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THE MMPI AND CRIMINAL RECIDIVISM

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In the course of an extended follow-up study of recidivism among men released from the Minnesota State Reformatory during the fiscal year 1955-56, an attempt was made to utilize MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) data in the prediction of recidivism or non-recidivism in individual cases. Previous studies along these lines have yielded contradictory results. Clark (1948) found that MMPI subscales provided no differential discrimination for recidivists as opposed to non-recidivists among AWOL soldiers and that inspectional analysis of the profiles yielded no significant differences between the two groups. He did find it possible, however, to develop a tentative 24-item recidivism scale which appeared to be effective for the purpose intended. Monachesi (1950) made mention of his development of two such tentative scales to be used with male and female juvenile offenders, but apparently they were never cross-validated successfully. Freeman and Mason (1952) reported lack of success in applying Clark's scale to selected groups of recidivists and non-recidivists at the Washington State Penitentiary, and they were unable to develop scales of their own which held up under the test of cross-validation. Dunham (1954) concluded that the D and Pd scales of the MMPI tended to differentiate between criterion groups of prisoners at the San Quentin Prison, but he also stated that "both groups had a tendency to deviate above the norms relative to the D and Pd factors with the recidivists deviating even more from

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The MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) referred to in this paper is an objective proof of 566 items, divided into ten diagnostic scales, and covering a wide range of subject matter—physical as well as moral and social—that serve to inventory ones personality.

scores considered normal". His findings would not, of course, be very helpful in the prediction of individual cases. Morrice (1957) offered an impressionistic evaluation of a very small number of MMPI profiles obtained from inmates of an English prison, and again the findings are of little or no value in individual prediction of recidivism versus non-recidivism. Other research efforts relating to the MMPI and recidivism have been reported in the literature from time to time (Panton, 1962). They have generally been concerned with the development of recidivism scales, and these, at least in the experience of the present authors, have failed to meet cross-validation requirements. The scales referred to include those developed by Clark and Panton as well as others which have not been published in the literature. They completely failed to discriminate between two groups of Minnesota State Reformatory parolees consisting of fifty violators and fifty non-violators.

The purpose of the present article is to describe one more attempt to predict post-institutional recidivism among the members of a group of youthful and adult offenders through the use of the MMPI alone. Two independent approaches to the problem were employed.

PROCEDURE I

Five clinical psychologists¹ skilled in the use of the MMPI were requested to do a "blind sort" on the admission MMPI profiles of 372 men who had been released from the reformatory not less than five years previously. They were further requested to do the same kind of sort on a sample of pre-parole profiles obtained from 210 men who were also members of the first group of 372. The five psychologists were to indicate whether or not they would have predicted recidivist or non-recidivist post-release behavior for each profile examined. The criteria furnished to them for the task of making their decisions were the following:

¹Dr. John P. Brantner and Dr. Robert D. Wirt, Professors of Psychology, Univ. of Minn.; Dr. Frederick J. Gelbmann and Mr. Alfred J. Barron, Minn. State Reformatory for Men; and Mr. Don E. Anderson, Minn. State Prison.

Recidivist—an individual who is released from the institution and continues to be a chronic lawbreaker or commits one or more serious offenses;

Non-Recidivist—an individual who is released from the institution and has no record of an offense, or who commits one or more minor offenses such as any ordinary citizen might commit.

If three or more of the judges agreed in their predictions on a given profile, then that prediction was considered consensually reliable and was placed in the category indicated.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 show the comparisons of three or more judges' agreement and disagreement with the actual record of recidivism or non-recidivism found in the followup of the subjects concerned. Percentages shown are based upon the total number of profiles in each category. The computation of chi square for each table indicates that neither in admission nor pre-release profile comparisons was there a statistically significant difference in the judges' ability to differentiate the recidivists from the non-recidivists.

Discussion

The judges who predicted recidivism or non-recidivism on the basis of a "blind sort" of MMPI profiles were aware that all profiles were those of men who had served sentences as criminal offenders. They might therefore have been expected to err in the direction of predicting a considerably

TABLE 1

BLIND SORT OF ADMISSION PROFILES SHOWING AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT OF PREDICTIONS MADE BY THREE OR MORE JUDGES WITH ACTUAL RECIDIVISM AND NON-RECIDIVISM

	Recidivists		Non-recidivists	
	N	%	N	%
Agreement with follow-up data.....	140	61.1	77	53.9
Disagreement with follow-up data.....	89	38.9	66	46.1
Total Profiles.....	229		143	

Chi square = 1.6358
1 df .30 > P > .20

TABLE 2

BLIND SORT OF PRE-RELEASE PROFILES SHOWING AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT OF PREDICTIONS MADE BY THREE OR MORE JUDGES WITH ACTUAL RECIDIVISM AND NON-RECIDIVISM

	Recidivists		Non-recidivists	
	N	%	N	%
Agreement with follow-up data.....	68	54.0	35	41.8
Disagreement with follow-up data.....	58	46.0	49	58.2
Total Profiles.....	126		84	

Chi square = 2.5793
1 df .20 > P > .10

higher incidence of recidivistic behavior than actually occurred, but in fact they did not. In Tables 1 and 2 they judged 55% and 56% of the profiles, respectively, to be those of recidivists. Actually, the percentages found were 62% and 60%. What is most important to observe, though, is that so many of the profiles were misplaced in the categories. Thus the predictions of non-recidivism in Table 2, for example, tend to be less accurate than might have been expected by chance alone, and only the predictions of recidivism in Table 1 tend to be more accurate than chance results. We are therefore in agreement with Clark (1948) that "blind" inspection analysis of MMPI profiles alone does not yield significant differences between groups of the type under consideration and that such analysis is of little or no value in predicting future recidivistic and non-recidivistic behavior in individual cases. This is by no means to say, however, that the interpretation of a single profile in conjunction with the evaluation of other information such as past history, interview and observational data, etc., provides no added predictive value. On the contrary, the authors believe that the use of the MMPI in this way makes a genuine contribution to accurate prediction in the individual case, but they know of no studies which have corroborated this.

PROCEDURE II

In addition to Procedure I, the authors attempted to develop a scale for the MMPI which would have predictive value in identifying recidivistic behavior. Both admission and pre-release

TABLE 3

Number of Items	Violators			Non-Violators			Total Youth	Total Adult	Total
	Youth	Adult	Total	Youth	Adult	Total			
27	1		1				1		1
26									
25		2	2					2	2
24	1		1	2	1	3	3	1	4
23	1	4	5	1	1	2	2	5	7
22	2	2	4	1		1	3	2	5
21	2	1	3		2	2	2	3	5
20	2		2	5	3	8	7	3	10
19	4	4	8	6	4	10	10	8	18
18	4	3	7	2	4	6	6	7	13
17	4	2	6	3	3	6	7	5	12
16	2	2	4	1	1	2	3	3	6
15	1	2	3	1	4	5	2	6	8
14	1	1	2	2	1	3	3	2	5
13		2	2		1	1		3	3
12				1		1	1		1
Total	25	25	50	25	25	50	50	50	100
Mean	19.08	18.92	19.0	17.64	18.04	17.84	18.84	18.48	18.66
Median	18.13	18.13	18.13	18.42	18.63	18.1	18.3	17.86	18.11

answer sheets were analyzed item by item for all of the 550 unduplicated items in the MMPI. Those items which yielded statistically significant differences between responses of recidivists and non-recidivists at the 5% level of confidence and beyond were identified by means of the chi square test. The analyses of admission and pre-release data yielded nineteen statistically significant items for each of the data pools (372 answer sheets obtained at admission and 210 answer sheets obtained at release from the institution). Only three items were duplicated in the two analyses, and thus it was possible to derive a combined scale of thirty-five items.

Results

For purposes of cross-validation, the 35-item scale was applied to the admission MMPI's of a randomly selected group of 100 parolees released from the State Reformatory for Men, of whom fifty were known parole violators and fifty had not violated their parole within one year after release from the institution. Both of these groups of fifty were evenly divided between youthful and adult

TABLE 4

Number of Items	Violators	Non-Violators	Total
27			
26			
25	1		1
24	2		2
23	1	3	4
22	4	1	5
21	5	5	10
20	2	6	8
19	3	3	6
18	2	3	5
17	2	1	3
16	1	2	3
15		1	1
14	2		2
13			
12			
Total	25	25	50
Mean	20.0	19.64	19.82
Median	20.1	19.42	19.63

offenders. A comparative distribution of significant items as responded to by violators and non-violators is contained in table 3.

Table 4 is a comparative distribution of the application of the combined scale to the pre-release MMPI's of twenty-five randomly selected adult violators and twenty-five non-violators within one year after they had been paroled from the State Reformatory for Men.

Discussion

Statistical analysis of the above data reveals no significant differences in the number of items to which violators and non-violators responded. The 35-item MMPI scale derived in the course of the present study, therefore, has no predictive value for the purpose intended. This conclusion also applies to several other MMPI recidivism scales, developed by independent research workers, which failed to discriminate among the criterion groups used here. It is perhaps worth mention, further, that separate 19-item scales were constructed on the basis of the items identified as significant in the admission and pre-parole data pools. These scales likewise failed to discriminate among the criterion groups. Finally, five items which were statistically significant well beyond the 1% level were used as a fourth and independent scale. This, too, was negative for discriminatory purposes.

A second conclusion is that when recidivism scales are successfully developed in one geographical area they are not likely to be reliable or valid in other geographical areas with different populations of offenders. It may also be the case that efforts to develop MMPI recidivism scales which

will be reliable and valid for a wide range of populations will continue to prove fruitless. Environmental factors such as familial and economic conditions, educational and vocational training opportunities, socio-cultural climates, etc., vary widely from place to place and time to time. They may play equal or more important roles in accounting for the post-institutional behavior of delinquent and criminal offenders than relatively minor personality differences.

SUMMARY

Two approaches to the problem of the prediction of recidivism among youthful and adult offenders have been described. These include "blind sorts" of the admission and pre-release MMPI profiles of fairly large groups of offenders and an attempt to derive a practically useful recidivism scale from the available data. Neither approach was successful in accomplishing its intended purpose. Conclusions have been reached as a consequence of work done, and reasons have been advanced to explain the negative results obtained.

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