

Risk and protective factors in criminal recidivist inmates

Sara Sousa, Jorge Cardoso & Pedro Cunha

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Forest arson in Portugal: criminal behaviour and gender differences

Jéssica Rolho^a and Cristina Soeiro^b

^aFaculty of Psychology of University of Lisbon, Lisboa; ^bCenter of Multidisciplinary Investigation Egas Moniz, Monte Caparica and Escola da Polícia Judiciária, Loures

Introduction/Background: Firesetting refers to the intentional act of use of fire with the purpose of damaging property. Starting a fire not only reveals an antisocial behavior but has also serious social economic implications for society. Although there are other possible causes for fires in general such as natural hazards, improper use of fire or accidental structural problems, intentional forest fires poses a serious problem and represents 13 to 20% of the causes of firesetting [1,2]. The incendiary behavior can be defined by a set of risk factors that explain recidivism: the firesetter and setting of fire characteristics and the motivations associated to the committed crime. The aggressor gender is a distinguished variable in this characterization, since this behavior is seen more frequently in males (90%). The females associated with this type of crime have more specific traits, integrating an homogeneous criminal typology. The objective of this presentation is to show results of a comparative study based on a sample of Portuguese arsonists of both genders, in forest context, between 2015 and 2017.

Methods: We studied 260 individuals, 25 were female (9.6%) and 235 were male (90.4%), between 14 and 86 years old. The variables were collected by the instrument "Summary Sheet - Risk Factors for Recidivism" (EPJ, 2015). The instrument is organized in three sections: 1) Offenders general characteristics (age, sex, education and profession), 2) Firesetting typology, 3) Criminal behaviour description and 4. Psychological and social firesetter characteristics. Collateral information was recollected through the consultation of the SPO (Judiciary Police Online Research System), for confirmation of socio-demographic data and criminal records. All work in this paper was conducted with the formal approval of the subjects and it follows the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Results: The results confirm that female show a more homogenous criminal typology than men. In general, women are represented in two main profiles: Profile A - Retaliatory Instrumental and Profile C- Clinical History, contrary to men that are represented in four criminal profiles (Profile A- Retaliatory Instrumental, Profile B- Benefic Instrumental, Profile C- Clinical History and Profile C1- Fire Attraction). Both genders share characteristics like: few social skills; difficulties in solving problems, in personal relationships as in integration in community; sustenance or unspecialized professions; type of burning area, time of occurrence and devices used. Concerning problems of psychological nature, men had more problems related to alcohol consumption than women, and women reported more mental health issues than men. Regarding motivation, female are essentially expressive, associating firesetting to anger and revenge drives, while male motivations are divided in two: expressive (78.44%) and instrumental (26.95%).

Discussion and conclusions: The firesetters could be differentiated in terms of expressive or instrumental motivations [3]. Many of the incendiary behaviors presented by women are associated with situations of depression, family problems involving relationship problems and parental responsibilities conflicts. Women also may present no attraction by the fire and low levels of alcohol consumption when compared with men (2% in the moment of crime).

CONTACT Jéssica Rolho  jessicarolho@gmail.com

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Risk and protective factors in criminal recidivist inmates

Sara Sousa^a, Jorge Cardoso^a and Pedro Cunha^b

^aIUEM – Instituto Universitário Egas Moniz, Monte da Caparica, Portugal; ^bUFP – Universidade Fernando Pessoa, Porto, Portugal

Introduction: In the last decades, the areas of criminal recidivism and risk assessment have been gaining prominence in the scientific community [1]. The literature confirms we must assess the risk and protective factors to know how to intervene with those who are serving prison sentences [2]. It also points to the importance of certain variables such as age [3] and criminal versatility [4]. The main goals of this study are to characterize the risk and protective factors of a sample of prison inmates; to verify the association between the risk, current age and age at the time of the first arrest; and to analyse the differences in the risk according to criminal versatility.

Materials and methods: The current study has an exploratory, quantitative and comparative design, with a non-probability convenience sample composed by 73 male inmates, who have more than one conviction leading to imprisonment. For data collection we used the Historical, Clinical and Risk Management Scheme [5] (HCR-20) and the Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for Violence Risk [6] (SAPROF), as well as a form to assess age and criminal versatility. The investigation was approved by the Ethics Committee of Fernando Pessoa University, as well as by both the General Management of Social Reintegration and Prison Services and Setúbal's prison establishment.

Results: The results point to a high risk of recidivism among inmates (low risk - 15.1%; medium risk - 43.8% and high risk - 41.1%). There are some risk factors prominently present in the sample, such as previous violence, substance abuse, impulsiveness and negative attitudes. The absence of certain protective factors such as empathy, adaptive coping, self-control and motivation for treatment can also be noted. No association could be found between the inmates' current age and risk ($r=-.18, p=.13$), but we confirmed a negative association between age at first arrest and risk ($r=-.34, p=.00$). There were no statistically significant differences between the means of the criminal versatility groups for risk [$F(2.69) = 2.92, p=.06$], but a negative association could be found between criminal versatility and risk ($r=-.28, p=.02$).

Discussion and conclusions: Although most of the participants have a high or medium risk of recidivism, their risk factors and absent protective factors are mostly dynamic, leading us to the conclusion that intervention in these cases would lower the risk. The negative association between age at first arrest and risk, as well as the negative association between criminal versatility and risk are supported by the previous literature. Age and criminal versatility are two factors that deserve to be studied in future works. The present investigation raises some serious questions about the rehabilitative work that can be done in prison establishments.

CONTACT Sara Sousa  saracsousa94@gmail.com

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Cannabinoid dependence: psychological issues in a biopsychosocial approach research – a working paper

Ricardo Ventura Baúto^{a,b,c}, Cathy Paulino^{a,b,d}, Ana Mouquinho^{a,b,d}, Carla Ferreira^{a,b,d}, Teresa Leal^{a,b,d}, Ana Raquel Gama^{a,c}, Joana Costa^{a,c} and Alexandre Quintas^{a,b,d}

^aLaboratório de Ciências Forenses e Psicológicas Egas Moniz (LCFPEM), Caparica, Portugal; ^bCentro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz (CiiEM), Caparica, Portugal; ^cLaboratório de Psicologia Egas Moniz (LabPSI-EM), Caparica, Portugal; ^dInstituto Universitário Egas Moniz (IUEM), Caparica, Portugal