Abstracts on Autism and False Confessions

High functioning autism spectrum disorders: an investigation of psychological vulnerabilities during interrogative interview

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Abstract

Forensic psychologists and psychiatrists are commonly asked to ascertain the reliability of statements made by suspects to the police during questioning and to assess an individual's vulnerability to providing information which is inaccurate, unreliable, and misleading during police interview. Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are characterised by qualitative impairments in social communication and interaction, and a restricted or repetitive pattern of behaviours, interests, and activities. It is not clear whether people with ASD are more vulnerable at interview, or more prone to respond negatively to interrogative pressure, when compared with the general population. In the present study, 26 individuals with high functioning ASD, and 27 gender- and IQ-matched controls, were compared on measures of interrogative suggestibility and compliance as well as on measures of anxiety, depression, the extent to which they feared negative evaluation by others, and whether they had a suspicious outlook. There were no significant between-group differences on the measures of suggestibility, but the group with ASD were rated as significantly more compliant than the controls in terms of both parental and self-report, and also had higher scores on measures of depression, anxiety, fear of negative social evaluation and paranoia. Bi-modal distribution of suggestibility scores within the ASD group indicates that individual characteristics should be taken into account when considering an assessment. Individuals with ASD may be more eager to please or to avoid conflict and confrontation than controls, and may be more prone to respond compliantly to requests and demands.

An evaluation of Miranda rights and interrogation in autism spectrum disorders

Lindsay M. Salseda, Dennis R. Dixon, Tracy Fass, Deborah Miora, Robert A. Leark,

Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, Volume 5, Issue 1, 2011, Pages 79-85

Abstract

The primary deficits present in autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may lead to increased susceptibility to involvement in the criminal justice system. The same deficits may also cause individuals with ASD to be more vulnerable to interrogation techniques and other aspects of the legal system. Due to the increased level of vulnerability as well as impairments in social cognition, individuals with ASD may have difficulty understanding their legal rights, more specifically their Miranda rights. This review explores Miranda comprehension in general and how the specific deficits found in ASD may impact Miranda comprehension.

Brief report: Suggestibility, compliance and psychological traits in high-functioning adults with autism spectrum disorder.

Maras, Katie L., Bowler, Dermot M.

Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, Vol 6(3), Jul-Sep, 2012. pp. 1168-1175.

Abstract:

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may be over-represented within the criminal justice system; it is therefore important to understand how they fare under police questioning. The present study examined interrogative suggestibility and compliance in individuals with ASD, and whether this is associated with certain psychological traits.

Adults with ASD and their typical counterparts completed the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scales (GSS), Gudjonsson Compliance Scale (GCS), and measures of state-trait anxiety, self-esteem, fear of negative evaluation by others and paranoia. In contrast to previous research (North, Russell, & Gudjonsson, 2008), there was no difference between the ASD and comparison groups on the measure of compliance, and groups also did not differ on any of the GSS measures, despite the ASD group reporting significantly higher paranoia. Findings indicate that individuals with ASD may be no more likely to succumb to interrogative pressures than their typical counterparts.

A systematic review of people with autism spectrum disorder and the criminal justice system.
King, Claire, Murphy, Glynis H.
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, Vol 44(11), Nov, 2014. pp. 2717-2733.
Abstract:

This paper provides a systemic review of the available literature on people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the criminal justice system (CJS). The review considers two main types of study: those that examined the prevalence of people with ASD in the CJS and those that examined the prevalence of offending in populations with ASD. In addition, types of offences in people with ASD, co-morbid psychiatric diagnoses, and characteristics of people with ASD who commit offences (including predisposing factors) are considered. A combination of search terms was used in a variety of databases in order to find all of the available literature on this topic, and research studies were included based on specified inclusion and exclusion criteria. It was found that whilst there is an emerging literature base on this topic, there are a wide variety of methodologies used, making direct comparison difficult. Nevertheless it can be concluded so far that people with ASD do not seem to be disproportionately over-represented in the CJS, though they commit a range of crimes and seem to have a number of predisposing features. There is poor evidence of the presence of comorbid psychiatric diagnoses (except in mental health settings) amongst offenders with ASD, and little evidence of the oft-asserted over-representation of certain kinds of crimes. It is recommended that further research of good quality is required in this area, rather than studies that examine populations that are not representative of all those with ASD.

Autism spectrum disorder and sexual offending: Responsivity in forensic interventions.
Higgs, Tamsin; Carter, Adam J.
Aggression and Violent Behavior, Vol 22, May, 2015 pp. 112-119.
Abstract:

Research concerned with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and criminality has grown in recent years. While having ASD does not increase risk of sexual offending behavior, an association has been recognized between ASD and sexually abusive behaviors. Despite this association, inadequacies in much of the criminal justice system to respond to the needs of this client group have been raised. A proportion of those people within the criminal justice system convicted of sexual offenses will have ASD. Given that group based interventions require participants to carry out introspection, sharing personal information and interacting in a group, all activities that an individual with ASD will invariably find challenging, efforts need to be made to develop interventions to work responsively, safely, appropriately and effectively with this client group to reduce risk of sexual recidivism. This review sets out to consider research on ASD and sexual offending in order to make practical recommendations on working responsively to raise the possibility of therapeutic interventions being effective when engaging with this client group. The status of research

on ASD both generally, as far as the scope of this review allows, and in relation to offending is discussed and practical guidance is offered.

Autism, sexual offending, and the criminal justice system

Melanie Clark Mogavero

Journal of Intellectual Disabilities and Offending Behaviour, Sept 2016, vol.7, no.32016, pp.116-126.

Abstract

Purpose – There has been growing concern among stakeholders about individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and sex offending as research supports an indirect association. The purpose of this paper is threefold: first, bring more awareness of the sexuality and deviant/criminal sexual behavior among those with ASD to stakeholders in the criminal justice system (CJS); second, demonstrate that much of the deviant or sexual offending behavior exhibited among those with ASD is often a manifestation of their ASD symptoms and not malice; and third, demonstrate the necessity to address specific needs of individuals with ASD who enter the CJS due to criminal sexual behavior.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper provides an overview of the ASD symptomology, including the diagnostic changes, a review of the literature on ASD and sexuality, which includes deviant sexual behavior and sexual offending.
Findings – The author linked examples of deviant or sexual behavior in the research literature to the ASD symptomology and described how the symptomology explains such behavior.

Originality/value – Sexual offending among those with ASD has received little research outside the mental health field. This review is of particular importance to those in the CJS unfamiliar with ASD, as they should handle them differently with regard to formal interviewing, measures of competency, capacity, and sentencing.

Compliance in autism: Self-report in action

Chandler, Robert ; Russell, Ailsa ; Maras, Katie.

Autism. 2018.

Abstract

Previous research indicates that autistic individuals are more likely to be bullied, and that they experience heightened anxiety and diminished self-esteem. These factors are known to predict heightened compliance, which is the tendency to agree with or carry out the requests and demands of others. This has a range of potentially serious consequences, particularly for an autistic person. This study utilised self-report (the Gudjonsson Compliance Scale) and behavioural measures of compliance (the door-in-the-face task) with 26 autistic and 26 typically developing adults. Participants also completed measures of early life bullying experiences, anxiety and self-esteem. Autistic participants were more compliant on both self-report and experimental tasks, and they reported more bullying experiences, higher anxiety and reduced self-esteem. Looking at both groups, bullying, anxiety and self-esteem were all correlated with self-reported compliance on the Gudjonsson Compliance Scale, yet only self-esteem was a unique predictor. None of these predictor variables related to behavioural compliance on the door in the face; nor did Gudjonsson Compliance Scale scores predict door-in-the-face performance, which may be better explained by situational and motivational factors. Findings have important implications for a range of real-life settings including requests made in the context of research, schools, the criminal justice system and the workplace.

Autism spectrum disorder and criminal responsibility: historical perspectives, clinical challenges and broader considerations within the criminal justice system

O'Sullivan, O. (2018). Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine, 35(4), 333-339.

Abstract

There has been relatively limited research focus on autism in the context of the criminal justice system. The relationship between autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and criminal responsibility is complex. Furthermore, the features inherent to ASD can have a significant bearing on a wide array of other issues in this context including police interviewing, fitness to be tried, culpability and the appropriateness of custodial disposal. This review explores the background to our understanding of ASD, patterns of offending behaviour and the nature of the relationship between this and characteristic ASD deficits. The clinical and legal challenges posed by ASD defendants in terms of identification, assessment and on a broader service level as they negotiate the criminal justice system are highlighted to illustrate the varied difficulties they may encounter and to draw attention to this field as a worthy area of research and training for the medical, legal and law enforcement professions.

The Risk of Making False Confessions: The Role of Developmental Disorders, Conduct Disorder, Psychiatric Symptoms, and Compliance

Gisli Hannes Gudjonsson, Rafael A. Gonzalez, Susan Young

First Published March 21, 2019 Research Article Find in PubMed

Abstract

Objective: To investigate salient predictors of self-reported false confessions. The conditions included mild intellectual disability (ID), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADHD, conduct disorder (CD), psychiatric symptoms, and compliance. Method: The sample consisted of 386 male Scottish prisoners, who completed a diagnostic ADHD interview, psychometric tests, and a questionnaire about false confessions they had given to police over their lifetime. Results: There was a high rate of reported false confessions (33.4%); the reason for the majority (62.2%) being to "cover up for somebody else." CD, ADHD, psychological distress and psychiatric symptoms, and compliance were all significant predictors of false confession. When examining the influence of underlying domains of ADHD, it was found that hyperactivity/impulsivity drove the association with false confession after adjusting for coexisting CD. Conclusion: CD and ADHD were the two most powerful predictors of false confessions, with CD mediating some of the effects of ADHD.

Suggestibility and false memories in relation to intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder: a meta-analytic review

W. Griego J. N. Datzman S. M. Estrada S. S. Middlebrook

Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, Sep 3, 2019.

Abstract

Background

A systematic literature review was conducted to evaluate previous research that examined intellectual disability (ID) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in relation to memory distortions (i.e. suggestibility and false memories). There were two goals for the current study; the first goal was to identify significant trends in past literature that fulfilled previously established selection criteria. The second goal was to establish reliability and effect sizes for suggestibility and false memory for samples with diagnoses of ID or ASD.

Methods and Procedures

Articles that were selected for inclusion in the current study were required to have a clinically diagnosed sample, as well as a non-clinical control group. Studies were also required to have a post-hoc power score higher than .30 to prevent the effects of underpowered studies and limit the potential for publication bias. Selected studies were also required to have provided pertinent information required to complete the analyses (e.g. means, standard deviations, p-values, or correlation coefficients). Any study that did not provide the required information was excluded.

Results and Conclusions

Two empirical Bayes omnibus analyses revealed a significant effect for participants diagnosed with ID ($z = 6.10$, $p < .001$), which supported the researchers' hypothesis. The results indicated increased susceptibility toward memory suggestibility and false memories when compared with the general population. However, the results of the analyses did not support the researchers' hypothesis regarding participants diagnosed with ASD. The analyses indicated that participants diagnosed with ASD displayed decreased suggestibility and were less likely to develop false memories ($z = -2.37$, $p = 0.018$).