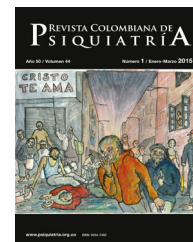




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Artículo original

Investigating Correlations Between Defence Mechanisms and Pathological Personality Characteristics

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between defence mechanisms and pathological personality traits.

Material and methods: We analysed 320 participants aged from 18 to 64 years (70.6% women, 87.5% university students) who completed the Dimensional Clinical Personality Inventory (IDCP) and the Defence Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40). We conducted comparisons and correlations and a regression analysis.

Results: The results showed expressive differences ($d > 1.0$) between mature, neurotic and immature defence mechanism groups, and it was observed that pathological personality traits are more typical in people who use less mature defence mechanisms (i.e., neurotic and immature), which comprises marked personality profiles for each group, according to the IDCP. We also found correlations between some of the 40 specific mechanisms of the DSQ-40 and the 12 dimensions of pathological personality traits from the IDCP ($r \geq 0.30$ to $r \leq 0.43$), partially supported by the literature. In addition, we used regression analysis to verify the potential of the IDCP dimension clusters (related to personality disorders) to predict defence mechanisms, revealing some minimally expressive predictive values (between 20% and 35%).

Discussion: The results indicate that those who tend to use immature defence mechanisms are also those most likely to present pathological personality traits.

Conclusions: The findings indicate the importance of investigating these correlations as a possible improvement to clinical assessment and intervention.

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Investigando las correlaciones entre los mecanismos de defensa y las características de la personalidad patológica

R E S U M E N

Palabras clave:

Trastorno de personalidad

Mecanismos de defensa

Autoevaluación

Introducción: El objetivo de este estudio es investigar la relación entre los mecanismos de defensa y los rasgos patológicos de la personalidad.

Material y métodos: Se analizó a 320 participantes de 18 a 64 años (el 70,6% mujeres y el 87,5% estudiantes universitarios) que respondieron al Inventario Dimensional Clínico de Personalidad (IDCP) y el Cuestionario de Estilo Defensivo (DSQ-40). Se hicieron comparaciones, correlaciones y análisis de regresión.

Resultados: Aparecieron diferencias expresivas ($d > 1,0$) entre grupos de mecanismos de defensa maduros, neuróticos e inmaduros, y se observó que los rasgos de personalidad patológicos son más típicos de personas que usan mecanismos de defensa menos maduros (es decir, neuróticos e inmaduros), lo cual comprende perfiles de personalidad marcados para estos grupos, según el IDCP. También se hallaron correlaciones entre algunos de los 40 mecanismos específicos del DSQ-40 y las 12 dimensiones de los rasgos patológicos de la personalidad del IDCP ($r \geq 0,30$ a $r \leq 0,43$), parcialmente respaldados en la literatura. Además, se usó el análisis de regresión para buscar el potencial de los *clusters* de las dimensiones del IDCP (relacionados con los trastornos de personalidad) para predecir los mecanismos de defensa, lo cual reveló algunos valores predictivos mínimamente expresivos (entre el 20 y el 35%).

Discusión: Los resultados indican que quienes tienden a utilizar mecanismos de defensa inmaduros son también los que tienen más probabilidades de presentar rasgos de personalidad patológicos.

Conclusiones: Los hallazgos señalan la relevancia de investigar estas relaciones como una posible mejora en la evaluación y la intervención clínica.

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Introduction

Defense mechanisms can be understood as unconscious automatic psychological processes whose purpose is to create awareness of stressor events and consequently protect against anxiety.¹⁻³ Originated in psychoanalysis, these ego (central axis) that organizes psychic processes and rationally controls conduct⁴ mechanisms indicate typical conflict resolution and personality organization modes.⁵

Defense mechanisms are processes that make possible to understanding the relationship between healthy and pathological personality functioning, the latter being this particular study's interest.⁶ Although there are several defense mechanism classification models,^{1,7-10} this study is based on a hierarchical model in which defense mechanisms are grouped according to their related maturity level, namely mature or adaptive, neurotic or immature defenses.^{9,10}

According to this model, defenses may be construed as a continuum, ranging from mature to neurotic and immature defenses. Mature defenses are considered to be the healthiest ones, making conscious stressor-management possible in affective and ideational ways that extenuate conflicts. These defenses are related to maturity in development and can be found in healthily functioning adult individuals. When an individual presents with intermediary defenses (i.e., neurotic defenses), conflicts (ideas, feelings, desires, memories, and

fears) are not clearly and consciously dealt with, resulting in typical displays of neurotic functioning, such as excessive concern and anxiety, and less control of the situation. These defenses are common in healthy developing individuals. In adults, they are commonly related to anxiety and neurotic disorders. Now, with immature defenses, conflicts are expressively and unconsciously dealt with in a way that the individual is unable to access unacceptable stressors, impulses, ideas, affects, or responsibilities. This leads to distortion of perception of self and others, as well as incorrect attribution of the antagonistic feelings to external causes. These defenses are commonly found in adults presenting with severe adaptive difficulties, which are frequently related to personality and/or mood disorders.^{9,11}

Under evolutionary hypothesis, all ego defenses have an underlying base structure. Thus, each defense presents a set of related personality traits.¹¹ Particularly, defense mechanisms may be understood as basic underlying personality functioning mechanisms.¹² In pathological personality functioning, these mechanisms may aid in distinguishing personality disorders' many functioning levels,¹³ and their similarities or comorbidities.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Table 1 shows defense mechanisms assessed by this study, as well as typical related personality disorders, according to literature.

In addition to mechanisms and related disorders, Table 1 also shows the dimension column, containing Dimensional Clinical Personality Inventory (*Inventário Dimensional Clínico da*

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