



Examining the relationship between early maladaptive schemas, criminal thinking styles and personality disorders within an offender population

BIGSPD Conference 2017

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Background

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As part of the course I completed a work placement at the Westgate Personality Disorder Treatment Service (PD TS) at HMP Frankland

During this placement I completed my dissertation using data from past/present inmates on the unit

The PD TS at Westgate is a purpose built unit housing the PD TS (N=65) and a PIPE (N=22). It has been operational since 2004, initially as part of the DSPD project, but, more recently, as one of the two high secure assessment and treatment facilities within the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway.

Abbreviations

PICTS- Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles

YSQ- Young Schema Questionnaire

YSQ-SF- Young Schema Questionnaire Short Form

IPDE- International Personality Disorder Examination

EMS- Early Maladaptive Schemas

PD- Personality Disorder

DSPD Pathway- Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorder Pathway

OPD Pathway- Offender Personality Disorder Pathway

DSM-V- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition

NOMS- National Offender Management Service

Objectives

To identify whether the levels of Early Maladaptive Schemas (EMS) and Criminal Thinking Styles were associated with overall number of PD diagnoses

To identify whether any specific subscales on the Young Schema Questionnaire Short Form (YSQ-SF) and the Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS) were associated with overall number of PD diagnoses

To identify whether EMS or Criminal Thinking Styles were more strongly associated with overall number of personality disorder (PD) diagnoses

Introduction

PDs reported in research to be more prevalent within forensic populations (60-70%) than they are the general population (4-11%) (DH/NOMS Offender Personality Disorder Team 2011)

Research suggests a potential explanation for this is PDs are associated with increased levels of traits which are often associated with criminality

E.g. Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) has been linked to anger (New et al, 2009), which has in turn been linked to criminality, with Agnew (1992) stating that according to strain theory it is one of the emotions positively associated with criminal behaviour; Långström et al (2004) linked PD diagnoses to recidivism

Introduction

This increased prevalence has subsequently resulted in research focusing more on PDs and criminal behaviour

The need for this focus has been exacerbated by the abolishment of the Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorder (DSPD) Pathway, and its replacement by the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) Pathway

One of the more prominent theories of the origin of PDs is the cognitive-behavioural approach, which explains that PD sufferers distort both what they observe, as well as the reinforcement of their behaviours which results in behaviours being performed which are not the social norm (Alwin et al, 2006)

These distortions are thought to be the result of schemas

Introduction

In 1990, Young first suggested the theory of EMS (Young, 2002); measured by the YSQ

Schemas thought to develop during adolescence as a result of an individual's interactions and relationships with others, and are described as "broad, pervasive themes or patterns" (Soygüt et al, 2009, p1)

The rigid nature of schemas is considered by literature to be problematic, as it could lead to negative thoughts (Jovev and Jackson, 2004)

Research has investigated EMS in terms of PDs within an offender population e.g. Gilbert and Daffern (2013) which found YSQ scores were positively associated with a range of PDs

Introduction

Criminal Thinking Styles are described by Walters as crime-supporting cognitive patterns, explaining that the earlier an individual begins to engage in criminality, the deeper-rooted these cognitive patterns are

They're measured by the PICTS; higher scores represent increased levels of criminal thinking

Literature calls for an increased focus on the PICTS and its use within prison populations in the UK (Walters, 1995)

Research has subsequently extended towards the relationship between the PICTS and PDs in prison populations, although such research is relatively limited (Bulten et al, 2009)

Introduction

The rationale for the current research was the population of the Westgate Unit as a whole had never previously been examined in terms of EMS/Criminal Thinking Styles and PDs

The work was particularly relevant given the Westgate Unit's anticipated increase in population size due to the increased number of referrals as a result of the OPD Pathway's implementation (Bennet, 2015)

The hypothesis of the research was that both EMS and Criminal Thinking Styles would be positively related to overall number of PD diagnoses

Methodology

Sample consisted of 110 past/present inmates of the Westgate unit; due to incomplete data 102 and 103 participants' data was included in the respective analyses

These participants were chosen for the study due to them having previously completed the YSQ and the PICTS, as well as having had the International Personality Disorder Examination (IPDE) completed for them

Some participants had completed the YSQ and PICTS multiple times; to ensure demand characteristics did not influence the findings, only participants' first completion of the psychometrics was used in the analysis

Methodology

The IPDE is used to give a definite/partial/absent diagnosis of the ten DSM-V PDs; consists of a screening questionnaire and a semi-structured interview

The YSQ consists of 75 items scored on a Likert scale with responses ranging from 1- Completely untrue of me, to 6- Describes me perfectly; split into 5 domains: Disconnection/Rejection; Impaired Autonomy/Performance; Impaired Limits; Other-Directedness; Over vigilance/Inhibition

The PICTS consists of 80 items scored on a Likert scale with responses ranging from 1-strongly agree, to 4- disagree; split into 10 subscales- 8 thinking styles and 2 validity subscales*: Confusion*; Defensiveness*; Mollification; Cut-off; Entitlement; Power Orientation; Sentimentality; Superoptimism; Cognitive Indolence; Discontinuity

Methodology

The current research was a secondary data analysis, as all data analysed had already been collected as part of the assessment phase new inmates on the unit undergo

The data from the psychometrics and IPDE were stored on a password protected file on a computer on the Westgate Unit

Upon receiving ethical approval from both Newcastle University and National Offender Management Service (NOMS), the researcher was permitted to access this data

Results

Once the data had been checked to ensure it met the assumptions necessary to perform a multiple regression analysis, the analysis was performed

During this analysis, a correlational analysis was performed on the data

	No. Total Diagnoses
PICTS Total score	.249*
Confusion	.253*
Defensiveness	-.065
Mollification	.186*
Cut-off	.266*
Entitlement	.235*
Power Orientation	.261*
Sentimentality	.131
Superoptimism	.082
Cognitive Indolence	.255*
Discontinuity	.233

	No. Total Diagnoses
YSQ Total Score	.399*
Disconnection/Rejection	.443*
Impaired Autonomy/Performance	.303*
Other-Directedness	.215*
Over vigilance/Inhibition	.348*
Impaired Limits	.219*

Results

The first multiple regression analysis used the data from 102 participants; the predictor variables were the total score on the PICTS and scores on its ten subscales (including two validity scales)

It found that total score on the PICTS was significantly positively associated with overall number of PD diagnoses; the 'Entitlement' and 'Superoptimism' subscales also showed this relationship with PDs

Results

The second multiple regression analysis used the data of 103 participants; the predictor variables were the total score on the YSQ-SF and scores on its 5 domains

The regression showed that total score on the YSQ-SF displayed a significant positive relationship with overall number of PD diagnoses

Similarly, the 'Disconnection and Rejection' domain was shown by the regression to have a significant positive relationship

Total YSQ score was found to have a stronger relationship with overall number of PD diagnoses than total PICTS score

Discussion

The results showed that EMS and Criminal Thinking Styles were positively associated with overall number of PD diagnoses; this was in keeping with the hypothesis of the research

The significant relationship found when the PICTS' 'Entitlement' and 'Superoptimism' subscales were analysed could potentially be attributed to the fact that features of these subscales include behaviours similar to arrogance e.g. belief they can get away with crimes; belief they have a right to possess things

This overlaps with the features of several PDs, including Narcissistic PD which is characterised by several features, including arrogance

In relation to the cognitive-behavioural theory of PDs, it could subsequently be argued that sufferers of such PDs are more likely to experience distortions associated with these thinking styles

Discussion

The significant result found when the 'Disconnection and Rejection' YSQ domain could potentially be attributed to an individual experiencing a difficult childhood

Individuals who score highly on this domain has been identified by research as more likely to have experienced such a childhood (Young, 2002)

This is a feature which could overlap with several PDs, as research has identified PDs including Borderline PD to be linked to a difficult childhood (Perry and Herman, 1993)

The cognitive-behavioural explanation of PDs could be used to argue that PDs causing the misinterpretation of events to fit the disconnection and rejection schema is the result of a negative childhood

Discussion

In terms of previous research, overall, the findings of the current research is similar, in that it identified a relationship between PDs and EMS/Criminal Thinking Styles

Some previous literature identified a similar result within an offender population e.g. Jovev et al (2004) also found a significant relationship when analysing the 'Disconnection and Rejection' domain, finding it to be positively related to Borderline PD

However, there were some differences e.g. the aforementioned work also found a significant result for the 'Impaired Limits' domain

This could potentially be due to the current research's focus on overall number of PD diagnoses, as opposed to some other literature's focus on individual PDs

Strengths and Limitations

Demand characteristics were controlled for during the study

However, the fact that both the YSQ and PICTS are self-report questionnaires creates several issues

E.g. dependent on participants to be motivated to complete the questionnaire (Walters, 2005) - could be responsible for the incomplete data of some participants

Additionally, the self-report nature means that participants could potentially provide dishonest responses (Seigfried et al, 2008)

Implications

The research's main implication is that it strengthens the argument from previous research that EMS/Criminal Thinking Styles are both linked to PD diagnoses in offender populations

The identification of significant domains/subscales offers greater insight into PDs within an offender population

This could also offer potential future directions for treatment, as the identification of overlaps in characteristics between PICTS/YSQ domains and PD diagnoses potentially offers new focuses for treatments

E.g. Individuals who score highly on the entitlement thinking style could undergo treatment programmes addressing arrogance, as the findings of this research suggest such characteristics could be linked to their offending

Future Research

In the same manner that PD diagnoses was focused on in the current research, psychopathy and its relationship with EMS/Criminal Thinking Styles could be focused on in future work

Additionally, EMS/Criminal Thinking Styles could be examined in relation to specific offence types, which would potentially further expand options for treatment of offenders convicted of specific offences

A further suggestion would be for future research to compare EMS/Criminal Thinking Styles of a clinical forensic population to a mainstream forensic population

Summary

YSQ-SF and PICTS scores were positively associated with number of PD diagnoses

Suggests that EMS and Criminal Thinking Styles are linked to PDs in offenders, potentially explaining the higher prevalence of PDs in forensic populations

The identification of significant subscales and domains could be argued as providing greater insight into how PDs influence offender's behaviour, subsequently offering potential new focuses for treatment programmes

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