

Psychopathy and Stress in Child and Adolescent's Sexual Offender

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Abstract

The aim of this article was to investigate whether child and adolescent's sexual offender (SO), with and without psychopathy, differ in relation to their ability to manage stress and distress. Thirty prisoners serving time in jail for sexual crimes against children and adolescents participated in the study, which was divided into two groups: G1 SO considered without psychopathy (N = 20; PCL-R < 30); and G2 SO with psychopathy (N = 10; PCL-R ≥ 30). The instruments used were: a protocol for collecting information on criminal proceedings; the Rorschach test according to the Performance Assessment System (R-PAS), considering the variables of the stress and distress domain, and the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R). The data were analyzed using Student's t-test and linear regression analysis. The results showed that 16% of psychopathy in SO was explained by a lower level of stress and distress.

Keywords: Child Abuse; Antisocial Personality; Rorschach test; Psychological Stress.

Psicopatia e Estresse em Autores de Violência Sexual contra Crianças e Adolescentes

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo foi investigar se Autores de Violência Sexual (AVS) contra crianças e adolescentes, com e sem psicopatia, se diferenciam em relação à capacidade de administrar o estresse e distresse. Participaram do estudo 30 reeducandos cumprindo pena em regime fechado por crimes sexuais contra crianças e adolescentes, divididos em dois grupos: G1 AVS considerados sem psicopatia (N = 20; PCL-R < 30); e G2 AVS com psicopatia (N = 10; PCL-R ≥ 30). Os instrumentos utilizados foram: um protocolo de coleta de informações no processo criminal; o teste de Rorschach de acordo com o Sistema de Avaliação por Performance (R-PAS), considerando as variáveis do domínio de estresse e distresse, e o *Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (PCL-R). Os dados foram analisados por meio do teste *t* de *student* e análise de regressão linear. Os resultados evidenciaram que 16% da psicopatia em AVS foi explicada por menor nível de estresse e distresse.

Palavras-chave: Abuso da Criança; Personalidade Antissocial; Teste de Rorschach; Stress Psicológico.

Psicopatía y Estrés en Agresores Sexuales de Niños y Adolescentes

Resumen

Este artículo investiga si agresores sexuales (AS) de niños y adolescente, con y sin psicopatía, se diferencian en relación a la capacidad de administrar el estrés y el distrés. Participaron 30 reeducandos cumpliendo pena en régimen cerrado por crímenes sexuales contra niños y adolescentes, divididos en dos grupos: G1 AS considerados sin psicopatía (N = 20; PCL-R < 30); y G2 AS con psicopatía (N = 10; PCL-R ≥ 30). Instrumentos utilizados: protocolo de colecta de informaciones en el proceso criminal; test de Rorschach conforme el Sistema de Evaluación por Performance (R-PAS), considerando las variables del dominio de estrés y distrés y *Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (PCL-R). Los datos fueron analizados según el test *t* de *student* y AS fueron por menor nivel de estrés y distrés.

Palabras clave: Abuso de Niños; Personalidad Antisocial; Test de Rorschach; Estrés Psicológico.

Introduction

Psychopathy can be defined as a serious personality disorder, which involves some subtle cognitive impairment, which favors the difficulty of processing emotions and affects, as well as managing interpersonal issues (Hare & Neumann, 2008). The losses in the scope of affections and interpersonal interactions are at the heart of this disorder, providing a lack of empathy, remorse and guilt, pathological manipulation and lying,

which also facilitate antisocial and criminal behaviors. However, when looking at empathy through cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects, there is a loss in relation to behavioral and affective empathy, which would be related to aggressiveness and emotional coldness, while the cognitive empathy that refers to the field of understanding would not present any harm to people diagnosed with psychopathy (Salvador-Silva & Hauck Filho, 2020). Currently, two theoretical models used to define and evaluate psychopathy can be highlighted:

Hare's bifactorial theoretical model (1991, 2003), and Patrick, Fowles and Krueger's triarchic (2009) (Blagov, Patrick, Oost, Goodman, & Pugh, 2016).

Considering Hare's bifactorial model (1991), psychopathy is understood by means of two factors (two-factor model). Factor 1 consists of the temperamental or innate and most compromising character traits, typical of the psychopathy condition, which are affective and interpersonal characteristics of the disorder, highlighting the deficient emotional reactivity and predatory inclinations in their relationships. This Factor 1 includes the traits of superficiality, insensitivity / cruelty, absence of affection, guilt, remorse or empathy, as well as grandeur, charm, concealment and manipulation. Factor 2 consists of impulsivity / behavioral disinhibition and antisocial and criminal behaviors, which are typical of antisocial traits often developed in a problematic context, such as in troubled family environments, for example. Thus, Factor 2 includes aspects such as: the need for stimulation, parasitic lifestyle, absence of realistic goals, irresponsibility, uncontrolled behavior and juvenile delinquency. To assess psychopathy in the bifactorial model, Hare (2003) developed the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) scale, which has been one of the most used in the United States (Archer, Wheeler, & Vauter, 2016), and in several others countries in the world, including Brazil (Morana, 2004; Southard & Ziegler, 2016). The author's main objective was to differentiate individuals who were only antisocial (common criminals) from those who were psychopaths and had the most damaging impact on the prison environment and the general population.

In 2009, the triarchic model of psychopathy emerges, the essence of which encompasses three distinct phenotypic constructions (or facets) of psychopathy, which have different underlying developmental and etiological processes. According to the authors, these three facets make it possible to understand psychopathy in all its manifestations, which can be conceptualized, measured and understood independently (Patrick et al., 2009; Blagov et al., 2016).

The first facet would be disinhibition, which is related to the problems of impulse control, which imply lack of planning, reduction of the regulation of affects, insistence on immediate gratification, and which is more related to the Factor 2 characteristics of the bifactorial model. The second would be meanness, which is defined as deficient empathy, exploitation by the other, lack of stable bonds and the search for excitement, aggressiveness and cruelty. This is the feature that is

most related to Factor 1 of the two-factor model. And finally, boldness, which corresponds to the combination of the dominance trait (high social domain), low anxiety (low reactivity to stress) and constant search for emotion and adventure (Patrick et al., 2009; Blagov et al., 2016).

Some studies indicate that psychopathic traits have a significant influence on the experience of stress, reducing its reactivity and providing more peaceful responses than those expected in emotionally and interpersonally impacting situations. According to the triarchic model, the daring trait would be the one most directly related to low reactivity to stress. And in the bifactorial model, the affective and interpersonal characteristics of the disorder (Factor 1) would be responsible for this deficient emotional reactivity, favoring insensitivity / cruelty, absence of affection, guilt, remorse or empathy and, consequently, also leading to predatory inclinations in their relationships (Nigel et al., 2019; Sandvik, Hansen, Hystad, Johnsen, & Bartone, 2015). In this way, the psychopath would be predisposed to classify stressful events as less threatening, which protects one from the negative effects of stress on mental health, such as, for example, the more serious effects of internalizing psychopathologies, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or depressive disorders (Sellbom, 2015; Nigel et al., 2019; Venables, Hall, Yancey, & Patrick, 2015).

On the other hand, other studies reveal the psychopath's greater susceptibility to stress caused by a combination of genetic, physiological and personality characteristics. Considering the personality, it would be Factor 2 of the bifactorial model and the disinhibition facet of the triarchic model of psychopathy, which predispose them to impulsivity and antisocial behaviors, which would let the psychopath be adversely affected by environmental stressors. Consequently, the psychopath would be more likely to suffer from PTSD (Nigel et al., 2019; Sellbom, 2015), and more likely to seek treatment, not only for physical injuries, but also for psychological suffering (Benning et al., 2018). As antisocial / impulsive behavior tends to be very common in criminals, ranging from 50 to 80% in prison samples (American Psychiatric Association, 2014; Hare, 2006), a closer look at the experience of stress (Factor 1 of the PCL-R) could shed light on this issue.

The existing findings suggest opposite associations of the two factors that make up the definition of psychopathy in the perception and response to stressful stimuli. Thus, a study that can observe the association between psychopathy and the way stress is experienced

may benefit further investigations on the understanding of shared and distinctive etiologies of these two constructs, with final implications for the prevention and intervention efforts of alleged aggressors and their experiences with stress.

Psychopathy can be considered as the most serious personality disorder, since individuals characterized by this pathology are responsible for the majority of violent crimes, and have the highest rates of criminal recurrence when compared to those who commit crimes, but are not diagnosed with this disorder (Balsis, Busch, Wilfong, Newman, & Edens, 2017). As for sexual offender (SO), the literature has pointed out that they are heterogeneous in relation to personality characteristics and psychopathologies. They usually have some personality or sexuality disorder. Therefore, some characteristics become evident, such as difficulties in controlling impulses and establishing intimate relationships, immature and unstable personality, aggression in the face of frustration, hostility and low self-esteem, distortion in affective, social / relational and cognitive aspects. (Prentky, Knight & Lee, 2008; Szumski & Zielona-Jenek, 2016).

Some studies have pointed out that sexual violence was positively correlated with psychopathy and with a greater likelihood of criminal recurrence (Gonçalves & Vieira, 2005; Gretton, McBride, Lewis, O'Shaughnessy, & Hare, 1994). The incidence of psychopathy is found, on average, in 1% of the general population, and between 15% and 20% of the prison population (Balsis et al., 2017; Gacono, Meloy, & Bridges, 2011; Hare, 2003; Hauck Filho, Teixeira, & Dias, 2012). Considering the incarcerated SO, the incidence of psychopathy increases significantly to approximately 30% (Young, Justice, & Edberg, 2010; Teixeira, 2017). Despite the high incidence, many SO cannot be considered psychopaths and, when it comes to child and adolescent's sexual offender, there is still the possibility that SO has a paraphilic disorder (pedophilia or efebophilia and hebephilia, for example), more specifically, pedophilia.

Pedophilia is understood as the sexual desire of an adult or adolescent by prepubertal children (American Psychiatric Association, 2014; Miranzi & Miranzi Neto, 2017; Taktak, Yilmaz, Karamustafalioglu & Usual, 2016). Having a paraphilic disorder, such as pedophilia, does not imply criminal behavior. It is possible that pedophiles never practice sexual violence in their entire lives, while sexual assault against children and adolescents is considered a crime, as predicted in the Brazilian law.

The Rorschach test has been one of the most widely used, accepted and frequently required projective

methods of psychological assessment in the practice of forensic psychological assessment (Acklin, 2018; Gacono et al., 2011; Weiner & Greene, 2017). Through this test it is possible to evaluate a wide range of personality characteristics, among them, the resources that the person has to solve problems and face stressful situations and emotional suffering, through the variables of the stress and distress domain (Meyer, Viglione, Mihura, Erard, & Erdberg, 2017; Schneider & Resende, 2018).

Considering the domain of stress and distress, some studies have observed that child and adolescent's sexual offender, when compared to other criminals (convicted of assault and robbery), revealed more passivity and subservience in the relationship with other people (p↑), more need to hide true feelings and thoughts (Cg↑), less ability to modulate affects (FC↓), showing a low adjustment in the perception of reality (FQo). When compared to criminals (convicted of assault, robbery) with psychopathy (PCL-R \geq 30), child and adolescent's sexual offender showed more dysphoric affection or psychological distress (Shaded View↑, DEPI↑), and more suicidal or self-destructive intentionality (Suicidal Ideation↑) (Etcheverría, 2009; Gacono et al., 2011).

When comparing the level of stress and distress among SO with psychopathy (PCL-R \geq 30) and criminals (convicted of robbery and murder) who did not have this disorder, it was noted that SO were more critical and dissatisfied with their self-image (MOR↑), and less sensitive and interested in what people do or say (H↓), and much less concerned with approaching relationships of intimacy or complicity ($\Gamma < 1$; Fr + rF↑), revealing impaired ability to connect with people. There was also a tendency towards more impulsive emotional reactions (FC < C + CF) and more suicidal or self-destructive intentionality (S-COM↑). However, Young et al. (2010) highlight that the high self-destructive intentionality can be interpreted due to the uncomfortable situation of incarceration in which they find themselves, or as a secondary gain in the attempt to serve their sentences in treatment programs. Psychopaths are usually not people who become sufficiently distressed to have suicidal concerns, and to commit suicide.

The sexual offender with psychopathy (PCL-R \geq 30), when compared to a group of people from a normative sample (Exner Júnior, 2003), revealed the absence of dysphoric affects related to negative self-criticism rumors (V = 0), low receptivity to emotional stimuli (Afr↓) and less openness to experiences (Lambda↑, F%) (Daderman & Jonson, 2008).

It is noteworthy that stress and psychological distress are aspects that help the person to be predisposed to change their way of thinking, feeling and acting (Exner Júnior, 2003), which are usually little present in SO, especially those with psychopathy. The ability to manage stress and remain satisfied and stable, even in the face of maladaptive behavior, prevents the person from coming into contact with experiences of fragility, helplessness and discomfort. More specifically, the distress would be the presence of anguish, distress or suffering caused by stress, that is, experiences of psychological restlessness due to stressful events (Meyer et al., 2017).

Although psychopathy is one of the most studied and well-validated personality disorders, there are still few studies that focus on evaluating this disorder through projective methods of psychological assessment, such as the Rorschach test, as well as those that focus on study of SO stress against children and adolescents with and without psychopathy, in the prison context. Thus, in view of the above, the goal of this article was to investigate whether child and adolescent's sexual offender with psychopathy (PCL-R ≥ 30) and without psychopathy (PCL-R <30) differ in relation to their ability to manage stress / distress. In this sense, as a hypothesis, highlighting the variables that make up the domain of stress and distress in Rorschach, it is expected that:

- SO with psychopathy (PCL-R ≥ 30) have less stress / distress than SO without psychopathy (PCL-R <30); more specifically, that SO with psychopathy reveal less: a) anxious ideation that is outside of one's control or possibly impinging on oneself from external forces (m); b) helpless feeling or anguish in the face of the stressors (Y); c) less underlying distressing experiences (PPD); d) less pessimistic ideations (MOR); e) less concern with suicidal ideations (SC-Comp); f) less traumatic and dissociation experiences (CritCont%); g) less emotional stress (YTVC); h) less vulnerable to mixed affective experiences (CBlend) and; i) less drawn to dreary, dark, and gloomy stimuli (C').

Method

Participants

Thirty SO participated against children and adolescents, with ages varying from 18 to 65 years old. This sample was divided into two groups, one group (G1) formed by SO without psychopathy (PCL-R <30 ; N = 20), with an average age of 36.1 years old (SD = 9.2),

and the other group (G2) composed of SO with psychopathy (PCL-R ≥ 30 ; N = 10), with an average age of 28.4 years old (SD = 7.6).

As for the sociodemographic profile of the participants: age varied between 18 and 60 years old, with an average of 33.5 years old (SD = 9.2); schooling had a predominance of five to eight years of study (N = 19, 63.3%); the marital status of 40% of them (N = 12) was married; professionally 40% (N = 12) were manual civil construction workers. Other observed aspects were that the victims had an average age of 10.0 years old (SD = 2.9; Minimum: 5; Maximum: 15), with 86.7% (N = 26) being female and 80% (N = 24) of the participants had some kind of proximity to the victim (father, stepfather, uncle, neighbor or friend of the family), of which 85% (N = 20) were parents or stepfathers.

It is a convenience sample, and the inclusion criteria for completing the research protocol were: being convicted of sexual crimes; having victimized children and / or adolescents; serving time in a closed condition facility. The exclusion criteria were: having victimized adults; not having the Informed Consent Form (ICF) duly filled out; performing poorly on tests to provide interpretatively reliable information; having progressed from prison conditions (from closed to semi-open or open) during research data collection. Three re-educated ex-convicts were excluded: two for claiming unwillingness to respond to all data collection instruments and one for not having an interest in signing the ICF. Thus, the final sample of the present article totaled 30 participants who were divided into the two groups described above.

Instruments

- Protocol for the Collection of Information in Criminal Proceedings: a protocol was used to collect information in criminal proceedings, available at the registry office of the prison unit (age, education, marital status and profession of the participants, as well as the age and sex of the victims, in addition to proximity with the victims);
- *Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (PCL-R): psychological test used to discriminate participants from G1 (without psychopathy) and G2 (with psychopathy). It was developed and validated by Robert Hare (Hare, 1991, 2003) in the United States, and validated by Morana (2004) in Brazil, to assess psychopathy in male forensic populations. The

scale consists of three stages. The 1st stage: interview with semi-structured script. The 2nd stage: script of objective information that can be investigated in the criminal process, interview with family members, professionals, and documents of the examinee, but in the case of the present study, data were collected only in the criminal process. The 3rd stage: checklist of 20 items, considering the information from the two previous stages; each item is qualified in an ordinal numerical scale, being 0 when it does not meet the item's criteria, 1 partially meets and 2 meets completely.

After the values are assigned, the 20 items are added to obtain the total score of the examinee in the PCL-R. In this study, the cutoff point of 30 points was used for the participants who composed the sample with psychopathy, which was the cutoff point established by the author when developing the scale, as well as being effective for defining what would be considered a typical psychopath (Hare, 1991, 2003).

- Rorschach Performance Assessment System (R-PAS) (Meyer et al., 2017): it is a psychological test made up of ten ink-stained cards built by Hermann Rorschach in 1921, in Switzerland, to assess personality. The application is individual, and requires test takers to identify what the constructed ink blots look like in response to the question, "What might this be?" The R-PAS variables are divided into five domains: behaviors and observations of the application, engagement and cognitive processing, perception and thinking problems, stress and distress, self and other representation.

In this study, the Stress and Distress domain was investigated, which is related to the experience of affective discomfort, stress, tension, anguish and emotional confusion. Thus, the feelings of helplessness, deep insecurity, devaluation and self-criticism are investigated in this domain (Meyer et al., 2017). From this understanding, it is necessary to understand that stress is important in decision-making and in solving life problems, and its absence or excess is an indicator of a pathological condition (Barros, 2017). This domain is composed of the variables m (inanimate movement), Y (diffuse shading), MOR (morbid content), SC-Comp (suicide concern composite), PPD (potentially problematic determinants), YTV C' (sum of shading and achromatic color), CBlend (color blended with shading or achromatic color), C' (achromatic color), V (vista) and CritCont% (critical contents percent).

Procedures

The research was forwarded and approved for the Research Ethics Committee (CEP). The procedures for data collection followed the steps: 1) Random selection of the processes of the re-socialized ex-convicts who had committed sexual crimes and contact with the possible research participant to verify their availability to participate in the study; 2) Obtaining the signature of the interested party in two copies of the ICF; 3) Collection of data in the criminal process; 4) Application of psychological tests, which followed the fixed order of application started with PCL-R followed by R-PAS.

Data analysis

The data processed in the R-PAS database and those referring to sociodemographic and PCL-R data, were included in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 24.0, to perform the statistical analyzes. Initially, the protocols of the PCL-R (N = 30) were corrected by two judges to calculate the reliability of the test through inter-rater agreement. The reference values for the reliability coefficients, using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC), were: between 0.40 and 0.59, moderate values were considered; between 0.60 and 0.74 good; and above 0.74 excellent (Hunsley & Mash, 2007). The average reliability value of the present study was 0.89, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.22, ranging from 0.62 to 0.96, revealing a good reliability of the interpretations of the interviews and the completion of the scale. The ICC found was similar to those achieved in the studies by Morana (2004), as well as in the studies by Hare and Neumann (2006) and Olver and Wong (2015) for sample of prisoners.

Another reliability analysis was performed using internal consistency, performed with Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with an acceptable consistency value above 0.70. For Factor 1 (psychopathic traits) the alpha coefficient was 0.79, and for Factor 2 (antisocial traits) it was 0.94. In general, the internal consistency of the total score with the PCL-R can be considered acceptable for a clinical scale, with an index of 0.93 for all items. These observed values were close to those observed in the Brazilian PCL-R study, by Morana (2004).

Subsequently, all Rorschach protocols (N = 30) were codified by the research group, coordinated by the second author of this article. Of these, 30% were selected at random and sent to be coded by two expert judges in R-PAS, blinded to the research objectives, in

order to calculate the analysis of agreement between evaluators, through the ICC. The average ICC value was 0.86, with a SD of 0.22, a median of 0.92, ranging from 0.64 to 1.00. All of these values were considered excellent and with strong evidence of reliability regarding the classification of responses under the R-PAS framework.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) normality test was performed, with Lilliefors correction for the variables evaluated in the Rorschach test. It was found that only one variable (10%) was within the normal range in the K-S test ($p > 0.05$; SC-Comp- $p = 0.200$). Thus, nine variables (90%) showed deviation from normal distribution. For this reason, the bootstrap was used, which adjusts the normality of the variables, and it was decided to use parametric tests for inferential analyzes. The descriptive analysis of the variables of the Rorschach test between G1 and G2 was performed using average, SD, minimum and maximum, with a confidence interval (95% CI) and the difference between groups was analyzed by Student's *t* test for independent samples. The effect size was verified by Cohen's *d*. Regarding the size of the effect calculated by Cohen's *d*, it was classified as small ($d = 0.20$ to 0.49), medium ($d = 0.50$ to 0.79) and large ($d \geq 0.80$), based on the reference values suggested by Cohen (Cohen, 1988). Finally, the multiple linear regression analysis explored the association between the variables age, stress and distress (independent variables) and the PCL-R scores (dependent variables). The variable input method used in the model was the stepwise forward. In all analyzes, they were considered as statistically significant, with $p < 0.05$.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive and comparative statistics of the variables of the Rorschach test of the stress and distress domain between groups G1 and G2. With regard to the stress and distress domain, the average of the concern with suicidal ideations (SC-Comp), emotional stress (YTVC') and vulnerability to mixed affective experiences (CBlend) variables were significantly lower in the group with psychopathy ($p \leq 0.05$), with large effect size for the variables SC-Comp ($d = 1.462$) and YTVC' ($d = 0.860$). However, the variable CBlend was unable to be calculated, due to G2 having presented zero as an average. Thus, the hypotheses e, g and h established for this study could be confirmed. While hypotheses a, b, c, d, f and i have not been confirmed.

Table 2 presents the multiple linear regression analysis, stepwise forward method, which explored the association between the variables: age, stress and distress and psychopathy (PCL-R scores). The adjusted model explained 16.3% (adjusted $R^2: 0.173$) of the psychopathy variance. Thus, the results show that the variables, age ($\beta: -0.25$; $p = 0.046$), Y ($\beta: -2.57$; $p = 0.021$) and YTVC' ($\beta: -0.98$; $p = 0.001$), were negatively associated with the outcome, that is, with psychopathy. Thus, the lower the emotional stress (Y and YTVC') and the age, the greater the traces of psychopathy.

Discussion

The present research aimed to investigate whether SO against children and adolescents with psychopathy

Table 1.
Rorschach variables with significant differences between groups

Variables	Groups	N	M	CI 95%	SD	Min	Max	<i>t</i> ¹	<i>P</i>	<i>d</i> ²
SC-Comp	G1	20	4.72	4.15-5.22	1.25	3.1	7	3.661	0.001	1.462
	G2	10	3.09	2.55-3.67	0.96	2.4	4.9			
YTVC'	G1	20	3.55	2.18-5.09	3.20	0	13	2.002	0.050	0.860
	G2	10	1.40	0.57-2.33	1.50	0	4			
CBlend	G1	20	0.45	0.13-0.84	0.82	0	3	2.438	0.025	*
	G2	10	0.00	0.00-0,00	0.00	0	0			

Abbreviations: M: average; SD: standard deviation; 95% CI: 95% confidence interval; ¹Student's *t* test for independent samples; Cohen's ²*d*; TG Total Group (G1 + G2);

* Cohen's *d* for CBlend was unable to be calculated because G2 had 0 as an average.

Table 2.

Multiple linear regression analysis that explored the relationship between psychopathy scores, age and the Rorschach test variable

Variables	β	Error pattern Robust	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² Adjusted
Age	-0.25	0.12	-2.10	0.046	0.315	0.173
Y	-2.57	1.04	-2.46	0.021		
YTVC'	-0.98	0.27	-3.58	0.001		
Intercept	44.40					

* Multiple linear regression model, stepwise forward method, adjusted for age, Y, SC-Comp and YTVC'. β = regression coefficient; *R*² = coefficient of determination; *t* = *t* test.

(PCL-R \geq 30) and without this disorder (PCL-R $<$ 30), differed in relation to the ability to manage stress and distress through the performance in R-PAS. The hypothesis was that SO with psychopathy (PCL-R \geq 30) would present less stress / distress than those without psychopathy (PCL-R $<$ 30). The results confirmed the hypothesis raised through three of the nine variables investigated in the test. The three variables that corroborated the hypothesis were considered significantly lower in the SO with psychopathy, and pointed out that they had less anxiety, irritation, sadness, dysphoria, loneliness or helplessness (YTVC'), as well as less experiences of vulnerability to mixed affects, specifically negative feelings that destroy positive reactions and satisfaction (CBlend), as well as less worries about self-destructive thinking or suicidal intentionality (SC-Comp). Similar findings (Daderman & Jonson, 2008), but through variables other than Rorschach, showed the low level of stress in SO with psychopathy, with the absence of dysphoric affects or more intense psychological suffering (*V* = 0), in addition to low receptivity to emotional stimuli (Afr↓).

Regarding the little concern with suicide, Cleckley (1976), several decades ago, had already observed that psychopaths never become sufficiently distressed to commit suicide, and that their frequent empty threats of self-harm are characterized by extraordinary cunning, premeditation and histrionics. According to this view, self-directed aggression by psychopaths can occur, but it tends to be highly instrumental and rarely lethal, unlike self-directed aggression by others who are associated with internalizing symptom problems, such as depression, anxiety or anguish. In the case of psychopaths, self-harm tends to be a mechanism for secondary gains when trying to serve the sentence in an alternative way, as, for example, in specific treatment programs for SO.

Regarding the low level of emotional stress (YTVC') and affective ambivalence (CBlend) found in the participants with psychopathy in the present study, Patrick et al. (2009) consider that one of the personality traits found in people with psychopathy, which helps to understand such peculiar characteristics, is daring. That is, the ability to remain calm and focused in situations that involve pressure or threat, as well as the ability to recover quickly from events that involve stress and danger, which makes them interested in situations that involve high adrenaline and constant search for emotions and adventure. However, in addition to daring, it is important to note that the psychopath would also have the strong trait of evil, defined as deficient empathy, disdain for the other, pleasure in exploring people, in being aggressive and cruel.

According to Exner Júnior (2003), the ability to manage stress well and thus remain satisfied and stable, even with maladaptive behaviors, prevents the person from coming into contact with experiences of fragility, helplessness and discomfort. Ideally, stress should be at a high level for any type of mental disorder or behavioral malfunction, as it is assumed that when the problem is solved, the person will be able to recover the direction of their behavior and self-control in their daily life. Therefore, stress is one of the aspects that favors the person to be predisposed to change. Without this stress, the psychopath may feel satisfied and comfortable, even showing problematic personality traits, showing resistance to changes in his behavior or personality, which can contribute to the improvement of psychological aspects, be they affective, behavioral or interpersonal.

In this study, it was observed that 16.3% of the psychopathy variance was explained by the lower reactivity to emotional stress (Y and YTVC'), and joviality, while the others, 83.7% of the psychopathy variance,

can be explained by other factors, whether interpersonal, cognitive, affective and behavioral, to be investigated in future researches.

Considering the R-PAS variables, which did not discriminate between the two groups of participants, some of them suggest being sensitive to drawn to dreary, and gloomy stimuli (C'), related to an environmental sensitivity or attunement (PPD), and intrusive thoughts caused by environmental stressors (m). The fact that they do not corroborate the raised hypothesis may be due to these variables appearing more frequently in protocols of people with average and above average capacities to process information, that is, to perceive the environment in a more elaborate or complex way (PPD, C'), as well as being related to a higher level of psychological maturity to perceive environmental stressors (m) (Meyer et al., 2017; Stanfill, Viglione, & Resende, 2013). However, these abilities may be related to the subtle cognitive impairments that are normally impaired in sex offenders, as well as in psychopathy, predisposing them to more simplistic and superficial perceptions and, consequently, their performance on the test would produce very little of these variables (Beech, Bartels & Dixon, 2013; Jordan et al., 2016; Ó Ciardha & Ward, 2013).

The other two variables, which also did not discriminate between groups, are related to the pessimistic thoughts and negative feelings about self (MOR), as well as to the difficulty of containing concerns and intrusive thoughts of traumatic events (CritCont%). These aspects were also not frequent in the performances of the participants in both groups, showing that they may be aspects that are not interfering in the psychological well-being of the SO during the period in which the personality assessment was carried out.

Some limitations can be identified in this article. One is the small number of participants that constituted a sample for convenience, which makes it difficult to extend the results to other samples. Other similar studies would be needed to more safely assess the experience of stress in SO against children and adolescents with and without psychopathy, and how threatening it could be for other people. Other researches with an experimental design could better assess the potential explanatory role of the perception of stress in SO with and without psychopathy. In addition, the present study worked with the bifactorial model of psychopathy which, although widely used for the study of this disorder, is not the only one nor the best model (Hare & Neumann, 2008; Patrick et al., 2009). There are several

theoretical frameworks about psychopathy as a personality construct, which differ in the nature and content of the dimensions.

Another limitation would be the broad definition that can be had of the stress / distress domain in Rorschach, which includes a diversity of variables that evaluate multiple dimensions of what stress would be. It is suggested that, in future studies, self-report instruments are included that evaluate correlated constructs, which could expand the understanding of the various constructs that make up the studied domain. In any case, it is extremely difficult to characterize the exact nature of the construct being measured in any psychological study, which is always a challenge for the researcher. It is also suggested to make comparisons between groups of SO with and without psychopathy that victimized children versus those that victimized adults.

Despite this, it is understood that some practical implications are relevant to the importance of the present study, which corroborates with the others that suggest that psychopathic traits have a significant influence on the experience of stress, decreasing its reactivity and providing more peaceful responses than those expected in the face of emotionally and interpersonally impacting situations (Nigel et al., 2019; Sandvik et al., 2015). Child and adolescent's sexual offender, with psychopathy, could be more predisposed to classify stressful events as less threatening than those who are not psychopathic (Sellbom, 2015; Nigel et al., 2019; Venables et al., 2015). It is understood that the implications of this are socially devastating for a personality who constantly craves predatory emotions and adventures and, at the same time, nurtures disdain for the other. The combination of this low reactivity to stress, with the misfit features of Factors 1 and 2 of psychopathy, would be the problem. This would increase the willingness for fearlessness in a profile of a malevolent person.

It is important to remember that psychopathy has been considered a psychopathological disorder of difficult remission, treatment and with high rates of criminal recidivism (Balsis et al., 2017; Gacono et al., 2011). These findings are relevant to forensic practice, especially for risk assessment and the development of more specific treatment programs. These are indicators of the need to develop different therapeutic approaches that work for psychopathic SO, as well as the need to study ways to keep them under control and reduce the devastating impact of these people, both in the prison environment and in society.

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