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Criminal characteristics of a group of primary criminals diagnosed with aspd: approach to criminal recidivism

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) is commonly associated with the risk of criminal recidivism. Knowing more about the factors associated with this pattern of behaviour can help with the design of effective prevention strategies. The purpose of this article is to establish if there are differences in socio-criminogenic variables of a group of criminals sentenced for the first time and with APSD compared to another group of first-time offenders who do not present this disorder.

Materials and methods: Analytical observation study of 70 men classified into 2 groups according to the presence of ASPD TPA (n=47; age: 29.98±7.8 years) or absence of ASPD (n=23; age: 32.35±8.7 years).

Results: The inmates with ASPD showed higher frequencies of current consumption of psychoactive substances (31.9%), criminal associations and simultaneous use of psychoactive substances (70.2%), having committed the crime under the effects of a psychoactive substance (55.3%), not having the possibility of distancing themselves from criminal associations (83%) and a lack of legal resources for proceedings for defence and release (76.6%).

Discussion: This sample contains a group of variables called dynamic that are more commonly present amongst first time offenders with ASPD; said variables have been associated as major predictors of recidivism. Given that they are regarded as dynamic, they may well be modifiable.

Keywords: prisons; antisocial personality disorder; substance-related disorders; Latin America; Colombia; theft; prisoners; risk factors.

INTRODUCTION

A threefold increase of thefts throughout the last 25 years, over 460 victims of sexual abuse a day and 100,000 direct victims of homicide every year [1] have made out of Latin America the most dangerous region in the world [2]. Most specifically, Colombia presents an exceptionally high criminal rate, which has encouraged the interest of the legislative power for deprivation of liberty as a control measure, with entails the country being where this measure is mostly used (161,477 inmates). In this context, despite the 3.5 billion pesos investment in the penitentiary system throughout recent years, overcrowding reaches 55%,

14.6% of which is directly associated with recidivism (INPEC, 2015) [3]. This figure jeopardizes guaranteeing prisoners' fundamental rights and impedes the development of treatment programs aimed at socially reintegrating this population [3].

Despite this scenario and the fact that penitentiary treatment should be focused on inmates' personality, their criminal profile in favor of reintegration and non-recidivism [4], Colombia lacks relevant studies establishing the relationship between social and crime-encouraging features and antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) whose presence has been associated with the repetition of criminal activities and the subsequent increased risk for recidivism, which can be

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increased up to four times in the presence of ASPD [5]. This has been recently contrasted in the meta-analysis by Bonta, Blains and Wilson [6] who identified through the analysis of 126 studies with 96 single samples, that this disorder constitutes one of the predictors with a strongest interference (d=0.54; 95% CI= 0.43-0.65). The meta-analysis by Hanson and Morton-Bourgon [7] concluded similar results by analyzing 82 studies with sex offenders, in which ASPD was underlined among the most relevant predictors for violent recidivism.

Other factors associated with recidivism are those proposed by Andrews and Bonta [8] through their risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model, which establishes a series of static and dynamic factors. According to their nature, or as a part of the personal history of the individual, static factors are not subject to modification while dynamic factors, associated with the antisocial lifestyle, are. Based on this proposal, eight predictors for criminal conduct have been identified. The first group includes the record of antisocial behavior, antisocial personality pattern, antisocial cognition and relationships with antisocial groups. The second group, of moderate incidence, includes aspects related with family, school and/or work, recreational activities and psychoactive substance abuse [9, 10].

Accordingly, this paper aims at analyzing the relationship between ASPD and social and criminal-encouraging variables which can support the identification of potential predisposing factors for recidivism. Therefore, a group of male inmates hosted in a prison in Colombia was assessed divided into two groups according to the presence or absence of ASPD. The main purpose of this work is to provide valid knowledge useful for Colombia's penitentiary system to design specific and differentiating strategies for inmates with ASPD aimed at a successful social reintegration and therefore a reduction of the risk for recidivism by acting on the relevant social and crime-encouraging variables.

Material and Methods

The design of the study is observational analytical and it was carried out in a correctional facility in Bucaramanga which hosts population from the Department of Santander (Colombia). The facility hosts approximately 1320 inmates of whom 98 at the time of the study were in a minimum-security stage, one of the final stages of the five stages included in the progression of correctional treatment in the prison system in Colombia.

To define the sample under study the facility's database was searched to determine what inmates fulfilled the inclusion criteria: deprivation of liberty, first-time conviction and minimum-security stage. Out of the 98 inmates included in the minimum-security stage, twenty-three were repeat offenders, two presented severe mental conditions and three refused to participate.

The final sample included seventy males aged between 20 and 57 (30.97±8.12) convicted and imprisoned for the first time for several types of offences. 45.7% were single, followed by 37.1% who reported consensual union and 17.1% who were either married or divorced. Moreover, 78.6% had not completed their secondary education and only 5.7% had accessed superior education. Prior to imprisonment, 62.9% were engaged in informal work activities, 10% in formal works and 27.1% were unemployed. 95.7% of the individuals belonged to low and medium-low socioeconomic strata. All of them provided written informed consent after receiving information on the objectives of the study and its anonymous nature.

All of them underwent an individual semi-structured interview to gather the relevant information. A specific form was designed and provided to collect information on socio-criminal variables.

This tool assesses seven dimensions with 71 structured questions designed in different categorical answer formats. The dimensions include the following areas: individual, social, educational, familiar, work, criminal and penitentiary context. This tool intended to measure dynamic and static variables considered in Andrews and Bonta Risk-Need-Responsivity model [8].

The classification criterion to include individuals in each of the analysis groups was the presence or absence of ASPD according to the 84 cut-off point suggested by some authors[11, 12] for the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI-II) which has shown appropriate criteria of validity and reliability[13, 14]. Those individuals with scores of 84 or more where considered positive for ASPD: 47 people (67.1%) aged 29.98 ± 7.8; and those with lower scores were included in the no-ASPD group: 23 inmates /32.9%) aged 32.35±8.7.

For the statistical analysis, SPSS software version 23.0 was used. In the description of demographic variables, frequency measures were used for qualitative variables and trend and dispersion measures for quantitative variables. To establish whether there were statistically significant differences in the frequencies of socio-criminal features between groups, Pearson chi-square test was used in bivariate contrast.

To explore the association hypothesis between the presence of antisocial personality disorder and socio-criminal variables the strength of the association

was assessed by means of multivariate logistic regression through the "enter" method with the significant variables. In accordance with the recommendations of the literature on the report of logistic regression models[15], Hosmer-Lemeshow chi-square statistical model[16] was used to determine the goodness of fit.

Results

44.3% of the sample is imprisoned and serves a sentence for aggravated theft, followed by drug trafficking and possession (27.1%). 78.1% takes the responsibility for the offence and the rest does not. 48.6% reports the victim being responsible for the offence. Likewise, 28.6% reports crime as a lifestyle.

Table 1 depicts those socio-criminal variables which were statistically significant in both groups. It is clear that individuals with ASPD present at higher frequencies variables which entail a poorer prognosis for re-offence such as: current use of psychoactive substances (PAS) (31.9%), social links associated to crime and PAS simultaneously (70.2%), having committed the crime for which the sentence us being served under the effects of psychoactive substances (55.3%), inability to walk away from criminal bonds and PAS use (83%) and lack of judicial resources for freedom procedures (76.6%).

Last, as to estimate the strength and direction of the association between antisocial personality disorder and socio-criminal variables, multivariate logistic regression analysis was carried out. Co-variables included in the equation were: "having committed the crime under the effect of some PAS", "current use of PAS", "ability to walk away from antisocial bonds and PAS" and "criminal bonds with PAS". Table 2 shows the results.

This analysis shows how when the aforementioned results are adjusted by means of a multivariate method, most of the associations are no longer significant. This can be due to the sample size, with a poor statistical power. However, in this analysis it is worth considering that having committed the crime under the effect of psychoactive substances is associated with the ASPD group (OR=3.91; 95% CI 1.050-14.563). Thus, this feature is prototypical of inmates with antisocial personality disorder.

Table 1. Socio-criminal differences according to the presence or absence of ASPD.

SOCIO-CRIMINAL FEATURE	No ASPD N = 23	ASPD N = 47	$\chi^{2\,a*}$	P value
	N (%)			
Current use of psychoactive substances (PAS)	2 (8.7)	15 (31.9)	4.528	0.033
Criminal and PAS bonds	9 (39.1)	33 (70.2)	6.216	0.013
Commission of crime under the effect of PAS	7 (30.4)	26 (55.3)	3.838	0.050
Inability to walk away from criminal bonds and PAS use	14 (60.9)	39 (83)	4.105	0.043
Lack of judicial resources for freedom procedures	12 (52.2)	36 (76.6)	4.274	0.039

Note. ASPD = Antisocial personality disorder PAS = Psychoactive substances
[a] Chi-Pearson chi-square. *Significant in all contrasts

Table 2. Variables associated with the presence of Antisocial Personality Disorder according to MCMI-II in a group of inmates with ASPDS.

	b (ET)	*Wald*	*OR*	*95% CI*
Constant	-1.113	2.118	0.328	
Current use of psychoactive substances (PAS)	1.520	3.100	4.572	0.842-24.83
Criminal and PAS bonds	0.797	1.692	2.219	0.668-7.379
Commission of crime under the effect of PAS	**1.364**	**4.132***	**3.910**	**1.050-14.563**
Inability to walk away from criminal bonds and PAS use	1.295	3.179	3.653	0.879-15.174
Lack of judicial resources for freedom procedures	-1.126	3.313	0.324	0.096-1.090

Notes. OR in bold indicate a direct relationship with ASPD. R^2 =0,350 (Nagelkerke).
Model $\chi^2_{(8)}$ =4.78 p = 0,784. Statistical significance for Wald statistics: *p<0.05.

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DISCUSSION

As far as we know, this is the first study to focus on socio-criminal variables of the Colombian imprisoned population according to the presence or absence of antisocial personality disorder. General results point out that this population has been convicted for theft, drug trafficking and possession and that over 25% have had these behaviors throughout their lives. It is worth underlining that most of them although considering themselves responsible for their actions also assign responsibility to victims.

With regard to the contrast between groups, we found that some features such as the use of psychoactive substances, the presence of antisocial bonds, the inability to walk away from other PAS users and a lack of judicial resources for freedom procedures are significantly more frequently associated with the presence of antisocial personality disorder. Variables found to be strong predictors for re-offence according to the Andrews-Bonta model[8], can be subject to modification through penitentiary treatment.

However, when contrasting the results of this study with the factors which according to the aforementioned model entail a higher risk for re-offence, we found that a history of antisocial behavior was only present in one fourth of the population and had no significant association; contrary to the presence of antisocial/criminal bonds. With regard to moderate-incidence factors[8], this study found differences in the use of psychoactive substances, which could entail that some of the secondary variables be subject to the presence or absence of antisocial personality disorder and thus, to the risk of criminal re-offence[5, 7].

Last, by means of the multivariate analysis including the aforementioned factors, we found a strong association between the presence of antisocial personality disorder and having committed the crime under the effect of psychoactive substances. Although this is a static variable[8] (it belongs to the past of individuals), it is worth considering it as a predictor for re-offence[9, 10]. The limitations of this study include the small sample size since it only included one of the three facilities in Bucaramanga. Although socio-criminal variables were measured by means of a specifically designed tool, it underwent a validity assessment process by a panel of experts and is currently used as a common tool for standardized data collection in the facility.

In summary, this study shows that the presence or absence of antisocial personality disorder coexists with a series of variables that are most frequently associated to the disorder. IN view that the presence of ASPD increases the risk for re-offence, it is relevant that the correctional system develops measures to assess this issue.

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