# Investigating the role of childhood victimization in criminal recidivism among a sample of male inmates: a cross-sectional study

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**Introduction**: In most countries the percentage of repeat offenders has been increasing. Many factors, including family background, education, occurrence of mental illness with, especially, substance use disorder, may predict the recidivism. Moreover childhood maltreatment increases the risk of repeat offence and, among specific types of victimization, neglect might be a strong predictor of recidivism.

**Objectives:** To examine associations among childhood victimization and criminal recidivism

**Methods:** We enrolled 215 male inmates. Recidivism was defined as the occurrence of one or multiple new convictions for any kind of offense. So the sample was divided, according to presence of recidivism, into two groups, compared for sociodemographic and clinic characteristics.  History of childhood victimization was assessed with the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire Short Form (CTQ-SF). The presence of specific trauma (emotional, physical and sexual abuse; emotional and physical neglect) was determined by meeting a threshold of moderate maltreatment severity.

**Results:** At univariate analyses, subjects with (n=124) and without recidivism (n=91) exhibited  a statistically significant association in the scores of physical neglet (p=0.00) and abuse (p=0.03). However, logistic regression analyses showed that only physical neglet was associated with recidivism (OR:2.32, 95% CI: 1.03-5.21). Moreover lower education, dual diagnosis and gambling were related to an increasing likelihood of criminal recidivism.

| Variable | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | OR  (95% CI) | P | OR  (95% CI) | P | OR  (95% CI) | P |
| Age (years) | 1.01 (0.98 -1.04) | 0.62 | 1.01 (0.98 -1.04) | 0.67 | 1.01 (0.98 -1.04) | 0.68 |
| **Education level** (elementary or lower secondary education/upper secondary school or university education) | 4.08 (2.05-8.20) | 0.00 | 3.80  (1.89- 7.69) | 0.00 | 4.35  (2.13- 8.33) | 0.00 |
| **Dual diagnosis (yes/not)** | 3.17 (1.45-6.92) | 0.00 | 3.18 (1.45 -6.94) | 0.00 | 2.61 (1.17 -5.80) | 0.02 |
| **Pathologic gambling (yes/not)** | 2.22 (1.03-4.81) | 0.04 | 2.37 (1.09 – 5.14) | 0.03 | 2.41 (1.10 – 5.26) | 0.03 |
| Childhood maltreatment: physical abuse (yes/not) | 2.05(0.85-4.92) | 0.11 | – | – | – | – |
| **Childhood maltreatment: physical neglect (yes/not)** | – | – | 2.32(1.03-5.21) | 0.04 | – | – |
| **At least one type of childhood maltreatment (yes/not)** | – | – | – | – | 2.70 (1.38-5.27) | 0.00 |

**Conclusions:**  Childhood maltreatment is associated with recidivism. In particular, physical neglect during childhood plays a critical role in repeated crime, in relationship with mental, substance use  disorders and pathological gambling. A careful evaluation of childhood maltreatment in the assessment and treatment of criminal offenders could be needed.