

The Effect of Different Personality Disorders on Criminal Behavior

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Abstract. Criminal behavior remains a pervasive issue in our society, and prior research has established a clear link between criminal behavior and personality disorders. While personality disorders are relatively uncommon in the general population, they are significantly more prevalent in prison populations, indicating a positive correlation. This study seeks to delve deeper into the relationship between criminal behavior and personality disorders, specifically exploring the various clusters of disorders as classified by DSM-V and their impact on criminal behavior. Previous studies have consistently shown that personality disorders are more prevalent in prison populations compared to the general public. For instance, according to DSM-IV, only 5.7% of the general population exhibited Cluster A personality disorders, 1.5% had Cluster B personality disorders, and 6% had Cluster C personality disorders. In contrast, in prison populations, these percentages often exceed 50% and can reach as high as 89%, underscoring a clear connection between the presence of personality disorders and criminal behavior. Interestingly, Cluster B personality disorders appear to be the most prevalent among criminals, despite having the lowest prevalence in the general population. They are followed by Cluster A disorders, with Cluster C personality disorders being the least common in prison populations, though still observable in samples. This suggests that each Cluster has its unique association with criminal behavior, aligning with its distinct characteristics. Furthermore, different personality disorders exhibit distinct relationships with criminal behavior. For instance, antisocial and borderline personality disorders, both belonging to Cluster B, are frequently prevalent in criminal populations and often rank as the two most common personality disorders among inmates. Conversely, schizoid and schizotypal personality disorders seem to be significantly associated with homicide. However, despite these findings, there is still a limited body of research that fully elucidates the connection between personality disorders and criminal behavior and the underlying mechanisms. Nevertheless, it appears that the symptoms associated with each personality disorder make individuals diagnosed with these disorders more predisposed to engage in criminal activities compared to those without such disorders.

Keywords: Criminal behavior, personality disorder.

1. Introduction

Crime, is, unfortunately, a prevalent part of our society. In 2017, it was estimated that 651,000 people were murdered worldwide. Currently, the highest rate of murder is in Jamaica, with an estimated of 52.13 murder victims per 100,000 people [1]. That's only murder, one of the more uncommon crimes – after all, most crime is mundane, nonviolent crimes. In 2020, there was a 30% increase in murder in the United States of America. In major cities of the US, homicides increased by 42.6% just from 2019 to 2022. Also in 2022, compared to 2021, robbery increased by 13%, motor vehicle thefts by 21%, and burglaries by 6% and 8%, according to their different categorizations [2].

It is clear that crime is a persisting issue in our societies that must be fixed if we wish for a safer, more stable life. Hence, there are many factors leading to crime or correlated to criminal behavior that we should investigate in detail. One of these factors is the prevalence of personality disorders – present in many criminals, both famous and unknown, this is a possible correlation that we should not overlook.

Personality disorder is defined as “an enduring pattern of inner experience that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual’s culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress or impairment”. According

to DSM-V (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition), personality disorders can be put into three groups with characteristics, with individuals with Cluster A disorders exhibiting “odd or eccentric” behavior, those with Cluster B disorders appearing “dramatic, emotional, or erratic”, and those with Cluster C disorders “often (appearing) anxious or fearful” [3]. Cluster A personality disorders encompass schizotypal, paranoid, and schizoid personality disorders. Cluster B personality disorders encompass narcissistic, borderline, antisocial, and histrionic personality disorders. Lastly, Cluster C disorders encompass obsessive-compulsive, avoidant, and dependent personality disorders.

Different personality disorders have also been found to differ in their individual relations with criminal behavior, with the different Clusters each showing a special relationship to criminal behavior. There are a few disorders that stood out, being present in famous criminals: in particular, you might recognize the names borderline personality disorder and anti-social personality disorder. Aileen Wuornos and Jeffery Dahmer were both diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD), while John Wayne Gacy, Dennis Rader, and Ted Bundy were all diagnosed with anti-social personality disorder (ASPD), with the latter commonly regarded as a prototypic case of ASPD. Many of these criminals were also diagnosed with or speculated to have other personality disorders, such as narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCD), and schizoid personality disorder.

Previous studies have shown that there is a relationship between someone having been diagnosed with one or more personality disorders and criminal behavior. Hence, through this study, I wish to investigate the possible correlations and relationships between the presence of personality disorder(s) and criminal behavior through reviewing related literature.

2. Personality Disorders and Criminal Behavior

2.1. The Relationship Between Personality Disorders and Criminal Behavior

In a research study conducted by Apostolopoulos, Michopoulos, Zachos and colleagues, among 308 randomly selected subjects in two Greek prisons, personality disorders were diagnosed in 89% of the prison population [4]. In another research study conducted by Flórez G et al. conducted on 204 inmates from a prison in Ourense, Spain, found that 50.5% of the inmates presented a personality disorder, with 24.01% of inmates in total (not in addition to the 50.5%) displaying two or more personality disorders. The second study also noted that, in international review studies, the average percentage was 47% while the prevalence rates in Spain vary between 30% and 76.7% [5].

In comparison to how common personality disorders are in the general population, the percentage of those in prisons is extremely high. In the study by Apostolopoulos et al., it was mentioned that according to the DSM-IV, out of everyone, 5.7% of people had Cluster A PDs, 1.5% of people had Cluster B PDs, 6% of people had Cluster C PDs, and in 9.1% of the cases, two or more personality disorders coexist in a person [4]. Compared to the percentages in prison populations – frequently, if not in most instances higher than 50% - it is apparent that personality disorders appear much more frequently in prison populations, denoting a connection between the two.

For Apostolopoulos’ study, out of the 308 prisoners in total, the highest number were diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), reaching up to 42.5%, following by borderline PD and narcissistic PD, at 15.9% and 7.8%, respectively. The remaining member of Cluster B personality disorders – histrionic personality disorder – was significantly lower, at 0.6%. At first glance, it seems that Cluster B PDs display the highest prevalence in criminals, though the anomalous result of histrionic PD needs to be further investigated [4]. Closely following is schizoid and paranoid PD, both at 7.1%, both of Cluster A PDs; the last member of their Cluster, schizotypal PD’s prevalence is 1.9%, displaying how Cluster A PDs seem to be more prevalent than Cluster C PDs in this sample. Both passive-aggressive PD and OCD show a higher prevalence than schizotypal PD, however, at 3.2% and 2.3%, respectively. It’s worth noting that the former hasn’t been classified as a member of one of the three Clusters. The remaining members of Cluster C personality disorders – avoidant PD

and dependent PD – are both at 0.3%, rounding out the last Cluster. From this study alone, it seems like Cluster B personality disorders show the highest prevalence – and hence, the highest correlation with criminal behavior, with Cluster A PDs following, Cluster C PDs at last, showing the least prevalence and the weakest correlation. It is also worth noting that in this study, the overall percentage of Cluster C personality disorders (approximately 2.9%) is lower than the percentage of those without personality disorders, at 10.7% [4].

In another study, Flórez found that out of the 204 prisoners, the most prevalent PD is narcissistic PD, at 21.08% among all prisoners, closely followed by ASPD at 18.63% and paranoid PD at 14.22%. Avoidant PD follows with 8.33%. Borderline PD and histrionic PD rounds up Cluster B personality disorders, with their prevalence at 7.35% and 6.37%, respectively. The remaining personality disorders – including schizoid, schizotypal, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive PD – show prevalence at zero or close to zero [5].

The results of this study and Apostolopoulos' study are rather different. For one, in the latter study, Cluster B personality disorders displayed the highest prevalence among prisoners, with ASPD at 42.5% of the general population (48% among all prisoners with diagnosed PD(s)) and the most prevalent personality disorder by close to 30%. In the second study, it was only at 18.63% for the general population (37% among all prisoners with diagnosed PD(s)) and not the most prevalent PD. In Flórez's study, a few personality disorders had percentages close to or at zero, such as schizoid, schizotypal, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive PD. Almost all of them were more prevalent in Apostolopoulos' study: OCD went from 2.3% to 0.98%; schizoid PD went from 7.1% to 0%; schizotypal PD went from 1.9% to 0.49%. Dependent PD's percentage actually increased, going from 0.3% to 0.98%. However, at the same time, personality disorders belonging to the three Clusters still showed clear differences. Cluster B disorders were still the most prevalent, at 67% and over 100% of the population with PDs (showing that many of those diagnosed with Cluster B PDs were also diagnosed with other PDs); Cluster A disorders followed, at 16% and 20%; with Cluster C disorders being the least prevalent.

Further studies supported this evidence. In a study by Whipp et al., ASPD was revealed to have a prevalence around 5% among a number of Finnish twins, but the prevalence rose to 40% when you test for ASPD in prison populations [6]. In a study by Azevedo et al., ASPD was revealed to reach up to 50% in prison populations [7]. A third article by Schnittker et al. further asserted that almost half of prisoners have been diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder, while the percentage falls sharply when it comes to the general population [8]. In another study by Jin et al., mainland China, out of 500 inmates from a male prison, 48 participants (9.6%) were put into the group who tested with high BPD symptoms and 234 participants (46.8%) were put into the group who exhibited low BPD symptoms. These classifications were done according to the MSI-BPD (The Mclean screening instrument for borderline personality disorder) due to a lack of official personnel able to diagnose prisoners with BPD [9].

Even in personality disorders that a large percentage of incarcerated people hasn't been diagnosed with, there is ample evidence to prove its relationship to criminal behavior. In the *Handbook of Crime Correlates*, a relationship between OCD and criminal behavior was also shown. The personality disorder has a comparatively low percentage in both prison populations and general populations, but for three of the four studies examined in the book, a positive relationship was shown between illicit behavior (such as violence, general law-breaking behavior, and drug usage) and the presence of that personality disorder, with the remaining study presenting non-significant findings [13].

Mundt et al. study revealed that BPD was commonly thought to be diagnosed in around half of the prison population while ASPD is commonly regarded as prevalent in more than half of the prison populations. The study, conducted on a sample of 427 imprisoned individuals in Santiago de Chile, only tested for two personality disorders, namely, the infamous borderline PD and antisocial PD but the combined percentage of these two reached up to 54.1%, with them each taking up 50.6% and 29.5% of the prison population, respectively [10]. In a case study on an offender of paternal filicide-suicide (performed filicide, attempted suicide but did not succeed) by Declercq et al., it was revealed

that schizoaffective disorders have been found to strongly associate with paternal and maternal filicide, which, in this case, includes schizoid and schizotypal PD. In this instance, the offender was strongly suspected to have schizoid personality disorder and sees the world, not himself, as the one in the wrong, which also contributed to his killing of his son, who he thought lived on another planet as him, so different were their thought processes [11]. Apostolopoulos et al.'s research study also revealed that both homicide and attempted homicide had significant correlations with both Schizotypal and Schizoid PD and that when it comes to sexual murderers, many are diagnosed with one of these two personality disorders [4].

2.2. How Personality Disorders Lead to Criminal Behavior

How exactly does the presence of personality disorders lead to an increase in criminal behavior? Well, in a study conducted by Apostolopoulos et al., they asserted that sexual murderers have often been found with a personality disorder, especially Schizoid and Schizotypal PD. These two disorders are characterized by a continuous detachment from personal relationships and a less flexible range of emotions when it comes to personal settings, and also continuously shown social deficits that manifests itself in the people's discomfort with personal relationships and eccentric behavior, respectively [3].

It was revealed that schizotypal features in children seem to make them victims to other children, which, in turn, could bring about violent behavior from them. The concept of neurobiological factors concerning the relation between Schizoid, Schizotypal PD, and homicides or other violent crimes was suggested in the study. Previous studies have suggested that the reward network for those with Schizotypal PD seemed to be different than those of the general population without this PD, shown by reports in which Schizotypal PD displayed heightened activation when it came to rewarding and recognition. The study suggests, hence, that since the two personality disorders are often perceived to be cold, this might be what is contributing to their association with lethal murders and otherwise deadly and violent crimes [4].

Studies on the relationship between borderline personality disorder and criminal behavior was also conducted. The personality disorder is characterized by instability in their relationships, self-image, as well as increased impulsivity [4]. In a study by Jin et al., it was shown that those who had a higher BPD score also showed high likelihoods of childhood maltreatment, especially in the area of neglect. It was inferred that maltreatment in a person's childhood can lead to them developing BPD and, hence, increase the rates for crimes of passion [9].

Other studies have also tried to focus on the relationship between ASPD and criminal behavior. This personality disorder is characterized by disregarding and even violating the rules of others through a continued period of time [4]. In a study by Schnittker et al., it's been observed that among a group of people who have had encounters with the justice system, from being on trial for their crime to actually having been imprisoned, that consistent irresponsibility, a symptom of ASPD (antisocial personality disorder) is the most prevalent symptom of ASPD, having shown a prevalence among 63% of adults [8].

In the book *Bad Boys, Bad Men* by Donald W. Black, those with ASPD are often seen as people who break rules in profusion, rebelling against all rules and expectations ever since they were children, and people who never learn from their mistakes, no matter how many times society tries to punish them for their behavior, from school punishments all the way to prison. Their behavior is stated as much more serious than normal people face – when we face punishment, we often get deterred and stop with our wrong behavior, while the behavior that those with ASPD is often chronic. This type of behavior, with the personality disorder even described as showing recurrent patterns of misbehavior, is what many believe to be the reason of the PD's extreme prevalence in prison populations. Its name is misleading – instead of being unable or unwilling to socialize with their peers, those with ASPD disregard social rules and social obligations that binds human relationships together, earning their name in this way [12].

Overall, how personality disorders lead to increased criminal behavior seems to be, still, a developing field of study – however, we can tell that the prevalence of personality disorders does seem to have an effect on criminal behavior.

3. Conclusion

The present study found that personality disorders in general show a much higher prevalence among prison populations than the general population. Each Cluster of personality disorder - which is split into three groups with related characteristics by DSM-5 - also showcases different relationships with criminal behavior. Cluster B disorders showed the highest prevalence in incarcerated personnel, followed by Cluster A disorders and Cluster C disorders. Out of those, antisocial personality disorder and borderline personality disorder, both belonging to Cluster B disorders, frequently showed the highest prevalence, while two Cluster A disorders, namely schizoid and schizotypal personality disorders frequently showed a high correlation with homicide and other violent crimes. Though the precise cause of the positive correlation between individuals diagnosed with one or more personality disorders and criminal behavior remains unclear, our leading hypothesis suggests that the symptoms associated with various disorders play a role in exacerbating their engagement in criminal activities. Acknowledging this connection represents the initial stride towards reducing the impact of crime on our society. Hopefully, in the future, we can mitigate the effect of having one or more personality disorders on criminal behavior, resulting in a safer society for us all.

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