

Stopping the Cycle:

Aggression as a Predictor of Criminal Recidivism in Relation to Gender

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I am studying the relationship between recidivism and aggression related to gender. This type of research is significant because research has been done on recidivism based on aggression, but to my knowledge no research has been done relating it to gender. This is important due to the difference in levels and types of aggressions seen in men versus women, therefore possibly having an effect on recidivism rates based on such. Furthermore, recidivism rates are high in the United States so it could be very useful to better understand the underlying cause of why people recidivate. In this sense, with a better understanding, it could be possible to learn the best way to prevent a person from recidivating.

One study was done on anger as a predictor of recidivism by Mills and Kroner. They hypothesized that because anger is not the only factor effecting an offender after being released, that anger would not be related to recidivism, (Mills & Kroner, 2003). Their population was male offenders who had been sentenced to at least 2 years and who had completed anger measures upon intake, (Mills & Kroner, 2003). Recidivism was measured by reviewing offenders' files based on the two categories of new charges and revocation, (Mills & Kroner, 2003). They found no statistically significant relationship between anger and recidivism therefore making anger not predictive of new charges or revocation, (Mills & Kroner, 2003). Another study was done on partner aggression severity and its predictivity of male and female violence recidivism by Woodin and O'Leary. The two hypothesized that levels of both psychological and physical aggression would predict recidivism, as well as that higher levels of aggression would continue even after treatment, (Woodin & O'Leary, 2006). In order to participate, the researchers required at least one spouse to have been involved in two acts of male-to-female physical aggression

within the last year, and the husbands had to have been involved in one act of male-to-female physical aggression within the last year, (Woodin & O'Leary, 2006). Aggression was measured using the *Modified Conflict Tactics Scale* which was filled out by both spouses before starting treatment as well as one year after treatment had been completed, (Woodin & O'Leary, 2006). Participants in the study were either assigned to a conjoint treatment group or to gender-specific treatment groups, each group having distinct and manualized treatment protocols, (Woodin & O'Leary, 2006). Woodin and O'Leary found that those who had higher degrees of mild and severe physical aggression before treatment were at greatest risk for continuing to behave this way, (Woodin & O'Leary, 2006). Finally, a study was done on predictability of violent criminal recidivism based on impulsive versus premeditated aggression by Swogger, Walsh, Christie, Priddy, and Conner. It was hypothesized that premeditated aggression would create a greater risk for violent recidivism, (Swogger et al., 2014). Participants were adults who were in a pretrial supervision day reporting program after being charged with a crime, (Swogger et al., 2014). Impulsive and premeditated aggression was measured using the Impulsive-Premeditated Aggression Scales (IPAS), and violent recidivism was assessed using state criminal history files, (Swogger et al., 2014). The results were that premeditated aggression significantly predicted violent recidivism even after controlling for race and general aggression, (Swogger et al., 2014).

In my study, I expect to find similar results as those found in previous related studies. I hypothesize that aggression will be a successful predictor of criminal recidivism and positively correlated for both men and women. Furthermore, I hypothesize that the correlation between aggression and recidivism will be stronger for men than for women based on previously collected data.

Method

Participants

Approximately 40 men and 40 women released a maximum of 60 days prior to the study will be recruited using the website mTurk. Participation in this study will be completely voluntary, and participation will be encouraged using a reward of twenty dollars in the form of a Visa gift card. Participants will receive a twenty-dollar Visa gift card after completing the first part of the study, as well as after the second part of the study. Contact information will be collected from participants and will be maintained for 3 years after the completion of the study.

Design

This research design is correlational. The variables are naturally occurring and will not be manipulated by the researcher. Furthermore, the purpose of the research is to look for a statistical relationship between aggression and recidivism related to gender. This study is a within-Ss design, as the participants will all take the same Aggression Questionnaire.

Measures

The questionnaire that will be used is the already existing Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992). This questionnaire measures four factors in relation to aggression, including 1) physical aggression, 2) verbal aggression, 3) anger, and 4) hostility. This questionnaire is scored using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = extremely uncharacteristic of me to 5 = extremely characteristic of me. Higher scores reflect a higher level of aggression. An example item of the questionnaire includes the question *given enough provocation, I may hit another person* will be included. Additionally, an example of an item on the questionnaire that will be reverse scores is the question *I can think of no good reason for ever hitting a person*. The demographic questions that will be included are gender, race, and age. Gender will be used in

direct relation to the findings of aggression in relation to recidivism. Race and age will be used only for demographic information.

Procedure

First, I will set up a link to the survey on the website mTurk with a description that makes it clear that participation is voluntary. The description of the study will also state that participants must have been released a maximum of 60 days before participating in the study to qualify. It will also be included that completion of the questionnaire will result in a reward of a twenty-dollar Visa gift card, and full completion of the study will result in a reward of a twenty-dollar Visa gift card. Before filling out the survey, participants will be required to provide their first name and their contact information that will be used later. After all data collection, all participants will be assigned a random number and their contact information will be deleted/destroyed. All information will be kept on a password-protected computer that will be equipped with data security protocols. Only the researcher will have access to this computer as well as the data stored on the computer. The updated data that includes the random participants numbers will be kept for at least three years after completion of the study. Participants will then fill out the Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992) to the best of their ability and most closely to their beliefs. After filling out the questionnaire, the participants will provide their age, race, and gender. The average aggression scores will be calculated for men, and the average aggression scores will be calculated for women. After approximately one year, the participants will be contacted using the contact information provided at the time of the survey. The participants will be asked whether they have recidivated and/or been convicted of a crime between that time and when they filled out the questionnaire. This will mark the full completion

of the study. After this data is collected, the findings will be analyzed for a correlation for men and then analyzed for a correlation for women.

Expected Results

My hypothesis is that aggression will be a successful predictor of criminal recidivism for both men and women and that the two will be positively correlated. Additionally, I hypothesize that the correlation will be stronger for men than for women. I will be using a Pearson correlation, as this test will tell me the correlation between level of aggression and criminal recidivism. I will define my aggression variables as 1 = low aggression, 2 = medium aggression, 3 = high aggression. Aggression scores will be in the form of a continuous variable. I will define my gender variables using 1 = female, 2 = male. I predict that level of aggression and criminal recidivism will be positively correlated, meaning the higher level of aggression, the higher probability of the participants recidivating. The correlation coefficient for men will be determined. The correlation coefficient for women will also be determined.

Discussion

I predict that aggression will be a successful predictor of criminal recidivism, and that the two will be positively correlated. This study could have very important implications in reducing the number of criminals who recidivate or who are convicted of another crime after serving time in prison. If aggression is found to be positively correlated with recidivism, this means that targeted treatment and focus on criminal's aggression and helping them control it may mean that they are less likely to reoffend in the future. Overcrowding in prisons is a huge problem in the US, along with frequency of recidivism. Therefore, determining a better treatment for offenders and stopping the cycle is important to decrease their likelihood of committing another crime and being sent back to prison.

References

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