

The prediction of violence



The growing concern with social problems generated by violence in any of its forms is a constant that has affected well-being and health for more than last two decades (OMS, 2002). Political, judicial and social health problems, juvenile violence, family and partner violence and especially the more extreme forms of criminal violence, such as sexual aggressions or child abuse, have generated an urgent professional demand for finding efficient solutions to these problems. Violence, along with its causes and consequences, has become a field where professionals such as jurists, criminologists, health workers, behaviour experts and social workers exercise in close collaboration. Historically many of these professionals had already focused on these problems in the framework of criminology (Garrido, Stangeland & Redondo, 2006). For these professionals none of what today is “new” really is new, as they have been working on it for more than 100 years. We are referring to analysing the causes of violent offence (homicides, sexual aggressions, etc) and their forms of incapacitation, treatment and prevention. Along the same line, the psychology of delinquency, which is an important part of this historical tradition, has been a first order professional referent in numerous countries as well as in ours (Redondo & Andres Pueyo, 2007). This field of the application of psychology has had great professional vitality although without an equivalent reflex in the academic world which has not, or only exceptionally, gathered the importance of the theoretical and professional developments of this tradition in the formation of future psychologists. In this monograph we will briefly review the state of the Psychology of Criminal Conduct in the framework of research studies on violence and in particular the new technical contributions which are specifically useful for predicting violence.

Professional interventions by psychologists to fight against the causes and consequences of violence are the spearhead of social initiatives regarding this issue. The urgency of the same has often resulted in the fact that conceptual and technological advances have not been available for these professionals but rather they had to be produced at the same time as the interventions. For this reason, the efficacy of these has depended more on the good judgement and skill of the professionals than on the contrasted soundness and conceptual foundation of these interventions. Hence, the knowledge generated in Psychology to combat violence has been simultaneous to the exercise of these professional skills and competencies. Violence is a very common social phenomenon but many critical aspects for its prevention and elimination are still unknown. We know that violence is very reiterative and that, in some of its forms, it reaches levels of extension and recidivism that could be classified as “pandemic”, such as what happens with gender violence. Among the most useful strategies for the reduction of violence is prevention, prediction techniques are the first step in treating violence on an individual case level and in avoiding its continuity or chronicity.

The prediction of physical, sexual and partner abuse is the main focus of this monograph. Techniques developed in the last 15 years with this aim have improved the efficacy and clarity of the professional decisions made by the specialists who work in this field. Throughout the entire twentieth century the basis for the prediction of violence has been dangerousness (Andres Pueyo & Redondo, 2007). The identification of this individual attribute is made by judges who are advised and informed by forensic experts who, using clinical methods, (Gisbert-Calabuig, 1998) analyse the state of danger of the subject mainly from a psychopathological perspective. Advances in psychiatric epidemiology, in psychological assessment

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and in criminology have proved the inadequacy of this technique and have proposed new methods of violence prediction based on the assessment of risk factors which anticipate violent behaviour (Hart, 2001). These new methods have specialized in the assessment of specific types of violence and have emerged from the collaboration between researchers and professionals in order to solve, first of all, the practical exigency to make efficient predictions. The results are the availability of a series of guides and protocols for risk assessment for professionals which have multiple applications and that have been rapidly generalized to a number of countries. The second paper in this monograph deals with these changes and the new procedures in violence risk assessment.

Regarding the use of these new techniques the violence can be efficiently predicted if we focus on the specificity of its forms of presentation and we assess the specific risk factors for each of the forms of violence. The best developed techniques are aimed at the prediction of severe physical violence and threats in delinquent populations in confinement and in hospitalized and community mental patients, as these populations are at greater risk of violence recidivism. The HCR-20, which is a violence risk assessment guide appropriate to this aim, is presented in the third paper of this monograph. The two remaining articles focus on other types of violence which are especially frequent and severe. These are sexual violence and partner abuse. For the assessment of these two types of violence, there are two specific guides available which are identified by the acronyms SVR-20 and SARA respectively, and whose peculiarities and rudiments are described in the last two works which make up this monograph.

The risk assessment guides which are presented here are the result of a request made to a team of experts from various universities and centres for victim care in Canada by professionals from psychology, psychiatry, criminology, police, and social work. They were initially proposed for local use but they quickly spread to other countries and have generated a series of studies, and at the same time, new prediction tools which are used in most European countries (Great Britain, Sweden, Holland, Germany, etc.), America (U.S.A., Argentina, etc.) and are now available in Spain. The HCR-20, SVR-20 and SARA guides presented in this monograph, have been adapted to Spanish and to our judicial-criminological environment by the Group of Advanced Studies on Violence (GEAV) of University of Barcelona. This has been made possible thanks to the funding from different public organisms (mainly the Ministry of Education and Science, through projects: SEC2001-3821-C05-01/PSCE and SEJ2005-09170-C04-

01/PSIC) and the facilities given by several psychiatric hospitals, judicial and police services, and penitentiary services, where the first studies regarding the predictive efficacy and adaptation of the guides to the prediction of violence took place. The authors of the works that follow would like to thank all those involved in this process for all the facilities conceded and we hope that the professionals will be able to use them and this way see their interventions noticeably improved.

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