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Military experience helps setting reasonable personality characteristics but does not alter the criminal behavior-related impression of negative parental experience and alcoholism in a Chinese population



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ABSTRACT

Personalities are determined by convergent factors, including physical environment, culture, special experience, and heredity. It has been shown that abuse of substance and alcohol among individuals with personality disorders predict criminality (Glenn and Raine, 2014; Hernandez-Avila et al., 2000). Thus, it is important to clarify the relationship between psychological characteristics and valence of criminal practice, even in the population without substance abuse. Here, we focused on a population with military experience in Shaanxi province of China to screen the psychological characteristics and correlate these characteristics to criminal behaviors. The study population included incarcerated veterans, incarcerated civilians, and three groups of military troops with different lengths of active duty history (< 1 month, 1 year, and 2 years). We used the MAST (Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test), EMBU (Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran), and 16PF (Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire) for the screening purpose. Eight hundred seventy-five valid packets of questionnaires were collected during November 2014–January 2015. Comparison of the mean scores was used to evaluate the difference among the five groups. Incarcerated veterans and incarcerated civilians shared the alcohol abuse-relevant characteristics, including negative parental attitudes during their childhood and decreased emotional stability. Compared to the incarcerated civilians, incarcerated veterans scored higher in emotional stability, self-reliance, and perfectionism, but a lower score in apprehension. Personality characteristics associated with criminal behavior of incarcerated veterans seem to be unrelated to their military service per se as evidenced by the control groups. Conversely, military service may benefit the personnel characteristics even in the incarcerated veteran population.

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1. Introduction

Numerous recent studies have examined war-precipitated problems in veterans (e.g., from the 1991 Gulf War, the Boer War, World War II, the Vietnam War, and peacekeeping operations), such as posttraumatic stress symptoms and unexplained physical symptoms (Black et al., 2005; Copeland et al., 2005; Eisen et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2003; McFall et al., 2005; Newby et al., 2005). With regard to criminal behavior of war veterans, it has been reported that although combat exposure may augment aggressive

tendencies, being afflicted with posttraumatic stress disorder does not appear to be a significant predictor of felonious behavior (Shaw et al., 1987). Additionally, a study observed that deployment was not a significant predictor of domestic violence in the early period of deployment (Newby et al., 2005). Meanwhile, a research based on 4179 US Vietnam War veterans revealed that hormone levels, which varied with demographic factors (i.e., age, social status, and race), correlated with a propensity for deviant behaviors (Mazur, 1995). Studies based on UK military personnel revealed that depression, anxiety, and alcohol misuse are most prevalent (Macmanus and Wessely, 2013; Murphy et al., 2008); consequently, the impetus for veteran care in the UK increased to a greater extent than in the US (Macmanus and Wessely, 2013). Furthermore, it is demonstrated that being a juvenile victim of physical or sexual abuse increased individual's risk of engaging in

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criminal behaviors, whereas self-efficacy, ego, integrity, and resilience characteristics decreased this risk (Benda et al., 2003). By contrast, there are relatively fewer studies based on Asian populations. The cultural defense strategy has been shown to excuse perpetrators from criminal prosecution in the American criminal courts (Reddy, 2002). A previous report by Hawkins et al. (1998) revealed that even in the same cultural environment, racial and ethnic differences played an important role in the number of serious juvenile and adult offenders in the US, but a newer report based on official record and self-report does not support this conclusion (Mansion and Chassin, 2016; Piquero and Brame, 2008). Thus, studies examining the psychological traits of post-employment veterans and their associations with criminal behaviors are needed to disentangle these incongruent findings, particularly among Asian populations.

Even though modern military personnel in many countries such as China are not commonly exposed to combat, many troops have difficulties in reintegrating into civilian life following their military service. These sufferings may attribute to abrupt differences between military and civilian lifestyles, challenging work content, job competition, lack of a higher education, and lack of economic resources. Those with poor adaptive abilities could end up unemployed and poor. Even worse, a minority portion of this population commits crimes and becomes a social encumbrance. Hence, developing an efficient evaluation system with psychological factors that may predict the criminal behaviors of the individuals with "early psychological markers" among the population of veterans and providing them with preventative interventions will greatly benefit themselves and our society.

Antisocial behaviors can originate in childhood (Jones et al., 2003), and high-risk social environments exacerbate the development of criminal vulnerabilities over time (Glenn and Raine, 2014). Risk factors related to social environment and individual characteristics can predict individuals' risks of committing crimes (Suh and Arthur, 2010). Antisocial tendencies in young adulthood has been linked to risk factors in childhood (Moffitt and Caspi, 2001; Moffitt et al., 2002). Consistent with these observations, a theory of developmental and life-course criminology proposed that criminal behavior could be predicted early in life. Criminal behavior of war veterans has been reported to be associated closely with personality traits, hereditary factors, and childhood experiences (Benda et al., 2003; Mazur, 1995; Shaw et al., 1987). Therefore, it is important to assess the relationship between psychological characteristics and criminal behaviors in incarcerated veterans.

Alcohol abuse is considered as a contributing factor for developing criminal behavior (Hernandez-Avila et al., 2000) and has been reported to have a hereditary component in criminal populations (Angela and Robin, 1998; Taylor, 1993; Taylor and Chermack, 1993). The Chinese version of the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) was used to measure participants' alcohol consumption (Xiangdong, 1993). The Chinese version of the Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (EMBU) is a 66-item questionnaire for the retrospective assessment of parental-rearing behavior in which questions are answered separately for the father and mother on a 4-point Likert-type scale. All the items are behavior oriented in their formulation without attribution evaluation. The EMBU is used to assess the attitudes of subjects' parents during child-rearing (from the subject's perspective) and the rearing practices that the participants experienced (Moffitt et al., 2002). The Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF), developed by Cattell, measures an individual's underlying "normal" personality traits. It is based on 16 primary factors or source traits believed to underlie an individual's total personality. Items for each factor are scored on a bipolar scale.

Our study used MAST, EMBU, and 16PF to screen the

Table 1
Conviction of incarcerated participants.

Conviction	Group (N = 175)		P
	Incarcerated veterans (n, %)	Incarcerated civilians (n, %)	
Violence	112, 64.23%	92, 52.57%	0.056, > 0.01
Robbery	11, 6.34%	11, 6.68%	
Larceny	52, 29.43%	72, 41.32%	

psychological characteristics and aimed to identify the factors that are most relevant to criminal behaviors in a population of Chinese incarcerated veterans never exposed to combat. Our findings may be useful for predicting the potential crime behaviors of veterans with aberrant scores evaluated by personality questionnaires and thus confer the potential early intervention for such individuals.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

The design of this study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Fourth Military Medical University. The study procedure was in accordance with WMA Declaration of Helsinki-Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects and the later versions and amended versions. All participants were of Chinese descent, and their written informed consent was obtained through the forms distributed to them.

We recruited participants for this study by advertisement through the Bureau of Prisons and Defense Manpower Department in Shaanxi province, China. In total, 200 incarcerated veterans and 200 incarcerated civilians who had never served in the military from six prisons were recruited for this study. In addition, 600 active-duty troops with different lengths of service duty were recruited from Shaanxi province to serve as nonincarcerated military control groups. The study covered five groups of participants: incarcerated veterans (3–5 years of military service), incarcerated civilians (never served in the military), new military troops (< 30 days), 1-year military troops, and 2-year military troops. Women were not included in our study because of the relatively small number of female veterans in the general population. We used an age range of 18–30 years so that all groups were constituted entirely of young adults. Thirty-five participants on average were requested to finish a pile of questionnaires in the same room within 2 h under the supervision of a professional psychological evaluation worker. All testing procedure lasted for 35 days.

2.2. Instruments and data collection

The questionnaire packet comprised the MAST, EMBU, and 16PF instruments, together with a demographic survey to collect data on age, race, educational level, and location of residence.

The MAST is a simple, self-scoring test that helps assess if an individual has a drinking problem. It consists of five scales: awareness of alcohol abuse by oneself or others; job and social problems; asking for help due to alcohol problems; having marriage and family problems; and having liver disease. The test comprises 24 questions. The score 0–3 means no apparent problem, "4" indicates early or middle problem drinker, and "5" or more indicate problem drinker (alcoholic) (Dong et al., 2015; Kano et al., 2014; Ohannessian et al., 2015).

The Chinese version of EMBU includes six paternal factors

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