -4 ; $\leq -3 \leq -1$), the one which is in the middle (PAI score = 0) and the other two account for a positive adaptation ($\geq 1 \leq 3$; ≥ 4). Information is also provided for the average PCL-R scores and the percentage of subjects that, in each PAI level, reached a PCL-R score equal or superior to 30.

Table 4 - PCL-R scores and PAI levels in the sample

PAI	≤ -4 (N = 8)	$\leq -3 \leq -1$ (N = 8)	0 (N = 4)	$\geq 1 \leq 3$ (N = 26)	≥ 4 (N = 30)
PCL-R	M = 28.3 SD = 6.8	M = 26.1 SD = 7.6	M = 27.5 SD = 6.8	M = 21.4 SD = 6.9	M = 21.3 SD = 7.4
	Score ≥ 30 N = 5 (62.5%)	Score ≥ 30 N = 3 (37.5%)	Score ≥ 30 N = 1 (25%)	Score ≥ 30 N = 2 (7.7%)	Score ≥ 30 N = 6 (20%)

Statistical analysis showed that a significant and negative correlation ($r = -.34$) was reached between the PAI scores and the PCL-R scores meaning that as the later were higher the former tend to be more and more negative. Also, the average PCL-R score (M = 21.3; SD = 7.1) of the prisoners who showed good adjustment (PAI scores higher than zero) was significantly lower than the average PCL-

R score ($M = 27.2$; $SD = 7.0$) of those who showed a bad adjustment (Scheffe $F = 4.24$; $p = .0005$). Finally, if we look at both ends of Table 4 we can see that nearly two thirds of the ≤ -4 PAI group are psychopaths and only one fifth of the ≥ 4 PAI group present the same condition. All these data confirm the hypothesis that psychopaths present the worse prison adaptation profile.

5. | DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CORRECTIONAL POLICY

Although cautioned by sample size, our results confirm a significant relationship between psychopathy and prison maladjustment thus giving credit to the studies reported above that indicate that psychopaths tend to be involved in institutional problems while they are under custody (see Hare & Hart, 1993). However, these studies addressed mainly the question of violent and aggressive behaviors by psychopaths. Through the use of a more comprehensive concept in the present study of adaptation or adjustment to prison which deals with the measurement of violent and aggressive acts but also with other types of misbehaviors (e.g., being incapable to hold on a prison job), we think that a broader picture of psychopaths' behavior in prison is reached. In fact, it seems that as same as for their life in the outside world, where they can't keep a job for longer than a few months and their sensation-seeking proneness always stands ahead, in prison the same conduct pattern persists.

It becomes clear that the use of procedures for screening psychopaths in the correctional system is necessary and important to better knowledge of future adaptation outcomes. This is particularly relevant to the implement of measures concerning the separation of prisoners and their classification in order to put them in the most appropriate security units or establishments. Nowadays, in our country, prisoners are mainly assigned to the prisons based on age criteria or family/relatives location. Furthermore and since there are fewer prisons in the north of Portugal, which tend to be overcrowded, the assignment of the prisoners based only on these criteria can no longer be satisfying.

The use of the PCL-R, apart from detecting and differentiating psychopaths from non-psychopaths, brought also relevant data to the establishment of correctional classifying procedures, which in turn can be used for further assignments to prison work, school, training courses, mental care services or even security measures and later releasing measures (parole, conditional release).

Finally, and since psychopaths are a dangerous category of individuals, their appropriate screening allows the prison's administration to take on the necessary security measures and to establish rehabilitation programs, either for them or for other inmates who can profit more if they are properly grouped and separated from others whose psychopathic features tend to destroy the positive aims of these programs.

Last but no the least, one cannot forget the almost prophetic words of Menninger (1969, p. 262), who wrote that "prisoners are individuals, some want treatment some do not. Some don't know what treatment is." In other words, one must bear

in mind that working with offenders requires strong ethical standards, in order to understand and accept that some individuals, like most psychopaths, are adverse to treatment or to change their attitudes/behaviours, probably because if they do that they are no longer themselves. In other words, they may identify themselves as Lucifer when he told God that he preferred to remain as a prince in hell than to be a servant in heaven.

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