Harmful Alcohol Use Moderates the Link between Proactive Aggression and Suicide Attempts among Criminal Offenders

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INTRODUCTION

A longstanding hypothesis posits that reactive aggression (RA) underlies the association between aggression and suicidal behavior, with the implicit assumption that proactive aggression (PA) is unrelated. However, a recent study found an association between PA and suicide attempts in substance-dependent men. In the current study, we examined associations of RA and PA with lifetime history of a suicide attempt in male and female criminal offenders. We also analyzed the moderating effects of harmful alcohol and drug use. RA was associated with history of a suicide attempt. Symptoms of alcohol use disorder moderated the relationship between PA and suicide attempts such that there was a relationship among individuals with high levels of harmful alcohol use, but not those with low or moderate levels.

METHODS

Participants: 96 criminal offenders, ages 18-62, participating in a pretrial jail diversion program.

Gender:
- Male: 73 (76%)
- Female: 23 (24%)

Ethnicity:
- Black: 50 (52%)
- White: 28 (29%)
- Other: 18 (19%)

Measures:
- Reactive/Proactive Aggression: The Impulsive-Premeditated Aggression Scale (IPAS; Stanford et al., 2003).
- Current Symptoms of Alcohol and Drug Use Disorder and Depression: The Psychiatric Diagnostic Screening Questionnaire (PDSQ; Zimmerman & Mattia, 2001).

RESULTS

Table 1: Logistic regression: Association between RA and lifetime history of a suicide attempt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>OR (95% C.I)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
<td>0.33 (0.10-1.11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proactive Aggression
-1.07 | 1.07 (0.99-1.16) |

Depression
-.17** | 1.19 (1.05-1.34)**

Table 2: Logistic regression: Association between PA and lifetime history of a suicide attempt: Moderation by symptoms of Alcohol Use Disorder

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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>.35 (.11-1.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reactive Aggression
-.09* | 1.10 (1.02-1.19)* |

Depression
-.16* | 1.17 (1.03-1.33)* |

Alcohol
-.08 | .99 (0.84-1.14) |

Step Two

Proactive Aggression
-.02 | 1.02 (0.92-1.12) |

Table 3: Logistic regression: Association between RA and lifetime history of a suicide attempt.

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DISCUSSION

- Replicating prior studies of non-offenders, we found that RA was associated with lifetime history of a suicide attempt.
- Symptoms of alcohol use disorder moderated the relationship between PA and suicide attempts such that there was a relationship among individuals with high levels of harmful alcohol use, but not those with low or moderate levels.
- For individuals who engage in high levels of harmful alcohol use, there is a relationship between PA and suicide attempts. This may due to alcohol’s weakening effects on inhibiting mechanisms (Gustafson, 1994) among persons who generally display more controlled aggression.

REFERENCES


