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Creators: Morgado, A. M. and Vale-Dias, M. d. L.

DOI: [10.14417/ap.1219](https://doi.org/10.14417/ap.1219)

Example citation: Morgado, A. M. and Vale-Dias, M. d. L. (2017) Portuguese juvenile delinquents: an exploratory study from a sample of institutionalized young offenders. *Analise Psicologica*. **35**(2), pp. 157-170. 0870-8231.

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Version: Published version

Official URL: <http://publicacoes.ispa.pt/index.php/ap/article/view/1219>

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Portuguese juvenile delinquents: An exploratory study from a sample of institutionalized young offenders

Alice Murteira Morgado* / Maria da Luz Vale Dias**

* Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade de Coimbra / University of Northampton, Faculty of Health and Society, UK; ** Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade de Coimbra

Severe antisocial behaviour in adolescence is a matter of concern in every society, especially when it translates in juvenile delinquency that persists through adulthood. In this study, we asked a sample of 121 institutionalized male juvenile offenders (between 14 and 20 years old) to fill several self-report measures to understand young delinquents and their social and academic conditions, behaviour, and individual dispositions.

Results reveal peculiarities on academic achievement, socioeconomic status and family size. Analysis confirmed the role of personality, self-concept, self-control and family environment on antisocial scores, especially psychoticism, neuroticism, social conformity, and family environment. Different behavioural subtypes reflect differences in psychoticism, antisocial behaviour and family environment. However, there were no correlations between antisocial tendency and age, school year or family size. Our paper contributes to existing knowledge that supports intervention approaches, stressing that, unlike age, school year or family size, different types of behaviour may require differentiated interventions.

Key words: Antisocial behaviour, Adolescence, Delinquency.

Introduction

The term antisocial behaviour refers to a diversity of behaviours that violate social rules intended to promote respect and consideration towards other people's life and property and "must be interpreted as a social event, with meaningful subtypes, topographies, antecedents, and functions" (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2008, p. 437). Hence, by definition, its study carries an immeasurable complexity due to the variability in antisocial manifestations, individuals, and trajectories. Such complex and heterogeneous nature, especially in adolescence, is well acknowledged in literature regarding this issue, and many theories have attempted to describe and explain the antisocial phenomenon, its origins, determinants, trajectories, manifestations, degrees of severity, and persistence mechanisms.

Particularly relevant to understanding the dynamics of adolescent delinquency (in opposition to adolescent deviant behaviours that are found in the general population) is Moffitt's theory (1993, 2006). The author postulates the existence of two types of antisocial behaviour: the life-course-persistent (LCP) and the adolescence-limited (AL). The latter, initiated in early adolescence, usually ceasing in young adulthood, is considered to be generalized (almost normative), transient, and less

Supported by the FCT Grant No. SFRH/BD/77702/2011.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Alice Murteira Morgado, University of Northampton, Faculty of Health and Society, Psychology Division, Office F4, Park Campus, Boughton Green Road, NN2 7AL, Northampton, UK. E-mail: alice.morgado@northampton.ac.uk

severe, consisting mainly of non-violent acts that are instrumental for the adolescent's desire for power and acknowledgement, such as theft, vandalism, substance abuse, etc. LCP, on the contrary, is rarer, more severe and persistent across the lifespan. Moffitt postulates that LCP antisocial behaviour has its origins in very early individual characteristics, such as neuropsychological health, that manifest as "variability in infant temperament, developmental milestones and cognitive abilities" (Moffitt, 1993, p. 687), combined with environmental disadvantages that prevent the correction of the child's individual problems, and may, in fact, contribute to exacerbate them: "under such detrimental circumstances, difficult behaviour is gradually elaborated into conduct problems and a dearth of prosocial skills (...), academic failure and a dearth of job skills. Over time, accumulating consequences of the youngster's personality problems and academic problems prune away the options for change" (Moffitt, 1993, p. 687). In fact, also the Cambridge Study for Delinquent Development argues that "the more persistent transgressors start early, have long criminal careers and present difficulties in many aspects of their lives" (Farrington, 2008, p. 242).

From this perspective, LCP antisocial individuals are somehow trapped by their circumstances, that is, at first by their characteristics and, later, by their contexts. In fact, little opportunity is available for this group of individuals to learn prosocial alternatives to their behaviours: "deviant behaviours later in life may thus reflect early individual differences that are perpetuated or exacerbated by interactions with the social environment: first at home, and later at school" (Moffitt, 1993, p. 683).

A different, but equally important, framework for understanding adolescent antisocial behaviour is suggested by Tremblay (2010), placing the focus on behavioural subtypes, rather than on age-of-onset. According to this author, diverse types of antisocial behaviour entail different developmental trajectories as different resources and characteristics are involved in distinct types of antisocial behaviour. In fact, the frequency of overt behaviours (like physical aggression) generally decreases with age, while the frequency of covert behaviours (such as rule breaking) tends to increase.

In this context, a developmental perspective may provide important insight and valuable clues to understanding what needs to be addressed in order to prevent and amend antisocial manifestations in adolescence, especially concerning specific contexts and individual characteristics (Morgado & Vale Dias, 2013).

There are several individual and contextual factors that have been mentioned to contribute to increasing the severity of antisocial behaviour to the point where it is translated into long-term delinquency. Farrington (2007) argues that delinquency is an element of a bigger syndrome of antisocial behaviour that tends to be persistent and relatively stable. Among others, the author refers to impulsivity, low intelligence (or poor school performance), poor parental rearing practices, antisocial family, and poverty as factors involved in the development of delinquency.

A negative association between socioeconomic status and antisocial behaviours has been generally confirmed (Church II, Jagers, & Taylor, 2012; Rutter, Giller, & Hagell, 1998; Tremblay, 2010). Yet, the effect of socioeconomic conditions on antisocial behaviours may not be direct but mediated by other living conditions, such as family functioning (Rutter et al., 1998). Indeed, the family's role is crucial for the development of social behaviours, since it is within the family that children will learn and rehearse social interactions, get reinforcements or punishments according to the adjustment of their conducts, and, therefore, identify what sets of behaviours are acceptable and may be repeated and what behaviours should be avoided. Hence, family structure factors (single parenting, divorce, family dimension, etc.) and the conflict that may be involved have been identified as determinants of social conducts (Pardini, Waller, & Hawes, 2015; Stadelmann, Perren, Groeben, & VonKlitzing, 2010). Family management practices, including control, discipline, supervision, and rejection (Farrington, 2007), as well the quality of communication and relations within the family (Laub, Sampson, & Sweeten, 2006; Tomé, Camacho, Matos, & Simões, 2015) have been mentioned as significant risk factors for involvement in violence, delinquency and other antisocial manifestations.

The importance of considering the role of individual dispositions in adolescent antisocial behaviour is also evident and has been previously explored in the Portuguese context with juvenile delinquents, in particular regarding psychopathic, callous-unemotional and narcissistic traits, and self-esteem (Pechorro, 2011; Pechorro, Ray, Barroso, Marôco, & Gonçalves, 2014; Pechorro, Silva, Marôco, Poiares, & Vieira, 2012).

One of the most solid theories on personality and antisocial behaviour (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985) – that has been widely tested and discussed (e.g., Center & Kemp, 2002) – suggests a specific profile consisting of high scores on the three Eysenck's personality traits – extraversion (high energy, sociability, stimulation seeking, activity, assertiveness), neuroticism (susceptibility to anxiety and quick emotional arouse), and psychoticism (aggressiveness, egocentrism, toughness, and impulsivity) – and low scores on the Lie scale (L) from the Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire (EPQ), which has been considered as a measure of socialization and social conformity.

In the scope of social functioning, self-concept is regarded both as risk factor and protective factor. Although the existing body of literature has already explained some aspects of antisocial children and adolescents' self-perceptions (Pechorro et al., 2012), research has not yet allowed us to clarify if there is a particular self-concept pattern that defines a tendency of antisocial adolescents. Despite the uncertainties around this matter, one aspect appears to be consensual: self-concept is entailed in adolescent development, has a significant role to play in the development of social behaviours (Salmivalli, 2001; Torregrosa, Ingles, & Garcia-Fernandez, 2011), and, consequently, in the development of antisocial trajectories at this stage of the lifespan. In this sense, analysis regarding different components of self-concept appear to be particularly, since research has been pointing out peculiarities when it comes to physical and social components of self-concept in antisocial adolescents (Salmivalli, 2001; Torregrosa et al., 2011).

Likewise, social skills appear to be determinant – either as protective factors or risk factors – in guiding individual's choices regarding social behaviours (Mota, Matos, & Lemos, 2011; Selman & Adalbjarnardottir, 2000). It is quite consensual that the tendency to show altruism, sympathy, and respect may be determinant in preventing an antisocial trajectory (Batanova & Loukas, 2011; Dodge et al., 2008), whereas lack of social sensitivity, empathy and perspective-taking in social interactions may put individuals at higher risk of engaging in antisocial behaviours (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004; Pechorro et al., 2014). In addition, social skills and antisocial behaviour have an important impact on school achievement. Indeed, children who bring a limited behavioural repertoire or limited social skills by the time they enter school may be more difficult to handle in the classroom, increasing the likelihood of poor academic performance, poor attachment to teachers, lower school commitment and rejection by conventional peers (Payne & Welch, 2015). Hence, adolescence, when social relations assume a growing importance in the individuals' lives, and when social skills are still far from being fully developed (Steinberg, 2009), may be a critical stage to identify, prevent and/or compensate for psychosocial vulnerabilities.

In this paper we address individual dispositions and perceptions with focus on personality, self-concept, social skills and family environment. Although such dimensions have been widely studied individually, their role on adolescent antisocial behaviour is still far from being fully understood and explained (Morgado & Vale Dias, 2013), especially when it comes to considering multiple dimensions in the same research design, which may provide a more complete understanding of each dimension and, due to joint analysis, of their complementary contributions on the explanation of adolescent antisocial behaviours.

With this study we intend to better understand a sample of institutionalized delinquent boys, namely their behavioural manifestations, personality, self-concept, social skills, and perceived family environment. Hence, our hypothesis were developed with a descriptive and exploratory purpose, in order to understand, on the one hand, if institutionalized adolescent delinquents would share some of LCP antisocial individuals' characteristics (Moffitt, 1993) and, on the other hand,

if different behavioural manifestations in these same individuals would, as suggested by Tremblay (2010), reflect distinct characteristics and resources:

- H1: Eysenck's personality traits (psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism) are positively correlated with antisocial behaviour while the "lie" scale of EPQ-J negatively correlates with antisocial behaviour;
- H2: Social skills, self-concept and perception of family environment are negatively correlated with antisocial behaviour;
- H3: Antisocial tendency and individual dispositions are related with age, school year and family size;
- H4: Juvenile delinquents with different behavioural subtypes present differences in antisocial behaviour scores and individual dispositions.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study included 121 boys with a history of delinquency institutionalized in five juvenile detention centres in different Portuguese regions, originally coming from all the country and living in urban areas (mostly greater Lisbon and Porto). Regarding their nationality, 86% were Portuguese, 13,2% came from African Portuguese Speaking Countries and only one individual was from another European country. Participants were predominantly of low socioeconomic status (88.4%) and with an average of 3.5 siblings. The age range of our sample is from 14 to 20 years old (mean=16.54; std. deviation=1.22). In terms of education, participants were attending professional and technical courses corresponding from the 5th to the 9th grade (45.5% were attending courses corresponding to the 2nd cycle: 5th and 6th grades). Almost half of our sample (46.3%) reported having been institutionalized due to both overt (i.e., aggression, threats) and covert behaviours (i.e., theft, drug dealing, destruction), with 38% reporting only covert behaviours and 15,7% only overt behaviours.

Table 1 shows some of the sample's sociodemographic characteristics.

Table 1

Sample description

		Frequency	%
Age	14	5	4.1
	15	18	14.9
	16	37	30.6
	17	36	29.8
	18	20	16.5
	19	3	2.5
	20	2	1.7
	Total	121	100
Socioeconomic status	Low	107	88.4
	Medium	12	9.9
	High	2	1.7
	Total	121	100
Number of siblings	0	12	9.9
	1	14	11.6
	2	24	19.8
	3	22	18.2
	4	15	12.4
	5	12	9.9
	>/=6	22	18.2
	Total	121	100

Measures

The studied variables were measured through self-report questionnaires, selected based on their psychometric characteristics, filling conditions (collectively and anonymously), and accessibility for individuals with basic reading skills.

Sociodemographic conditions were assessed with a Sociodemographic Questionnaire built specifically for this research, with open questions on the individuals' characteristics and living conditions, such as their age, school level, family size and socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status was determined based on families' qualifications and occupations, following the criteria used by Simões (1994).

Behavioural characteristics were assessed with the Portuguese version of Youth Self-Report (YSR; Achenbach, 1991; Fonseca & Monteiro, 1999). Although the questionnaire includes 6 scales, we only considered results from the "antisocial" scale, composed of items related to cruelty, disobedience, fights and threats, which obtained a strong reliability score ($\alpha=.82$).

Personality was assessed through the Portuguese version of Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire for Children (EPQ-J; Fonseca, 1989), organized in four scales: "psychoticism" ($\alpha=.66$), "extraversion" ($\alpha=.72$), "neuroticism" ($\alpha=.71$), and "lie" ($\alpha=.73$) according to Eysenck's personality theory previously described.

To measure self-concept, the Portuguese version of Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale-2 was used (PHCSCS-2; Piers & Herzberg, 2002; Veiga, 2006). This reduced version includes 60 items that provide a global self-concept measure ($\alpha=.84$), resulting from the sum of scores from 6 factors: "behavioural adjustment" ($\alpha=.75$), "intellectual/school status" ($\alpha=.68$), "physical appearance and attributes" ($\alpha=.63$), "anxiety" ($\alpha=.67$), "popularity" ($\alpha=.53$), and "happiness and satisfaction" ($\alpha=.59$). The two last factors were not considered due to low internal reliability (George & Mallery, 2003).

To assess social skills, we used the Portuguese version of Social Skills Questionnaire – Student Form (SSQ; Gresham & Elliot, 1990; Mota et al., 2011), namely its "empathy" ($\alpha=.74$), and "self-control" ($\alpha=.77$) scales. Each item could be answered according to its frequency and its considered importance. We used the answers regarding frequency since those are the only allowing quantitative analysis.

Perception of family environment was measured with the Portuguese version of the Family Environment Scale (FES; Matos & Fontaine, 1996; Moos & Moos, 1986), with 10 scales organized in three underlying dimensions: relationship – "cohesion" ($\alpha=.80$), "expressiveness" ($\alpha=.32$), and "conflict" ($\alpha=.57$) – personal growth – "independence" ($\alpha=.22$), "achievement orientation" ($\alpha=.39$), "intellectual/cultural orientation" ($\alpha=.70$), "active/recreational orientation" ($\alpha=.47$), and "moral and religious emphasis" ($\alpha=.75$) – and system maintenance – "organization" ($\alpha=.59$), and "control" ($\alpha=.41$). Due to the low internal reliability of most scales (George & Mallery, 2003), we chose to use only a global score of family environment ($\alpha=.88$) consisting on all the 90 items in the questionnaire (see, for example, Briere & Elliott, 1993). Due to the nature of the "conflict" scale, we inverted its items for this global score in order to assure that all items were in the same direction, that is, a higher score being equivalent to a general better perception of the family environment.

Procedures

Prior to the instruments' application, permissions were asked to the Ministry of Justice as well as to the National Committee for Data Protection (CNPD). After each juvenile detention centre agreed to collaborate, youths were asked to provide their informed and voluntary collaboration,

being assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their answers. Our sample was occasional and included all the individuals who agreed to participate from the 175 who were consulted (acceptance rate of 69%). The protocol was applied collectively and anonymously in two sessions. Although it would have been beneficial to have access to the individuals' formal reports regarding the conditions of their institutionalization, the need to ensure anonymity prevented us from gathering that additional information. Data was, then, inserted on IBM SPSS (v.22) and analysed with the same program.

Results

A considerable percentage of our sample came from low socioeconomic status (88.4%) and 58.7% reported having 3 or more siblings. All individuals were still at basic school levels, with almost half of the sample attending classes corresponding to the Portuguese 2nd cycle of basic school (corresponding, on average, to ages 10-12).

To test the first three hypothesis, we performed Pearson correlations, as shown in Table 2, to check for relations between antisocial behaviour, individual dispositions, age, school year, and family size. Hypothesis concerning personality, self-concept, social skills and family environment factors were generally confirmed with psychoticism (.65), lie (-.57), and behavioural adjustment (.62) showing the strongest correlations with antisocial behaviour, followed by family environment (-.40) and global self-concept (-.36). The hypothesis regarding the relation between antisocial tendency and age, school year and family size were refuted. Results only show significant (but modest) correlations between school year and psychoticism (.24) and school year and intellectual/school status (.20).

Table 2

Pearson correlations: Antisocial behaviour; individual dispositions, age, school year and family size

	YSR antisocial	Age	School year	Family size
YSR Antisocial	1	.00	-.08	-.09
EPQ-J Psychoticism	.65**	-.04	.24*	-.02
EPQ-J Extraversion	.13	-.01	.05	-.04
EPQ-J Neuroticism	.35**	.08	.17	.03
EPQ-J Lie	-.57**	.02	-.10	.17
PHCSCS Global Self-Concept	-.36**	.05	.09	-.05
PHCSCS Behavioural Adjustment	-.62**	.03	-.03	.04
PHCSCS Intellectual/School Status	-.26**	-.08	.20*	-.05
PHCSCS Physical Appearance/Attributes	.12	.06	.08	.17
PHCSCS Anxiety	-.09	-.15	-.04	-.10
SSQ Empathy	-.18	.12	.08	-.04
SSQ Self-Control	-.30**	.18	-.03	-.10
FES Family Environment	-.40**	.09	.07	-.02

Note. ** $p < .005$; * $p < .03$.

Taking into consideration these results, we tested a multiple regression model in order to verify, in all variables correlated with antisocial behaviour, those that would stand out as its predictors. Table 3 shows that psychoticism, lie, neuroticism and family environment revealed significant predictive value, accounting for 56% of the variance.

Table 3

Multiple Linear Regression Model (Stepwise): Predictors of antisocial scores

Dependent variable	Independent variable	<i>R</i>	<i>Adjusted R²</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Beta Std.</i>	<i>P</i>
YSR Antisocial	EPQ-J Psychoticism	.76	.56	36.65	.00	.44	.00
	EPQ-J Lie					-.28	.00
	EPQ-J Neuroticism					.16	.00
	FES Family Environment					-.15	.00

To test for differences according to behavioural subtypes, we performed One-Way ANOVA that revealed significant differences between groups in antisocial behaviour, psychoticism, behavioural adjustment and family environment, as Table 4 demonstrates.

Table 4

One-way Anova: Differences between behavioural subtypes

Dependent Variables	Groups	Mean	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
YSR Antisocial	Overt	5.89	10.14	.00
	Covert	8.74		
	Overt+Covert	10.95		
EPQ-J Psychoticism	Overt	4.21	4.88	.01
	Covert	5.50		
	Overt+Covert	6.57		
EPQ- J Extraversion	Overt	13.47	.62	.54
	Covert	14.35		
	Overt+Covert	14.46		
EPQ-J Neuroticism	Overt	9.63	.22	.80
	Covert	9.17		
	Overt+Covert	9.63		
EPQ-J Lie	Overt	8.00	1.93	.15
	Covert	7.37		
	Overt+Covert	6.39		
PHSCS Global Self-Concept	Overt	41.26	2.30	.11
	Covert	40.35		
	Overt+Covert	37.46		
PHSCS Behavioural Adjustment	Overt	8.47	4.82	.01
	Covert	7.46		
	Overt+Covert	6.14		
PHSCS Intellectual/School Status	Overt	8.79	2.10	.13
	Covert	8.41		
	Overt+Covert	7.55		
PHSCS Physical Appearance/ Attributes	Overt	5.42	.24	.80
	Covert	5.76		
	Overt+Covert	5.63		
PHSCS Anxiety	Overt	4.68	.10	.91
	Covert	4.93		
	Overt+Covert	4.88		
SSQ Empathy	Overt	16.37	1.19	.31
	Covert	15.56		
	Overt+Covert	15.00		
SSQ Self-Control	Overt	13.89	1.62	.20
	Covert	14.04		
	Overt+Covert	12.78		
FES Family Environment	Overt	367.61	4.24	.02
	Covert	353.52		
	Overt+Covert	339.52		

Discussion

This research intended to study a challenging phenomenon and sample, composed of a group of institutionalized delinquent boys that have committed an offense before reaching the legal age to be trialled in adult courts. We hypothesized that personality, social skills, self-concept and perception of family environment were correlated with antisocial behaviour. We also anticipated that antisocial behaviour and individual dispositions were related with age, school year and family size and that juvenile delinquents with different behavioural subtypes would present differences in antisocial behaviour scores and individual dispositions.

The majority of boys whose behaviour justified an institutionalization came from disadvantaged social contexts, suggesting, in line with previous research (Farrington, 2007; Moffitt, 2006), that low socioeconomic status may place individuals at higher risk for antisocial conducts. This confirms the need to direct our preventive efforts to youngsters living in disadvantaged social and economic contexts where boys are more vulnerable to antisocial behaviours. Also noteworthy is the fact that a considerable amount of individuals in our sample had 3 or more siblings, which is highly above average for the Portuguese population. In fact, although there is no official data on the number of siblings of Portuguese adolescents, according to the population census, the fertility rate was 1.45 in 2001 and 1.35 in 2011. Furthermore, the rate of Portuguese families with a total of 6 or more elements was only of 3% in 2001 and 2% in 2011. This reality in Portugal is in line with findings from the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development indicating a higher likelihood of convicted delinquents to have lived in poorer and larger families (Farrington, 2007).

Likewise, the fact that all boys over 15 years of age were still in basic school levels (when it is expected that, at 15, Portuguese students are attending the first year of secondary education) indicates a prior unsuccessful academic trajectory with several retentions, since, in juvenile detention centres, students have mandatory classes according to their school level at the moment of institutionalization. It is possible that, as postulated by Moffitt (1993), these individuals have developmental and cognitive disadvantages that, combined with environmental disadvantages such as those found in this study, may explain, at least partially, such academic failure. In fact, literature generally confirms the comorbidity between conduct behaviors, developmental delays and consequent school failures and dropout (Farrington, 2007; Paterson & Yoerger, 2002; Payne & Welch, 2015; Thornberry & Krohn, 2004). The Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development has not only identified low intelligence and poor school performance as some of the factors involved in the development of delinquency, but has also found that these dimensions may help to predict delinquency in adulthood (Farrington, 2004). Indeed, together with results on the correlation between antisocial behaviour and academic self-concept, this indicates the utmost importance of developing efforts towards preventing academic failure, for example, by empowering these boy's roles as students, improving their academic self-concept with personalized and meaningful reinforcement systems in their school achievements.

The hypothesis that Eysenck's personality traits were positively correlated with antisocial behaviour while the lie scale presented a negative correlation was confirmed (except extraversion that did not show significant results). The same variables were also found to predict antisocial scores, together with family environment, that was negatively correlated with antisocial behaviour. Connolly and O'Moore (2003, p. 560), argue that "a child's personality is greatly influenced by their upbringing and experiences. Therefore the experiences of children who come from less cohesive or dysfunctional homes may be related to their personality type". Hence, these results reveal the importance of a positive involvement of the family in juvenile offenders' lives, in efforts to promote socially adjusted behaviours that can, hopefully result in desistance from criminal trajectories. Thus, effective interventions should include families, capacitating their members to

create positive, harmonious relationships, coherent management practices and to stimulate personal growth, and prosocial interactions.

We found a significant correlation between antisocial behaviour and self-control, but the same did not occur with empathy. These results highlight the particular relevance of a tendency for impulsivity, aggressiveness, emotional instability or tension in antisocial behaviours.

Results on behavioural and global self-concept suggest that delinquent boys with higher antisocial scores perceive themselves as less behaviourally adjusted and in a more negative perspective. In other words, they appear to acknowledge the maladjustment of their behaviours, suggesting a cognitive understanding of social rules, but do not show sensitivity to such rules (as illustrated by results on the lie scale – negatively correlated with antisocial behaviour), possibly because they have not internalized them adequately. As the Cambridge Study for Delinquent Development (Farrington, 2007) suggests, the occurrence of frequent offenses depend on the interaction between the individual (who has a certain degree of antisocial tendency) and the social environment, as well as on a process of decision-making based on opportunities for deviancy: there are motivational factors for an antisocial act and, if the methods chosen to satisfy such motivations are socially disapproved, then an antisocial tendency may be strengthened. On the contrary, the same study suggests the existence of inhibiting factors, that is, if socially learned attitudes and beliefs are internalized, antisocial tendencies can be reduced. In fact, when parents promote and value legal norms and adequately supervise their children, practicing a discipline oriented by affection, children will understand that delinquency is wrong. However, impulsivity, neurological dysfunctions and low intelligence may affect the development of such internal beliefs, even when adequate environments are provided. In addition, also global self-concept was negatively correlated with antisocial behaviour which indicates, as expected, that individuals may perceive themselves more negatively due to their predispositions to negatively relate with the surrounding environment. Indeed, an individual that perceives himself poorly is less likely to adhere to social expectations due to the lower value attributed to others' judgments. Thus, it would be important to further analyse what motivates the perpetuation of antisocial conducts in individuals who have the ability to perceive their behavioural adjustment as negative but may not be able to act accordingly, and to explore matters of social identity and adjustment as well as the consideration towards others and the ability/motivation to say "no".

Results point out to some differences between individuals who committed offenses of different natures. Such differences suggest that individuals convicted due to both behavioural subtypes may be more vulnerable in terms of their individual conditions (poorer family environment, self-concept and higher psychoticism) and may have a higher antisocial tendency when compared to those convicted due to one subtype of antisocial behaviour. In fact, results indicate that juvenile delinquents manifesting both overt and covert forms of antisocial behaviour may have fewer resources to cope with their circumstances when compared to other young offenders, and therefore, may be more vulnerable to follow a more persistent and severe deviant trajectory. When individuals convicted due to overt and covert behaviours were compared, the latter appeared to be, in line with Tremblay's assumptions (2010), more vulnerable. When compared to overt behaviours, individuals who engage solely in covert behaviours appear to be more vulnerable in terms of impulsivity, toughness and egocentrism, behavioural self-concept, and family environment. It may be the case that, due to the different characteristics of each behavioural subtype, individuals who exclusively engage in serious covert behaviours may exhibit higher levels of defiance, general disregard for rules and hiding from authority figures. As Tremblay (2010, p. 347) postulates, "one of the major developmental challenges of a child is to learn to inhibit physical aggression and use other patterns of action in his attempts to achieve his goals". In other words, covert behaviours, by nature, require higher levels of scheming, which is may be associated with higher psychoticism, poorer behavioural self-concept and more negative family

environments. The question that remains unanswered is: what triggers what? Do individual dispositions make an individual more likely to engage in covert behaviours or is it that engaging in covert antisocial behaviour makes individuals more vulnerable?

This calls our attention to the need for differentiated approaches according to behavioural subtypes, following Tremblay's argument that "it seems obvious that physical violence and theft require different bio-psycho-social skills and different interventions are needed to prevent or correct these problems" (2010, p. 352). Indeed, differences between groups show us that adolescents convicted due to covert and overt behaviour may be more resistant to change when compared to those who were convicted due to one specific type of behaviour (the same occurs when we compare those who were convicted due to covert behaviour in comparison with overt behaviour). In light of these results, if, on the one hand, psychoticism, behavioural self-concept and family environment should be addressed in all groups, it would be important to work on the specific skills/motivations involved in covert and overt behaviours according to the behavioural subtype displayed by each group (and on both subtypes in the more vulnerable group).

There were no correlations between antisocial behaviour or individual dispositions and age or family size. Regarding school year, only psychoticism and academic self-concept showed significant, but modest correlations. This may be explained by the fact that psychoticism is a trait related to impulsivity (a characteristic that contributes negatively to academic achievement) and by the fact that academic failure highly contributes to poorer academic self-concept. Such results lead to the conclusion that this particular population may be more homogeneous in terms of antisocial behaviour and individual dispositions than we could anticipate. In fact, it appears that there are important vulnerabilities concerning social, familial, and personal domains that cross the studied sample, regardless of their age, school year, and family size.

This study is not without limitations. Our sample is relatively small and occasional since we had to depend on the collaboration of all the visited institutions and on voluntary participation from individuals. Some conditions (psychopathology, drug consumption, previous life experiences) were not controlled because, to guarantee anonymity, we could not access legal, academic and/or medical reports from these individuals. Moreover, the fact that participants were in a closed environment with significant restraint, away from their usual living environment may have had some unaccounted influence on the results. Due to the limited number of girls in juvenile detention centres and to the unavailability of institutions that include female sectors, our sample only included boys, leaving the important gender factor aside. Finally, it would have been preferable to base our analysis on other measures besides self-report measures. However, due to the peculiarities of our sample (e.g., routines, limited availability) and in order to preserve anonymity, it was impossible to recur to individual interviews. Furthermore, the access to families was extremely difficult due to the geographic distance between the families' homes and the juvenile detention centres and to the small frequency of visits. This may, as well, hamper the implementation of an intervention program such as the one proposed, that would imply families' cooperation.

Nevertheless, we believe that this study has great value for understanding such a challenging population, highlighting the value of personal dispositions and individual perceptions on the explanation of adolescent antisocial behaviours. Hence, due to its broad scope (considering multiple sets of variables independently and taken together), our results deepen our knowledge of the variables in play in severe and persistent adolescent antisocial behaviour. We were able to describe a particular sample of adolescents in terms of their personal, social and family conditions, highlighting several important vulnerabilities in all the three aspects of their lives and according to behavioural manifestations. It is our belief that this exploratory data offers new elements for understanding this challenging population, adding knowledge to the existing literature and calling the community's attention to the need to further study juveniles' vulnerabilities in the

most important domains of their lives. We recognize the importance of differentiated interventions according to behavioural subtypes and suggest that, in future studies with these populations, research focuses on studying large datasets with both male and female offenders with longitudinal designs, to accompany and study their trajectories as well as the variables highlighted in this study. We also believe that using qualitative data (e.g., focus groups, observations) could complement what we already know about this population and provide some clarification on the cognitive and emotional aspects underlying young offenders' different behavioural choices.

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A questão dos comportamentos antissociais graves na adolescência é motivo de preocupação social, especialmente quanto se traduzem em delinquência juvenil que persiste pela idade adulta. No sentido de estudar as características de jovens delinquentes assim como as suas condições sociais e académicas e o seu comportamento e disposições individuais, foi solicitado o preenchimento de diversos questionários de autorrelato a uma amostra de 121 jovens delinquentes a cumprir medida de internamento em Centros Educativos (entre os 14 e os 20 anos de idade).

Os resultados revelam particularidades relativamente ao percurso escolar, nível socioeconómico e estrutura familiar. As análises realizadas confirmaram o papel da personalidade, autoconceito, autocontrolo e ambiente familiar na tendência antissocial, destacando-se o papel do psicoticismo, neuroticismo, conformidade social e ambiente familiar. Foi ainda possível confirmar diferenças no psicoticismo, tendência antissocial e ambiente familiar entre jovens com diferentes tipos de

comportamentos antissociais. Não foi, todavia, possível confirmar a existência de correlações entre tendências antissociais e idade, ano de escolaridade ou dimensão da fratria.

Este estudo oferece um contributo adicional para defesa de diferentes abordagens interventivas, destacando que, apesar da uniformidade na tendência antissocial e disposições individuais em termos etários, escolares e familiares, indivíduos com comportamentos antissociais distintos poderão beneficiar de intervenções diferenciada.

Palavras-chave: Comportamento antissocial, Adolescência, Delinquência.

Submitted: 25/01/2016

Accepted: 08/04/2016