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Assessment of personality pathology in a forensic setting

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The assessment of personality pathology highly prevalent in prison populations is an essential part of the legal and forensic process for both judges' decisions regarding punishment and treatment of disordered offenders. Forensic assessments should not only be efficient and cost-effective, but also give possible consequences of their outcomes- accurate, objective, and transparent. The MMPI-2 self-report instrument is the most widely used and researched test of adult psychopathology. However, it does not have forensic norms. The DAPP-SF self-report instrument can distinguish treatment-seeking patients with personality disorders from the general population, but this has not yet been investigated in forensic populations. Data from two studies will be presented. Study one aimed at deriving an empirical classification system using cluster analysis of 247 MMPI-2 profiles of criminal defendants undergoing pre-trial psychological assessments in a forensic psychiatric observation clinic. In similar studies, the number of clusters varied between 10 and two. Results indicated only a non-disturbed and a disturbed profile, differing on general elevation of MMPI-2 profiles but displaying no qualitatively distinct profiles. Study two focused on the screening potential for personality disorder of the DAPP-SF in 89 defendants in the same clinic. Results showed only moderate associations between DAPP-SF and the outcome of the structured interview for DSM-IV personality (SIDP-IV). A floor effect was found in DAPP-SF scores: the forensic population reported less personality pathology than the general population, indicating faking good. Results indicating restricted usefulness of self-report instruments such as the MMPI-2 and DAPP in forensic populations will be discussed.

Biography

Marleen Spaans completed her Master's degrees in Developmental and Educational Psychology in 2003 and in Forensic Criminology in 2006, both from Leiden University, Netherlands. She is a Scientific Researcher in Department of Research and Education, Netherlands Institute for Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology (NIFP), part of Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice. She is pursuing her PhD on "The prevalence, assessment and prognostic value for treatment of personality pathology in a forensic setting", at Graduate School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Leiden University.

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