

Borderline Personality Traits, Dysfunctional Family and Risk-Taking Behaviors in Prison Inmates

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Abstract

This research was intended to analyze relationship between borderline personality traits, dysfunctional family and risk-taking behaviors in prison inmates, and gender differences across all study variables. A non-probability purposive sample of 80 participants aged 18 to 55 years (49 men and 31 women) including under trial and convicted prisoners was collected from District Jail (Camp Jail) and Central Jail (Kot Lakh Pat Jail) Lahore. The measures used were McLean Screening Instrument for BPD, Index for Family Relations Scale (IFR), and Risky, Impulsive, and Self-Destructive Behavior Questionnaire (RISQ). It was concluded that borderline personality traits and dysfunctional family life were positively related to risk-taking behaviors and foresaw risky behaviors in prisoners. In terms of gender differences, men prisoners were more inclined towards risk-taking behaviors than women prisoners. Implications of this research and their usage for future research were also highlighted.

Keywords: Borderline Personality Disorder, Prisoners, Dysfunctional Family, Risk-Taking, Personal Relations, Crime, Men, Women, Pakistan.

Introduction

Psychological health of prison inmates is likely to get adversely affected by factors such as; penalties, violent behavior of other inmates, authoritarian prison staff, and secluded surroundings. These conditions and lack of awareness among the prison staff can potentially damage the psychological health of the prison inmates and they can develop dysfunctional behaviors, distorted thought patterns, and psychological disorders. This study focuses on the association between Borderline Personality tendencies, and Dysfunctional family in terms of Risk-taking behaviors of prisoners.

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The presence of impulsivity, disturbed self-image and interpersonal relationships are some of the key traits of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) (DSM-5, 2013).

Borderline Personality Disorder is defined as, a constant pattern of instability among familial, social relationships, self-image, including; inconsistency in an individual's beliefs, goals, identity; idealization (exaggerated positive qualities) or devaluation (exaggerated negative traits) regarding objects/people; anger, fear of abandonment, feeling detached from self and marked impulsivity such as; involvement in risk-taking behaviors for instance, self-harm, self-inflicting injuries, harming others etc. (DSM-5, 2013).

Impulsivity is defined as, acting spontaneously without thinking of the consequences to seek instant satisfaction and to return to normal from a state of emotional distress (Lawrence et al., 2010). Whereas, dysfunctional family is defined as; damaged relationship of family members including; little or no communication and lack of affection (APA, 2022).

Risk-taking is a pattern of unnecessary involvement in dangerous behaviors that greatly rely on, taking a chance (APA, 2022). Risk-taking behaviors, impulsivity and anger can also be observed in prisoners; which may indicate that BPD tendencies are linked to their criminal behaviors.

Cloninger's psychobiological model of personality (1993) is a seven-factor model including three dimensions of character i.e. self-directedness (the degree to which individuals are goal-oriented and focused), cooperativeness (the ability of individuals to relate to others), self-transcendence (the degree to which the individuals are principled). This model also has four dimensions of temperament such as; novelty-seeking (impulsivity, hasty decision-making, anger), harm avoidance (anxiety, suspicion, pessimism), reward dependence (tendency to react to positive indicators such as; social approval and to keep up with rewarding behavior), and persistence (tendency to carry on with an activity despite frustration, displeasure, or exhaustion) (APA, 2022; Cloninger et al., 1993).

Biosocial theory of BPD by Linehan (1993), elaborated Cloninger's psychobiological model of personality (1993), and discussed that biological vulnerabilities and environmental factors cause emotional dysregulation – one of the main traits of BPD. Thus, individuals develop distorted patterns of emotional responsiveness and find it challenging to express themselves. Additionally, this theory discusses a concept called invalidating environment. Linehan (1993) explains that from a young age individuals are taught to avoid exhibiting their emotions, and

handle them without seeking support from their guardians. Thus, they fail to control and comprehend their emotive responses. This either leads to suppression or intense expression of emotional state and individuals are unable to solve problems adding to the imbalance (Crowell et al., 2009).

Economic Marginalization theory (Chesney-Lind, 1997) focused on criminal tendencies in women. This theory states that women commit crimes due to financial crisis, including low-income jobs, inadequate facilities, and single-handedly taking care of households with a large number of children (Small, 2000: 76). Consequently, to fulfill their financial needs, women engage in crimes. However, some theories relate traumatic childhood experiences of women i.e., verbal, physical, and sexual torment as the main cause of women offenders (Islam et al., 2014).

Literature Review

Moore et al. (2018) stated that prisoners with BPD are likely to exhibit impulsivity and anger, such as breaking rules, getting into verbal/physical fights, and disobedience which may be related to their history of disruptive behaviors such as aggression towards familial and social ties. They assessed BPD traits in prisoners using Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI) and Conflict Tactic Scale-2 (CTS-2) to assess personal relationships of prisoners (including intimate partners) and found that prisoners with BPD display higher tendencies of psychological aggression i.e., humiliation, threatening behavior, recklessness, and rebellion towards prison staff and other inmates as a result of being provoked as compared to those without BPD tendencies.

Self-harm is another diagnostic feature of BPD found among prisoners. Gardner et al. (2016) assessed male and female prisoners using the Inventory of Statements about Self-Injury (ISAS) (Klonsky & Glenn, 2009) and found that prisoners with BPD traits were more likely to inflict self-harm to end feelings of detachment, to block their urge to commit suicide and to release negative emotions. Their problems were related to instability in their personal and social relationships. Consequently, the prisoners undergo major mental stress and trouble with forming an emotional connection (Agrawal et al., 2004). This problematic personal life of prisoners may be validated more in prisons where attachment needs are not fulfilled – an important aspect in increasing their chances of having BPD traits.

Fatimah et al. (2019) explored whether the association of problematic parenting approaches, conflicting marriages, and divorce may be the indicators of BPD traits in children. The primary objective was to examine if BPD was due to

hereditary or environmental factors or a combination of both in biological and adoptive children, as fully-grown adults. For this, both categories of parents were given Parental Environment Questionnaire (Elkins et al., 1997) to evaluate parent-offspring relations; biological parents scored higher on PEQ and Child-rearing questionnaire. Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976) was given to assess the marital life quality of parents, based on individual responses of couples – higher scores revealed higher marital conflicts. Parents who exhibited uninhibited abuse were likely to heritably pass on and predict BPD traits in their biological children. Whereas environmental influence was found due to negative parenting from both maternal and paternal sides, including conflict, lack of association, and affection – which are likely to be the indicators of BPD traits in both biological and adoptive offspring, leading to their subsequent poor interpersonal skills in the later years.

Lopez-Villatoro et al. (2018) discussed the contribution of psychopathic traits in BPD using a two-factor model of psychopathy. Psychopathy is a psychological condition with deficits of emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and self-regulation. The two-factor model of psychopathy includes Factor 1 (F1) concerning interpersonal and emotional aspects of psychopathy; lack of guilt, manipulation, self-centeredness (egocentric) and grandiosity, and lack of empathy. Factor 2 (F2) involves impulsivity, and disruptive behaviors, such as recklessness, aggression and breaking the law. Results revealed women prisoners scored higher in factor 2 traits along with a positive correlation between F2 psychopathy traits and BPD such as sharing symptoms of impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, and aggression.

Kulsoom and Gul (2020) studied the association between personality disorders with a variety of crimes along with gender variations. The study put forward that men and women are likely to be dissimilar in different types of crimes (I – assault, rape, murder, theft, etc. II – frauds, gambling, drug abuse, etc.); personality disorders from cluster Band type II crimes may have a positive relationship. Demographic variables such as age, job, family income, and disturbed personal relations, may predict type I and II crimes. A sample of 80 offenders (40 men and 40 women), aged 16-65 years was taken from Central Jail Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) using non-probability convenient sampling and Personality disorder questionnaire (PDQ-4, Hyler, 1994) was used. Results specified that there was a positive association of cluster B personality disorders with type II offences; where men were more inclined to commit type I crime.

Rana and Khan (2014) studied self-harm among Pakistani women prisoners before and during their incarceration along with reasons for self-harm. A sample of 38 women prisoners was interviewed and Deliberate Self-Harm Inventory was used as a measuring tool. Results revealed that before imprisonment, psychological distress was the starting point of self-harming practices for women and they prevented their injuries from healing. During imprisonment, self-harming practices of women prisoners included, punching themselves, starving, and thumping hands hard, on the floor. Hence, this research on women prisoners aligns with one of BPD traits, self-harm.

Khalid and Khan (2013) discussed the causes that may have led Pakistani women to commit crimes. They conducted structured clinical interviews with 114 women prisoners (including convicted and under-trial) their financial status, relationships, education, marital status and types of crimes committed. Results revealed that 64% of women were unemployed prior to their imprisonment hence indicated poverty to be the major reason behind their crimes of theft, kidnapping, drug-dealing and also indulging in prostitution and disturbed marital life; which led to their psychological problems and thus involvement in risk-taking and law-breaking activities – some of the common symptoms of BPD.

Rationale

Mental health of prisoners has not been explored much in Pakistan and this study focuses on Borderline Personality traits among prison inmates; as there are very few researches available on BPD tendencies in correctional facilities. Variables such as; dysfunctional family life and risk-taking behaviors, have been chosen to analyze if those two are likely to be the contributing factors of BPD tendencies among prisoners. This research will guide the staff of correctional facilities to identify the causes of psychological problems of prison inmates and to prevent the deteriorating psychological health of prison inmates.

Hypotheses

- There is likely to be a positive relationship between Borderline Personality Traits, Dysfunctional Family Life and Risk-Taking Behaviors in prison inmates.
- Borderline Personality traits and Dysfunctional Family Life are likely to be the predictors of Risk-Taking Behaviors in prison inmates.
- Men and women prisoners are likely to be different on all study variables.

Methodology

Research Design

A correlational study with a cross-section research design was used to find the relationship among borderline personality tendencies, dysfunctional family life and risk-taking behaviors in prison inmates.

Sample

A non-probability purposive sample of 80 prison inmates (49 males and 31 females) ($M = 35.54$, $SD = 8.96$), was taken from District Jail (Camp Jail) and Central Jail (Kot Lakh Pat) Lahore. Its size was measured using G-Power analysis with 95% confidence intervals. The sample included under-trial and convicted prisoners age between 18 to 55 years. The sample excluded prison inmates with; organicity, medico-legal cases, death penalty, and those taking any treatments in the form of prescribed medications for psychological illnesses.

Measures of Data Collection

- **McLean Screening Instrument for BPD**

It is a 10-item, self-report screening scale developed by Mary C. Zanarini et al. (2003). This scale was administered to prison inmates to identify BPD traits in them. It covers questions about interpersonal relationships, self-harm, impulsivity, mood-swings, anger, suspicion, and self-detachment. The sensitivity level of this scale is 0.81; the specificity level is 0.85 and the reliability is 0.70.

- **Index Family Relation Scale (IFR)**

The scale is a 25-item scale with statements concerning interpersonal relationships with a Likert scale of 1 to 7 (1=lowest, 7= highest). The reliability of this scale is .90 or more and the validity is .60 or more (Hudson, 1990, 1993).

- **Risky, Impulsive, and Self-Destructive Behavior Questionnaire (RISQ)**

The scale is a 38-item questionnaire by Sadeh and Baskin-Sommers (2017). It was administered on prison inmates to see thrill-seeking tendencies, motivation behind risky behaviors, irresponsibility, drug addiction, risky sexual behaviors, reckless behaviors etc. Internal consistency reliability is 0.70-0.82 in the Pakistani context (Malik & Farooq, 2021).

- **Demographic Information Sheet**

A demographic information sheet was used to cover the questions in terms of background information such as ethnicity, gender, age, education, job, marital status and income.

Procedures

The research was initiated by taking permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the initial request for data collection was taken to the Inspectorate General Prisons (IGP) office, Lahore. Permission was given to collect samples from District Jail (Camp Jail) and Central Jail (Kot Lakh Pat), Lahore. Participants were given Research Information Sheet and Informed Consent form; they were assured of confidentiality of their information and were free to opt out of the research at any time. Demographic information sheet was provided to them to cover their background information. McLean Screening Instrument for BPD, Index for Family Relations Scale (IFR), and Risky, Impulsive and Self Destructive Behavior Questionnaire (RISQ) (Urdu versions) were administered on prisoners to measure Borderline Personality traits (BPD), Dysfunctional Family (IVs) and Risk-taking behaviors (DV) respectively.

Results

Data analysis was done using SPSS version 26. The data was examined with Descriptive and Inferential analysis. Firstly, descriptive analysis was done; it provided summary of all variables i.e. McLean Screening Instrument for Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), Index for Family Relations (IFR), and Risky and Self Destructive Behavior Questionnaire (RISQ) along with its 9 subscales; drug behaviors, aggression, risky sexual behavior, reckless behaviors, illegal behaviors, gambling, heavy alcohol abuse, self-harm, impulsive eating) along with the total number of responses regarding sex, the means, and standard deviations (Table 1). Secondly, Cronbach's alpha was done to check the reliability of all variables. The Cronbach's alpha value for all scales and subscales was found to be adequate (Table 2). Thirdly, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis was done to assess the strength and direction of association between variables; borderline personality traits, dysfunctional family relations with risk-taking behaviors in prisoners. Results showed there is a high statistically positive correlation, between McLean BPD and IFR with Pearson correlation coefficient value of 0.330. There is also high statistically positive correlation between McLean BPD and RISQ with a Pearson correlation coefficient

value of 0.380. Results indicated that prisoners with disrupted family relationships develop borderline personality traits and engage more in risk-taking behaviors (Table 3). In the next step, Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis was used to analyze if borderline personality traits and dysfunctional family life had a role in the onset of risk-taking behaviors among prison inmates. Enter method was used to run the regression analysis. Assumptions were fulfilled. Examination of beta values revealed that gender, socioeconomic status and borderline personality traits were significant predictors of risk taking behaviors of prison inmates. The model explains a 32% variance in risk taking behaviors of prisoners. The result suggested that only borderline personality trait is the significant predictor of risk-taking behaviors in prisoners; while dysfunctional family life is not a significant predictor. Hence, the second hypothesis is partially accepted (Table 4). An independent sample t-test was used to find gender differences between McLean Screening Instrument for BPD, Index Family Relations (IFR), and Risky, Impulsive, and Self Destructive Questionnaire (RISQ). Results indicated that there is a significant difference in Risk-taking behaviors across gender; men prison inmates were more inclined towards risk-taking behaviors as compared to women prison inmates (Table 5).

Discussion

Findings of this research suggested that, prisoners develop borderline personality tendencies and adopt risk-taking behaviors as a result of their immediate environment and disrupted family relations. The hypothesis was accepted and was consistent with previous researches. A meta-analysis identified maladaptive parenting practices as one of the contributing factors of BPD. These practices included; childhood abuse and neglect, witnessing parental conflict from a young age. Also, individuals who are exposed to domestic violence and verbal abuse are at three-times increased the risk of BPD. The research determined that children from hostile family lives, and who experienced conflicting parental relationships are at increased risk of BPD at as early as 11 years of age (Kaur & Sanches, 2022).

The second hypothesis was accepted and was consistent with previous researches that, people with BPD engage in risk-taking behaviors as a reaction to emotionally stressful situations. The research stated that, BPD was an important predictor of risk-taking behaviors such as; unsafe sex, reckless driving, substance abuse, self-harm, physical fights (Karnedy, 2018).

The third hypothesis was also accepted and was consistent with previous researches, that there are likely to be gender differences across all study variables. A

research done on BPD patients discussed gender differences in terms of risk-taking behaviors revealed that, men possess more aggression, quick temperament and impulsivity as compared to women (Mancke et al., 2015).

Implications

The outcome of this research can educate general public and prison staff regarding behaviors, thought patterns of prisoners and understanding how various environmental influences trigger them to commit crimes. This research could be used to develop therapy plans for prisoners such as; altering punishment-based practices into reward-based activities. These findings can also serve as the basis for new researches in the fields of Clinical and Forensic psychology in Pakistan.

Limitations & Suggestions

The data was collected mostly from lower socioeconomic class of Pakistan. Secondly, prisoners were given self-administered questionnaires; also the total number of women imprisoned were less in both jails as compared to men prisoners hence, both factors may have resulted in displaying partiality in responses. Also, a wide range of data could not be collected due to insufficient time frame. These limitations can be improved if applied on a large sample with equal number of men and women prisoners. Partiality in responses can be further reduced, if time duration is increased. In order to have diversity in research and to improve reliability in results, the sample should also include prison inmates from upper socioeconomic class.

Conclusion

Findings of this study suggest that there is a positive correlation between borderline personality traits, dysfunctional family life and risk-taking behaviors in prison inmates. These findings also suggested that, negative parenting, and lack of empathy can lead to psychological problems in men and women prison inmates and hence both genders seek relief through engaging in risk-taking behaviors; where men have a high inclination to indulge in risk-taking behaviors as compared to women prisoners.

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Information (N = 80).*

Variables	M(SD)	f(%)
Age	35.54(8.96)	
Sex		

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• Male	49
• Female	31
Education	
• Uneducated	21
• Primary	26
• Matric	15
• High School	6
• Bachelors	7
• Masters	5
Marital Status	
• Single	21
• Married	59
• Divorced	-
• Widowed	-
Social Status	
• Upper Class	7
• Middle Class	11
• Lower Middle Class	62

Table 2 Psychometric Properties of all Study Variables (N = 80).

Variables	K	M (SD)	Range		A
			Min.	Max	
McLean BPD	12	17.65(1.80)	14.00	23.00	0.62
IFR	18	53.40(3.74)	45.00	61.00	0.70
RISQ	38	57.73(4.30)	46.00	68.00	0.67
Drug Behaviors	8	11.53(0.96)	7.00	13.00	0.52
Aggression	5	5.42(0.86)	5.00	8.00	0.58
Risky Sexual Behaviors	4	5.37(0.97)	4.00	8.00	0.37
Self-Harm	4	5.25(1.46)	4.00	8.00	0.37
Impulsive Eating	2	2.23(0.57)	2.00	4.00	0.16
Reckless Behaviors	4	4.41(0.70)	3.00	6.00	0.82
Illegal Behaviors	5	7.37(1.23)	5.00	10.00	0.73
Gambling	4	7.92(0.34)	6.00	8.00	0.34
Heavy Alcohol Use	2	3.51(0.71)	2.00	4.00	0.40

Note. *K*= No. of items, *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation

Table 3 Relationship between Borderline Personality Traits, Dysfunctional Family Life and Risk-taking behaviors in Prison Inmates using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis (*N* = 80).

Measures	1	2	3
McLean BPD	1	----	----
IFR	.330**	1	----
RISQ	.380**	.272*	1
<i>M</i>	17.65	53.40	57.74
<i>SD</i>	1.81	3.74	4.30

Note. **p*<0.05 (2-tailed), ***p*<0.01 level (2-tailed), BPD=Borderline Personality Disorder, IFR= Index for Family Relations, RISQ=Risky, Impulsive and Self-Destructive Questionnaire, *M*=Mean, *SD*=Standard Deviation

Table 4 Impact of Borderline Personality Traits, and Dysfunctional Family Life as predictors of Risk-taking behaviors in Prison Inmates using Hierarchal Linear Regression (*N* = 80).

Variables	Risk Taking Behaviors in Prison Inmates	
	Δ R2	B
Step 01	.19*	
Age,		-.07
Gender		.44***
Education		.00
Socioeconomic status		.32*
Step 02	.10**	
Borderline Personality trait		.33**
Step 03	.02	
Dysfunctional Family Life		-.03
Total ΔR2	.31	

Note. **p* < .05, ***p*< .01, ****p*<.001

Table 5 Effect of Gender differences across all variables and subscales using Independent *t*-tests (*N*=80).

Variables	<i>M</i> (<i>n</i> = 49)		<i>F</i> (<i>n</i> = 31)		95%CI				Cohen'd
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)	<i>P</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
McLean BPD	17.71	1.82	17.54	1.80	.39(78)	.69	-.66	-.99	-
IFR	53.44	3.97	53.32	3.39	.14(78)	.88	-1.59	1.84	-
RISQ	59.45	4.38	56.65	3.16	-2.97(78)	.004***	-.46	-.92	0.6

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001, *M*=Male, *F*=Female

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