

# Antisocial personality disorder as a predictor of criminal behaviour in a longitudinal study of a cohort of abusers of several classes of drugs: Relation to type of substance and type of crime

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## Abstract

Mixed findings have been made with regard to the long-term predictive validity of antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) on criminal behaviour in samples of substance abusers. A longitudinal record-linkage study of a cohort of 1052 drug abusers admitted 1977–1995 was undertaken. Subjects were recruited from a detoxification and short-term rehabilitation unit in Lund, Sweden, and followed through criminal justice registers from their first treatment episode to death or to the year 2004. In a ML multinomial random effects regression, subjects diagnosed with antisocial personality disorders were 2.16 times more likely to be charged with theft only ( $p < 0.001$ ), and 2.44 times more likely to be charged committing multiple types of crime during an observation year ( $p < 0.001$ ). The findings of the current study support the predictive validity of the DSM-III-R diagnosis of ASPD. ASPD should be taken seriously in drug abusers, and be targeted in treatment to prevent crime in society.

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## 1. Introduction

Crime and drug abuse go together. Miller and colleagues estimated that 5.4 million violent crimes and 8 million property crimes involved alcohol and other drugs use in the USA in 1999 (Miller, Levy, Cohen, &

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Cox, 2006). Drug users report greater involvement with crime than non-users, and are more likely to have criminal records. Persons with criminal records are much more likely to be drug users than others. Among Swedish drug users identified in the criminal justice system, the majority have been sentenced for a non-drug offence, such as theft or violence (Wittrock, 2006).

Alcohol abuse precedes or accompanies a large proportion of violent crime (Gorman, Speer, Labouvie, & Subaiya, 1998; Rossow, 2001; Scribner, Cohen, Kaplan, & Allen, 1999; Scribner, MacKinnon, & Dwyer, 1995).

Several mechanisms may explain these associations. Drug users may be involved in crime to obtain money for drugs; drug users may also commit crime under the influence of drugs; and drug users, or a subset of drug users, may share characteristics that predispose them to criminal behaviour, such as antisocial personality disorder (ASPD).

Table 1  
Studies on the longitudinal association between ASPD and crime in substance abusers

Reference	Treatment	N/n with ASPD	Diagnostic approach	Follow-up time	Follow-up data collection	Key findings
Alterman et al., 1996	MMT and counselling	184/59	SCID-II	7 months	Self-report	ASPD less criminal
Alterman et al., 1998	MMT	193 <sup>a</sup>	Various	7 months	Self-report	Non-significant findings
Bell et al., 1997	MMT	304 <sup>a</sup>	DIS	12 months	Self-report	ASPD symptom count associated with criminal involvement
Bovasso et al., 2002	MMT	254 <sup>a</sup>	PDE	2 years	Criminal justice records	ASPD not associated with crime, after controlling for psychopathy and socialization
Grella et al., 2003	Mixed drug free	707/291	DIS	5 years	Self-report	Higher level of criminal involvement for ASPD, no time*ASPD effect
Hernandez-Avila et al., 2000	Mixed drug free	276/75	SCID-II	12 months	Self-report	No significant effects reported
Kranzler et al., 1997	Mixed in- and outpatient	100/23	LEAD	6 months	Self-report	ASPD predicted days in jail, but not ASI legal problems
McKay et al., 2000	Drug free aftercare	127/46	PDE	12 months	Self-report	No differences reported — low level of criminal involvement for all subjects
Messina et al., 1999	TC	338/166	SCID-II	19 months	Criminal justice records	Fewer arrests among ASPD+ subjects
Verheul et al., 1999	Mixed alcoholism treatment	309/95	CIDI	14 months	Self-report	Small, non-significant difference indicating higher level of legal problems among ASPD+ subjects

Notes: MMT: Methadone Maintenance Treatment. SCID-II: The Structured Clinical Interview for the DSM-III-R. DIS: Diagnostic Interview Schedule. PDE: Personality Disorder Examination. CIDI: Composite International Diagnostic Interview. LEAD: Longitudinal Expert All Data method.

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>a</sup> N with ASDP not reported.

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