

The mental state in perpetrators of violent crime: a short case report regarding preliminary investigation with the adult attachment interview

Stati mentali in autori di crimini violenti. Dati preliminari di una ricerca clinico-forense con l'ausilio dell'adult attachment interview

Tamara Patrizia Franco, Gabrielle Coppola, Alessandro Costantini, Rosalinda Cassibba, Pasquale Musso, Cristina Semeraro, Alessandro Taurino, Ignazio Grattagliano

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Corresponding Author: Ignazio Grattagliano
ignazio.grattagliano@uniba.it

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Abstract

Given the influence of the quality of childhood experiences upon psychological development (Bowlby, 1988) and its role in the involvement in criminal activities (Farrington, 1994), it has been hypothesized that adverse childhood events could facilitate a life path marked by criminal offences. This study involved the analysis of the Adult Attachment Interview of 7 offenders convicted for violent crimes against the person (*experimental group*) and 7 official non-offenders (*control group*), whose data came from a study that recruited fathers of preterm infants. The groups were matched for socio-demographic variables (e.g. age and level of education) and for attachment patterns. The results of this study are preliminary. Implications for practice, also within the criminal justice system, are discussed.

Keywords: attachment, quality of infant's experiences, adult attachment, violent crimes.

Riassunto

Nota l'incidenza della qualità delle esperienze infantili sullo sviluppo psicologico dell'uomo (Bowlby, 1988) e nel coinvolgimento in attività devianti (Farrington, 1994), è stato ipotizzato che eventi sfavorevoli infantili possano favorire l'evoluzione di un percorso di vita segnato da condotte criminose. Lo studio ha considerato l'analisi dell'Adult Attachment Interview di 7 soggetti detenuti per reati violenti contro la persona (*gruppo sperimentale*) e 7 soggetti estranei al circuito giudiziario (*gruppo di controllo*), i cui dati derivano da uno studio che reclutava padri di bambini pretermine. I gruppi sono stati confrontati per esaminare l'incidenza dei modelli di attaccamento e le differenze rispetto a specifiche esperienze affettive con i caregiver. I risultati suggestivi sono da considerarsi preliminari. Infine, implicazioni per la pratica e input per studi futuri sono discussi.

Parole chiave: attaccamento, qualità delle esperienze infantili, attaccamento adulto, crimini violenti.

Tamara Patrizia Franco, Department of Education, Psychology and Communication, University of Bari, Aldo Moro | **Gabrielle Coppola**, Department of Education, Psychology and Communication, University of Bari, Aldo Moro | **Alessandro Costantini**, Department of Political Sciences, University of Bari, Aldo Moro | **Rosalinda Cassibba**, Department of Education, Psychology and Communication, University of Bari, Aldo Moro | **Pasquale Musso**, Department of Education, Psychology and Communication, University of Bari, Aldo Moro | **Cristina Semeraro**, Department of Education, Psychology and Communication, University of Bari, Aldo Moro | **Alessandro Taurino**, Department of Education, Psychology and Communication, University of Bari, Aldo Moro | **Ignazio Grattagliano**, Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione, Psicologia e Comunicazione. Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro.

The mental state in perpetrators of violent crime: a short case report regarding preliminary investigation with the adult attachment interview

Introduction

The quality of primary relationships plays an essential role for the psychic progress of human. The internal working models, conditioned by the quality of the attachment relationship and by the secure base effect, can influence human's adaptation, at an intrapersonal, interpersonal and social level. They guide behaviors and choices in adulthood. Therefore, it seems reasonable to consider unfavorable dyadic experiences as possible antecedents of dysfunctional behaviors, since the experimentation of insecure or disorganized attachment bonds can give rise to an unpleasant corollary of evolutionary consequences.

The present contribution is part of a wider project focused on the quality of attachment among perpetrators of violent crimes, in collaboration with the Administration Department for Prison (D.A.P.) of Apulia and Basilicata. After start, the research had to stop, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research protocol is broad and complex and it involves the administration of many instruments: a. Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan & Main, 1985); b. Adverse Childhood Experiences – International Questionnaire (OMS); c. STAXI-2 (Spielberger & Comunian, 2004); d. Indicatori della Condotta Aggressiva (I-R; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli & Perugini, 1991); e. MMPI-2 (Butcher, Dahlstrom, Graham, Tellegen & Kaemmer, 2002); f. Matrici progressive di Raven (Raven, 1938/2013, cited in Grattagliano et al., 2020).

Preliminary results concerning the findings of the Adult Attachment Interview's administration to a small group of inmates who have committed violent crimes against the person will be presented below. It's about crimes against people, more specifically: sexual violence, beatings, aggravating circumstances and grievous bodily harm. These crimes were not committed within the family context of the subject examined.

The influence of early negative family experiences in relation to the development of behavioral problems during childhood and adolescence and involvement in criminal activity during adulthood have been well established in developmental psychopathology and in the criminological literature (Farrington, 1994). Thus, in the opinion of the Authors, the investigation of the link between attachment and offensive behavior offers a new way of interpreting the criminal dynamics.

The theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1969-1988) has emphasized the role of relationships in the development of the human functioning. The attachment system is defined as the innate predisposition of the child to make

contact with the species so that a special bond can be established with the caregiver. Relationships will be translated into mental representations over time, that means schematic structures of knowledge can be evoked and communicated both through relational behavior and self-narration. Internal Working Models (IWM) are mental representations containing informations about themselves, significant others and the world. As such, they carry meanings related to the quality of the dyadic experiences, the availability and consistency of the caregiver's response and the perception of being worthy of affection which will be, over time, generalized to other relational contexts. The degree of expected safety depends on the quality of the IWM, influencing human adaptation, especially when it comes to interpersonal and social aspects. Because internal working models are the framework which filter future affective experiences, they were labelled by Mary Main as the current (and not past) state of mind with respect to attachment (Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985).

Decades of research have shown that the quality of attachment organization has a strong influence on the individual's personality development and on the related socio-emotional skills. The attachment style is relatively stable over time and the secure type plays a protective role during psychological development (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978/2015; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan et al., 1987). Conversely, dysfunctional relationships characterized by deprivation, emotional neglect, mistreatment or abuse, can interfere with the development of an adaptive psychological functioning by encouraging the possible genesis of deviant behavior.

The lack of emotional ties can be considered a risk factor for the development of criminal and violent behavior. It was also highlighted by the literature, since Bowlby's studies (1944). The author, through the observation of juvenile delinquents in London during wartime, has deduced that the unfriendly character of the young offenders could be traced back to a broken maternal attachment. He also explained how children victims of unfavorable parenting are more likely to become troublesome teenagers, and subsequently, aggressive adults, adopting the same internalized parenting patterns.

In this theoretical context, an increasing number of researchers have attempted to analyze the complexity and clinical usefulness of the association between attachment style and the transition to violent, non-violent and sexual acts. In general, studies that have considered individuals within the judicial circuit regardless of the crime committed, have revealed the presence of an attachment substantially less secure (Ross & Pfäfflin, 2007), but also significantly insecure (Van IJzendoorn, 1997).

Several studies have preferred to examine individual differences of attachment over a specific crime. Given that insecure attachment is more present among offenders, more precise correlations have emerged between attachment and the type of crime. Sex offenders, for example, have shown a more dismissing attachment style (Grattagliano et al., 2015; Marsa et al., 2004; Smallbone & Dadds, 1998; Ward, McCormack & Hudson, 2002) than subjects accused of sexual offense against minors, which demonstrate an entangled attachment style (Marsa et al., 2004; Wood & Riggs, 2008). Moreover, entangled attachment has emerged among domestic violence perpetrators (Velotti, Beomonte Zobel, Rogier & Tambelli, 2018) and stalkers (Grattagliano et al., 2012; Mackenzie, Mullen, Ogloff, McEwan & James, 2008). The stalker usually manifests attitudes, also aggressive ones, to prevent abandonment, due to persistent and intrusive fantasies about the relationship with the victim. It is a phenomenon that also involves the helping professions (Grattagliano et al., 2014).

In some empirical studies the offenders have confided major problems of paternal attachment. They recounted controversial relationships and more intense experiences of rejection by the father, described as disinterested, cold, unloving, abusive and violent (Grattagliano et al., 2015; Smallbone et al., 1998, 2000). The attachment to the father is particularly important as a basis for subsequent social competence (Diener, Isabella, Behunin & Wong, 2008). If paternal sensitivity is lacking, a future evolution of externalizing behaviors is possible (Trautmann-Villalba, Gschwendt, Schmidt & Laucht, 2006), so it is necessary to analyze this particular aspect.

With respect to the specific topic of this paper, it has been shown that childhood relational experiences have an impact on the development of behavioral problems and involvement in deviant activities (Farrington, 1994). Adverse experiences were one of the possible antecedents to be taken into account in the evolution of violent conduct (Beitchman et al., 1992; Boduszek, Hyland & Bourke, 2012; Bowlby, 1944).

Then, summarizing the results of the main studies on attachment, it was found that violence and crime may be the result of cognitive deficits, distortions in implicit theories and lack of empathy (Hayslett-Mchall et al., 2002). Therefore, it would be reasonable to support the correlation between violent conduct and insecure style of attachment.

Due to an adverse background, the human being can have difficulty in the distinction between “me” and “not me” and in separation of borders between oneself and others. He or she may be unable to handle emotions. He or she may have low frustration tolerance and few empathic skills. Some authors (Di Vella, et al., 2017; Di Vella, Grattagliano, Romanelli, Duval & Catanesi, 2017), in the medico-legal field, have found that these conditions may facilitate the manifestation of destructive aggressiveness towards oneself or others. And, Rocca and colleagues (Rocca et al., 2019), analyzing the profile of a murderer,

have encountered stories about family conflicts during childhood, ambivalent relationships with the parents and the lack of stable and precise object relations. These factors could have influenced the development of modes of thought and behavior characterized by feelings of inadequacy in the relationships with others. All of these conditions involve cognitive distortions that facilitate the development and the manifestation of offensive behavior.

Existing findings show the effective influence of attachment bonds on the development of human offensive behavior. Although there are several factors that can lead a man or a woman to act in an unconventional way, few studies have found the presence of unfavorable experiences in the story of the offenders. Most studies have relied on self-report measurements to examine attachment styles, despite they widely have been criticized for being subject to response bias. In this field, some researchers have been carried out in Italy, a nation that has a specific cultural context focused, more on the value of the family.

One of the strengths of this study is the use of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George et al., 1985), the elective tool to detect the state of mind in adulthood with respect to attachment. It is a semi-structured interview that challenges the adult to maintain discourse coherence while narrating past and present attachment experiences. The AAI is specifically aimed to “surprise the unconscious” (George et al., 1985; Hesse, 2008). The internal working models have conscious and unconscious components; hence the assessment of attachment style should capture both dimensions. In fact, the Adult Attachment Interview evaluates the implicit processes, on the contrary all self-report instruments have access only to the conscious features of the affective relationships.

The coding system of the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1985) provides the classification of the mental state into one of the following categories of attachment: secure (F), dismissing (Ds), entangled (E), unresolved (U) and cannot classified (CC). The “secure-autonomous” (F) category collects all the interviews of collaborative and reliable subjects that narrate both positive and negative experiences, with discursive coherence. The narration of the “insecure-dismissing” (Ds) adults appears inconsistent with the generalized representations of parents, which are unsupported by specific episodes. They generally tend to deny the influence of attachment experiences on the current functioning. Interviews of “insecure-entangled” (E) adults are pervaded by anger towards parents or confusion of the mental processes regarding attachment. They report chaotic tales emphasizing conflict and the negativity of experiences. The unresolved (U) or unclassified (CC) attachment categories were later added by Main and Solomon (1990). If there are signs of an unresolved loss or trauma it is possible to select the category of unresolved (U). This category integrates all those subjects who talk about traumatic experiences in an unusual way; they are evident failures in the monitoring of thought and speech. Lastly, the interview is considered “cannot classified” (CC) when it cannot fall

into one of the previous categories, since the subject cannot be attributed to a unique state of mind due to contradictory narratives: this kind of narrative, which reflects the absence of an organized strategy to deal with affective relationships, might occur especially in the presence of clinical conditions (Hesse, 2008).

In conclusion, the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1985) allows to deepen the childhood experiences referring to the narrative style, the emotional reactions, the change of feelings over time and the perceived effects related to the adult personality. The purpose of the present study is to comprehend if the insecure or unresolved state of mind is a result of adverse affective experiences in the history of offenders.

1. Materials and Method

Once the purpose of the research had been established, the consent of the Ministry of Justice was requested. After obtaining the research authorization from the Ministry of Justice, the penitentiary institutes limited to the Administration Department for Prison (D.A.P.) of Apulia and Basilicata were contacted. Each Governor of the Penitentiary Institution, upon the acceptance of the proposal, drew up a list of prisoners based on the crimes committed. In parallel, workshop and training meetings were held for the management of the research project and administration of specific instruments. Subsequently, in agreement with the Governor of the Penitentiary Institution, some meetings were scheduled with the perpetrators of violent crimes to proceed with the collection of data.

Violent crimes against the person were considered: crime of sexual violence (Art. 609-bis Penal Code), crime of beating (Art. 581 Penal Code), grievous bodily harm (Art. 582 Penal Code); aggravating circumstances crime (Art. 583 Penal Code).

At the first meeting with each inmate, the signature of the informed consent was required for participating in the study. And afterwards the instruments included in the protocol were administered. The information received was handled with discretion only by the team who was authorized to work on the research; in fact, the workers of the penitentiary institutes had no access to the data collected.

1.1 Hypothesis

Attachment research may have explanatory power to recognize risk factors for violent behavior. In the literature the role of insecure attachment of offenders is recognized. However, the specific attachment experiences that could lead to the development of an offensive behavior have never been analyzed.

Taking into account the group of inmates (*experimental group*) we expected a higher incidence of insecure-dismissing attachment. Moreover, we assumed that the perpetrators reported different emotional, educational and formative experiences compared to individuals with the

same mental state, but outside the judicial circuit. Lastly, we hypothesized that the offenders reported more unfavorable experiences in the direct relationship with the father, than with mother.

1.2 Objectives

The main question from which this preliminary investigation took place was: "Is it possible to highlight the presence of unfavorable childhood experiences in most of the perpetrators of violent crimes?". Starting with this question, this study, which focused on the exploratory analysis of the Adult Attachment Interview, has multiple objectives.

Firstly, this study intended to detect the distribution of adult attachment styles in a small sample of perpetrators of violent crimes. Secondly, it aimed at exploring whether there are significant differences with respect to the quality of the affective experiences between the sample of perpetrators of violent crimes and the control group with the same adult attachment. The third objective was to examine whether the offenders had experienced more unfavorable experiences with the paternal figure than those outside the judicial circuit.

1.3 Data

For this preliminary study, a total of 14 male individuals was considered. In Italy, the percentage of women in the judicial circuit is very low. It is equal to 4,19% of the total amount (in August 2020 - source: Department of Prison Administration), hence only males were the subjects of this study.

All the subjects aged between 23 and 46 ($M = 37.64$; $SD = 8.02$). The experimental group was composed of 7 violent offenders (age: $M = 40$; $SD = 7.96$ / years of education: $M = 8.71$; $SD = 1.90$), selected in agreement with the Governor of the Penitentiary Institution. The experimental group involved only males who were convicted for violent offences definitively. The control group was subsequently formed by 7 prosocial individuals (age: $M = 37.57$; $SD = 5.77$ / years of education: $M = 10.14$; $SD = 3.93$). It included subjects outside the judicial circuit. We retrieved data and interviews of healthy adult men with no prison experience, for the precision, fathers of preterm infants, who had submitted to the Adult Attachment Interview for a previous study (cfr. Coppola, Cassibba, Bosco & Papagna, 2013).

1.4 Measures

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George et al., 1985) was chosen as the elective tool for the research. A validated assessment procedure was applied to an increasing number of researches to detect adults' current mental representation of their childhood attachment experiences. It is required to describe the childhood experiences with attention to the first relationships with the caregivers in

order to evaluate the influence of such experiences on interpersonal development and functioning. The system does not focus directly on lived experiences, but it is based on the way in which subjects narrate and reflect on these experiences and the consequent effects on their current functioning (Main et al., 1990).

The AAI is a semi-structured interview, that lasts about one hour, about emotional experiences, both past and present. The purpose of the interview is to evaluate the mental state of the adult relating to their attachment relationships, based on the level of discursive coherence expressed during the interview. The protocol includes twenty questions in a predetermined order. Reflections and memories on both the present and the past are required in two distinct ways: the general evaluation of the experience and the narration of specific episodes (Calvo et al., 2007).

Firstly, the description of the family environment and of the relationships with parents during childhood is asked in general. Then, it is asked to choose some adjectives to describe the relationship with the parent and subsequently it is requested that these are supported by specific episodes. After that, there will be questions about experiences of separation, loss and trauma experienced during life. Furthermore, it is asked to reflect on the influence of childhood experiences on their personality and on their current functioning. Finally, the interviewee's current relationship with their children is explored, or if they do not have, how they would imagine the relationship. In brief, the sequence of questions submits the interviewee to a specific mental process, both metacognitive and metarepresentational. The classification of the subject is based on the correspondence between the mental organization of the subject and some characteristics of the speech quality (Calvo et al., 2007). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Then a certified coder carried out the coding according to a set of nine-point scales (Main & Goldwyn, 1998).

The *subjective experience scales* assess the quality of childhood experiences. The aim is to have a coherent picture of the individual and his experiential history of attachment. The *state of mind scales* estimate the state of mind through discursive coherence, the level of integration of mental representations, the processing of unpleasant emotional experiences, the reflexivity on past and present experiences and the degree of collaboration during the interview. In addition, two scales related to unresolved states of mind (disorganized or disoriented) are added to evaluate traumatic or mourning experiences and experiences of abuse, not yet elaborated, involving parental figures (Main et al., 1990; Hesse, 1996).

The global score provides an overall profile of the subject's interview, as a starting point for assigning the attachment model. In fact, the coding allows to classify the adult's mental state in one of the attachment categories: secure- autonomous (F), insecure-dismissing (Ds), insecure-entangled (E), unresolved (U), cannot classified (CC). Each primary classification of attachment has some specific sub-categories, which translate the prevailing me-

chanisms of the individual's mental organization (Calvo et al., 2007).

Thus, the AAI allows to deepen childhood experiences lived through the narrative style, the reactions, the change of feelings over time and the perceived effects on the adult personality.

1.5 Statistical analysis

In the experimental group the distribution of attachment styles was calculated based on the principles of the statistics descriptive.

Subsequently, the control group (group of non-offenders) was formed based on the frequency distribution of attachment styles found in the experimental group. Thus, the groups were matched for socio-demographic variables (e.g. age and level of education) and for attachment patterns. It was necessary to statistically verify whether there were significant differences between the two groups with respect to age and years of education with the Mann Whitney's U test. This is a non-parametric test, chosen due to the small sample size, that allows to compare two samples like the parametric comparison tests.

Secondly, the experimental group and the control group were compared on the experience scales of the Adult Attachment Interview through with the Mann Whitney's test. It was chosen to investigate the differences with respect to each experience scale across the two groups, the one with violent offenders and the control one. The Mann Whitney's U test was applied for two reasons: the small sample size with fewer than thirty subjects and the presence of many *can't rate* (C.R.) values due to an insufficient number of experiences narrated by of the interviewees.

Finally, the Wilcoxon test was used for the third objective aimed at examining whether the story of offenders was characterized by more unfavorable experiences in the relationship with the father, compared to the relationship with the mother. Wilcoxon's non-parametric test is comparable to the t-test for repeated measures to be applied to non-parametric distributions, for example if the sample has a small sample size. Therefore, it was used to verify discrepancies between the scores on the experience scales for mother and father in each subgroup.

2. Results

In the experimental sample (N=7) a higher frequency of insecure attachment was expected. In fact, three individuals showed a secure-autonomous attachment (42.9%), three other showed a dismissing attachment (42.9%) and one presented an unclassified/unresolved attachment (14.3%).

Consequently, the control group was composed of three individuals with secure attachment, three with dismissing attachment (Ds) and one with the unresolved attachment as secondary classification but having the

entangled attachment as primary classification (E/U). This last choice was made because the probability of finding adult with unclassified attachment is very low in the low-risk population and in fact, was unavailable in the control group. No statistically significant difference was found in the Mann Whitney test, $U = -.966$, n.s., and $U = -.713$, n.s. respectively for age and years of education, meaning that the two groups are equivalent and well matched with respect to these two variables.

Secondly, a statistically significant difference was found on the maternal pressure scale ($U = 3.00$, $p = .015$) when comparing the experimental group and the control group on the AAI experience scales through the Mann Whitney U test. Specifically, considering the mean values, in the experimental group the value was 1.00, while in the control group it was 4.50. It was found a higher score on the maternal pressure scale in the control group than that experimental group. This means that adults in the control group, in childhood, have experienced a particular pressure from the mother to achieve overly ambitious objectives considering the age or the development.

Thirdly, no significant findings emerged between the quality of the affective experiences with the mother and those with the father.

3. Discussion

Following the theoretical paradigm, it is possible to notice that the adverse attachment experiences compromise the development of the capacity of individuals, including empathic abilities, emotional self-regulation and moral reasoning, and subsequently also the development of strong prosocial bonds.

Several studies have examined the attachment model in adult inmates to support the causal relation between attachment and the development of offensive behavior, but few studies have used the Adult Attachment Interview. The AAI is the gold standard tool for assessing adult attachment.

The main findings of this study are two. The prevalence of the insecure-dismissing attachment style and the evidence of a low score on the maternal pressure scale in the experimental group. This last is not found in the literature. Due to the extreme smallness of the sample, as we already mentioned, this is a very preliminary investigation and besides the non-parametric tests, we prefer to focus our attention on a qualitative data interpretation.

Firstly, a higher incidence of dismissing attachment emerged in the experimental group than entangled or unresolved/unclassifiable attachment. In fact, the entangled attachment pattern was totally absent. This is a widely confirmed finding in the literature also by other studies (Grattagliano et al., 2015; Smallbone et al., 1998, 2000; Van IJzendoorn, 1997).

Particular attention, in the experimental group, should be devoted to the case of unclassified/unresolved attachment (CC/U). Despite it being a typical attachment

pattern in clinical samples and in subjects within the judicial circuit (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009; Cassibba et al., 2013), it is hard to detect in low risk samples. Indeed, for this reason, we had to include a subject with entangled/unresolved (E/U) attachment in the control group to match the experimental group.

This case of unclassified/unresolved attachment (CC/U) in the experimental group is characterized by the absence of an organized state of mind with respect to attachment. It associated with a history of trauma or unresolved experiences, which might be a highly risk condition for dysfunctional behaviors and outcomes. Thus, we believe that the combination of unresolved trauma with disorganized attachment might be particularly salient from a clinical and criminological perspective.

As to the only U classification, this is per se quite rare: the meta-analysis by Cassibba and colleagues (2013) highlights only 8% of unresolved/unclassified attachment in the overall Italian non-clinical sample, a category that is under-represented compared to other countries (Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2009). For this reason, we had to include a subject with the entangled/unresolved attachment (E/U) in the control group, i.e. showing the organization of a mental state despite a history of trauma or unresolved bereavement.

As to the test of the second aim, findings show a significant difference on the mothers' pressure scale. According to a critical reading, the result could be interpreted in both positive and negative terms. The pressure scale evaluates how the subject, during childhood, perceived the parental pressure to achieve goals. Such pressure can hardly be admitted in childhood because it is often experienced with a state of tension. But it is also reasonable to support the value of education in a household system, which could characterize a situation of pressure to achieve goals.

If we shift our attention to the score obtained on the same scale in the experimental group, we might think that they lacked the regulatory framework and the specific parental imprint on the educational level so to remain within socially conventional boundaries. Attachment is a balanced emotional bond that is established with a sensitive mother, neither intrusive nor irritating (Ainsworth et al., 1978/2015). If we consider the pressure scale as a continuum, with both scores placed at the ends to be considered dysfunctional, the score of the control group (4.50) indicates a moderate pressure. This score could be functional to develop emotional and behavioral regulatory skill. On the contrary, the average score in the experimental group is 1.00 and it highlights a total absence of structure and regulation from the caregivers. Although this is a speculative, because it is based on a very limited number of cases, this suggestion might pave the way for follow-up work.

No significant findings emerged regarding the unfavorable experiences in the direct relationship with the father, despite this has been reported in the literature, maybe because of the small sample size. Attachment to the father promotes sociability by contributing to emo-

tional regulation and the learning of functional and adaptive coping strategies (Diener, et al., 2008). Unfavorable attachment experiences in the direct relationship with the father seem to be risk factor in the story of offenders (Grattagliano et al., 2015; Smallbone et al., 1998). Therefore, it is advisable to investigate this aspect thoroughly so that it can be generalized, and it can support the implementation of treatment plans for each father who is in detention.

The role of parents in prison is rather delicate. Family and parental attachment play a significant role within the penitentiary institute. It has been shown that both detention and low trust in attachment relationships can compromise the perception of competence in the parenting role and the ability to balance one's roles (Grattagliano et al., 2018). Trust in attachment relationships and involvement in a romantic relationship seem to support fathers in maintaining contact with children (Laquale et al., 2018). On the other hand, if we consider the intergenerational transmission of attachment and the incidence of unfavorable events on the attachment style, such as imprisonment, emotional deprivation and parental abandonment, it is the psychologist's task to promote interventions to support parenthood. Maintaining a good relationship between the inmate and the family with particular reference to children and the investment of the held in his parental role - can constitute useful measures for the individual psychological balance and also effective in a more general criminological perspective (Grattagliano et al., 2016; Lisi, Grattagliano, Berlingerio & Catanesi, 2016).

4. Limitations of the study

Although this is a preliminary investigation that has several limitations, it was possible both to confirm the already existing findings in the literature and to obtain useful insights for the design of new studies. Below we mention the major limitations of this study, some also derived from force majeure, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Firstly, the small sample, which is why the results must be considered preliminary, and not only that: they certainly need empirical support to re-enter into the panorama of literature.

Furthermore, it was not possible to consider other factors that would have allowed the correlation with other variables, and consequently, the generalization of the data. And as we have already said, there was the presence of many *can't rate* measures (C.R.), probably due to the resistance shown by the subjects in detention.

Conclusions

Given the limitations of the study, the valuable use of the Adult Attachment Interview cannot be disregarded. For statistical and research purposes it certainly allows to move

away from the bias of the subjective responses of the self-report tools, widely used in other studies, by investigating the interviewee's relational background in the best way. Furthermore, the tool has an added value as an interview, such as observing the data from a qualitative and not just a quantitative point of view, suggesting future researches that are statistically more complex considering interconnected constructs with the topic and reflecting on prevention and treatment programs.

This preliminary investigation, currently limited to a local level in collaboration with the Administration Department for Prison (D.A.P.) of Apulia and Basilicata, may have an interesting clipping in the literature, because the antecedents of the attachment styles' development and the consequent influence on adult functioning are not well documented. Assuming the considerable value of childhood and adolescent interpersonal experiences, as well as ongoing relational experiences, it is necessary to understand what are the possible antecedents that could define a deviating life from socially conventional limits.

It is true that the criminally relevant conduct is an action caused by the multiple influences of physical, psychological and social factors. On the other hand, the first contacts with the caregiver and their respective emotional responses are structured in the internal working models. Studies confirm that the specific attachment styles and the evolutionary experiences affects socio-emotional functioning.

Our study is wondering about the possible impact of attachment style and the quality of childhood experiences on violent behaviors, despite biological, autonomic and temperamental factors should not be underestimated. Although full responsibility cannot be attributed to the attachment style for criminal conduct, it can be considered as a risk indicator of offense.

Hence, given the attachment frame in the study of the interpersonal behavior and the individual differences in emotion regulation processes in adulthood (Mikulincer, Shaver & Pereg, 2003), a growing body of research has also supported the association between attachment and aggression. Fonagy and colleagues (Fonagy, Moran & Target, 1993) were ones of the first psychologists to realize that experiences of secure attachment facilitated the ability to regulate aggressiveness, promoting control over the aggressive impulse, as an intrinsic component of man.

Aggressiveness and violent behavior are more associated with insecure attachment styles (Brodie, Goodall, Darling & McVittie, 2019; Mikulincer et al., 2007; Simons, Paternite & Shore, 2001; Smallbone et al., 1998, Van IJzendoorn, 1997). The insecure attachment style has also been positively correlated with hostility (Critchfield, Levy, Clarkin & Kernberg, 2008) and increased general aggression (Simons et al., 2001). Understanding the causal link between insecure or disorganized attachment and dysfunctional anger could be a further and decisive step. Dysfunctional anger could converge into destructively aggressive behaviors, such as misdemeanors, delinquency, crime, domestic, sexual and intergroup violence, and antisocial behavior.

Aggressiveness and deviant behaviors can be dysfunctional modalities aimed to repairing experiences of mistreatment, abuse or trauma, which reflect a strong impairment of reflective functioning and an inability to empathically experience the victim's experiences (Fonagy, 1999). For this reason, the reflective function could be the mediator to observe and understand the affective and emotional component of aggressive and deviant behaviors. It might just be a good input for future research.

In brief, anger and aggressiveness are the protagonists of the insecure sphere of attachment, even if they have different forms. It seems that the insecure attachment makes it difficult to limit to a functional and constructive form of anger, originally named by Bowlby (1988) "anger of hope". Furthermore, studies on violent behavior have suggested that the aggressiveness was not only related to an inability to inhibit or control anger, but also to chronic over-control and suppression of anger (Davey, Day & Howells, 2005). The insecure attachment styles can be associated with aggressiveness through a differential process of regulating dysfunctional anger. Therefore, it may be relevant to study the relationship between attachment and anger regulation in order to understand the level of dispositional aggressiveness in the individual.

The perceived security in the bonds of attachment is a protective factor against multiple dysfunctional evolutionary outcomes, especially for the onset of aggressive and deviant behaviors and criminal offences. On the line of research initiated by Bowlby (1988) and Farrington (1994), the studies have noted the presence of unfavorable experiences in the story of offenders. However, it is necessary to deepen the present literature and to fill possible gaps. This might be possible combining the validity of psychology and criminology to create a systematic model for the observation and the study of the crime according to all the dynamics that occur following a bond of attachment.

We observed the incidence of unfavorable childhood experiences on adult functioning and related choices for one's life, sometimes deviating from a regulatory trend. Well, in our way, we suggest considering variables related to the theme of attachment, such as personality traits, anger, aggressiveness and presence of trauma or unresolved mourning, as probable risk factors for deviant behavior. Because, as it has been said, attachment and related experiences are structured in internal working models that, during the life, will be a filter influencing the cognitive abilities, emotional strategies and sociability. All abilities having to do with how we relate to each other.

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