



Violence risk assessment in forensic psychology office: from childhood to elderly

Ricardo Ventura Baúto, Ana Filipa Carreiro, Margarida Pereira & Iris Almeida

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Traumatic experiences in a lifetime: impact on the connection with others and the role of emotions

Bruno J. Morgado^a, Gonçalo F. Rodrigues^a, Marco R. Filipe^a, Vanessa S. Madureira^a and Telma C. Almeida^{a,b}

^aInstituto Universitário Egas Moniz (IUEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal; ^bLaboratório de Psicologia Egas Moniz (LabPSI-EM), Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Traumatic events in a lifetime have an impact on the connection with others [1] and on emotional regulation in adults [2]. In the present study, we aim to analyse the relationship between traumatic events and the connection with others and to verify the relationship between traumatic events and emotional regulation.

Materials and methods: The study design is descriptive, observational, and cross-sectional. The sample consisted of 63 Portuguese adults divided into two groups according to whether participants had experienced traumatic events (G1: $n = 28$, 44.4%) or not (G2: $n = 35$, 55.6%) with ages between 18 and 61 years old ($M = 28.78$, $SD = 12.61$). The link to the study was disclosed by e-mail and in social networks. Participants answered online to a sociodemographic questionnaire, the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) [3], the Adult Attachment Scale-R (AAS-R) [4], and the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) [5]. The study was conducted in accordance with all the ethical principles.

Results: There were significant statistical differences between G1 and G2 on the total scale of the CTQ [$F(1,61) = 11.510$, $p = .001$], and in the subscales Emotional Abuse, Anxiety, and Trusting Others. The total score of the CTQ showed a negative correlation with the Trusting Others ($r = -0.299$, $p < .05$) and a positive correlation with the total score of the DERS ($r = 0.281$, $p < .05$), and with Limited Access to Regulatory Strategies ($r = 0.337$, $p < .05$). There was a positive association between Emotional Abuse and Anxiety ($r = 0.413$, $p < .05$). The Emotional Neglect and the Physical Neglect showed correlations with the DERS, Inability to Engage in Goal-Directed Behaviour, Difficulty to Control Behaviour, and Limited Access to Regulatory Strategies.

Discussion and conclusions: Participants who didn't experience trauma revealed higher scores of connections with others. Our results also demonstrate that victims of trauma in childhood develop dysfunctional patterns of emotions [6]. This research highlights the negative consequences of child abuse in adults, concerning emotional regulation and connecting with others.

CONTACT Gonçalo F. Rodrigues  goncalo_rodrigues95@hotmail.com

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Violence risk assessment in forensic psychology office: from childhood to elderly

Ricardo Ventura Baúto^{a,b,c}, Ana Filipa Carreiro^{a,d}, Margarida Pereira^{a,d} and Iris Almeida^{a,b,c,d}

^aLaboratório de Ciências Forenses e Psicológicas Egas Moniz (LCFPem), Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal; ^bCentro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal; ^cLaboratório de Psicologia Egas Moniz (LabPSI-EM), Centro de Investigação

Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal; ^dInstituto Universitário Egas Moniz (IUEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the work developed by the Forensic Psychology Office (GPF) at Forensic Sciences and Psychology Laboratory located at the Egas Moniz Higher Education School. GPF's main goals are performing forensic psychological assessments, especially violence risk assessments, as well as scientific research. The main purpose of violence risk assessment is the prevention and development of management strategies to minimise risk and try to identify factors that may contribute to the violent behaviour [1] supporting the criminal justice system in allocating more appropriate measures (e.g. sentence, intervention) [2]. GPF presents itself as the main response to cases with higher complexity and it provides guidance about the necessary measures to protect victims [3,4].

Materials and methods: This is a quantitative study and the sample ($n=90$) is derived from violence risk assessments of GPF (2016–2019). We evaluate 52 victims: 39 women/girls and 13 man/boys, aged between 5 and 95 years old ($M=33.04$, $SD=21.82$); and 38 defendants: 30 men and 8 women, aged between 23 and 82 years old ($M=44.64$, $SD=14.75$). Data was collected from lawsuits, semi-structured interviews of the victims and defendants, collateral information and clinical and forensic assessment tools. All participants signed an informed consent term, which contained the purpose of the assessment, the limits of the confidentiality, and also information about the ethics and technicians impartiality. All ethical principles have been taken due to the sensitive nature of the data involved and the respective informed consent.

Results: In 90 criminal processes assessed, 66 cases was about reported situations of domestic violence. In these cases the relationship between victims and defendants was: 33 ex-partners; 12 ex-spouses; 10 ex-boyfriend/girlfriend; 6 married; 3 parents and 2 son/daughter. We assessed 11 child abuse cases (5 parents; 3 relatives; 2 son/daughter; 1 stepdaughter). We also evaluate 9 child sex abuse cases (2 son/daughter; 2 classmates; 2 stepdaughters; 2 relatives and 1 stranger). Finally, we evaluate 4 elderly abuse cases (2 relatives; 1 son/daughter and 1 parent). In the violence risk assessments, most of the cases presented high risk level ($n=33$, 36.7%), followed by moderate risk ($n=23$, 25.6%) and low risk ($n=11$, 12.2). In defendant's testimony credibility, 39.5% ($n=15$) was undetermined, 34.2% probably not credible ($n=13$), 7.9% ($n=3$) probably credible and 2.6% ($n=1$) did not collaborate in the assessment. In victim's credibility of testimony, 73.1% ($n=38$) was probably credible, 15.4% ($n=8$) undetermined and 3.8% ($n=2$) probably not credible.

Discussion and conclusions: Higher and moderate risk are the most common levels in the Office assessed cases. These results demonstrate evidences of violence risk assessment importance in criminal justice system and an good practices example between Forensic Psychology and Law. Currently, through psychological assessment protocols defined for this purpose, the GPF has contributed to supporting the criminal justice system in allocating measures that are more appropriate to protect victims.

CONTACT Ricardo Ventura Baúto  rbauto.lcfpem@egasmoniz.edu.pt

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Vulnerable victims in court: from childhood to senescence

Iris Almeida^{a,b,c,d,e}, Ana Filipa Fernandes^e, Catarina Frade^e, Carolina Nobre^e and Lúcia Osório^e

^aInstituto Universitário Egas Moniz (IUEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal; ^bCentro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal; ^cLaboratório de Psicologia Egas Moniz (LabPSI-EM), Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal; ^dLaboratório de Ciências Forenses e Psicológicas Egas Moniz (LCFPem), Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Egas Moniz Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, Caparica, Portugal; ^eGabinete de Informação e Atendimento à Vítima – Espaço Cidadania e Justiça (GIAV – Egas Moniz/DIAP Lisboa), Lisboa, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The trial process is usually stressful for victims. Testifying in criminal court must cope potentially traumatising effects and implies recalling and evoking a crime. Such act tends to be a revictimization [1–3]. Several studies have shown that re-traumatization of victims in criminal justice process has serious problems [3]. The article 271 of the Portuguese Code of Criminal Procedure allows the prosecutors and the inquiring judge to record the victim's testimony