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Interpersonal factors as predictors of disciplinary infractions in incarcerated personality disordered offenders

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Abstract

A number of studies suggest that personality factors, but particularly psychopathy, play a significant role in violence risk prediction. To date, there have been few studies looking at interpersonal style as a predictor of institutional violence. We examined the predictive validity of the Chart of Interpersonal Reactions in Closed Living Environments (CIRCLE) Dominance, Coercion and Hostility scales and the Psychopathy Checklist: Screening version (PCL:SV) for institutional aggression at 12 month follow-up in 100 personality disordered prisoners. We found that aggressive prisoners had significantly higher scores on the three key CIRCLE subscales and the PCL:SV than non-aggressive prisoners, but the CIRCLE subscales were statistically better predictors of any subsequent infraction, particularly verbal aggression, at 12-month follow-up based on subsequent predictive validity analyses. Survival analyses indicated that although the PCL:SV was better at distinguishing poor survival rates for any infraction and for physical violence, the CIRCLE subscales were better in distinguishing survival rates for verbal aggression. The findings suggest that the staff ratings of interpersonal style particularly CIRCLE Dominance, Coercion and Hostility may have some utility in the identification of those who will engage in disciplinary infractions in institutional care.

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Keywords: Interpersonal style; Psychopathy; Disciplinary infractions; Prediction

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1. Introduction

In interpersonal theory, personality disorders can be conceptualised as relatively stable maladaptive styles of self-representation that are reciprocally reinforced or validated by reactions from others. There is now a significant body of research indicating that interpersonal variables can be represented by the interpersonal circle (Leary, 1957; Wiggins, 1982), in which variables form a circumplex around two orthogonal dimensions of power (dominance versus submission) and affiliation (hostility versus nurturance). Interpersonal style can be assessed using self-report measures (Wiggins & Pincus, 1992), but scales to operationalise the social behaviour of incarcerated offenders by key workers have also been developed (Blackburn & Renwick, 1996). The latter have particular utility in the assessment of deviant interpersonal styles in forensic samples where reliance on self-report measures may be questionable.

The potential for violent behaviour by prison inmates, both during incarceration and subsequent to release, is a major concern for both prison staff and society at large. One approach to the prevention and management of institutional risk is the use of classification systems to identify high-risk cases and to allocate resources accordingly (Van Voorhis, 1994). Over the last two decades a significant literature has emerged to suggest that psychopathy assessed using the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R: Hare, 1991) or the Psychopathy Checklist Screening Version (PCL-SV, Hart, Cox, & Hare, 1995) is one of the most robust predictors of recidivism and violence across cultures (see Dolan & Doyle, 2000; Hare, Clark, Grann, & Thornton, 2000; Hart, 1998; Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell, 1996; for reviews). Indeed several violence risk assessment tools such as the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG; Harris, Rice, & Quinsey, 1993; Quinsey, Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 1998) and the Historical-Clinical-Risk Management 20 item scale (HCR-20; Webster, Douglas, Eaves, & Hart, 1997) include psychopathy as core component of the assessment of violence risk. Although all of these measures were developed and evaluated in North American samples, there are now several international studies pointing to the utility of these measures in a range of settings (see Douglas & Weir, 2003 for overview).

To date, there is relatively little data on the predictive validity of psychopathy for institutional misconduct and violence in correctional or forensic settings. Early studies using the PCL and PCL-R reported significant correlations with various forms of inmate behaviour (Forth, Hart, & Hare, 1990; Hare & McPherson, 1984; Wong, 1984), although many have subsequently been criticised for using non-independent criterion measures (Cunningham & Reidy, 1998). Data emerging from forensic psychiatric patient samples have produced either modest associations between psychopathy and institutional violence (Doyle, Dolan, & McGovern, 2002; Heilbrun et al., 1998; Hill, Rogers, & Bickford, 1996) or have failed to replicate the findings in general populations of prison inmates (Kosson, Steuerwald, Forth, & Kirkhart, 1997; Serin, 1991).

In recent years there have also been developments in the systematic assessment of interpersonal style in institutional settings based on staff ratings (Blackburn & Renwick, 1996). The latter authors developed the Chart of Interpersonal Reactions in Closed Living Environments (CIRCLE) staff-rated measure to assess interpersonal style in mentally disordered offenders. The derivation and replication samples were recruited from high security hospital patients detained under the legal categories of Mental Illness and Psychopathic Disorder and the initial scale consisted of 49 items. Following extraction of the first two principal components from the inter-correlations of the 49 items they formed octant scales on the basis of item similarity in content and position in

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