The psychopathic dimension in women of mafia☆

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ABSTRACT

The authors focus their interest on the socially deviant mafia world, especially on the question of a psychopathic dimension of individuals in mafia. From the scientific point of view this continues to be an unknow world. In all these cases, individuals in mafia, their "feats", their profiles seem to correspond to popular conceptions of the psychopath. Even less known is the women's role in criminal organizations. Their historical role in recent decades has gradually shifted and become more important than it was in the past.

The investigators' interest was focused on identifying the prevalence of the psychopathic dimension in mafia women.

So the authors examined a sample of 20 convicted mafia women coming from Campania and Calabria, the regions of Camorra and 'Ndrangheta respectively, historical Italian criminal organizations. These women inherited their roles from previous bosses and successfully carried on the criminal business. The authors compared this sample of mafia women with a sample of female offenders with full criminal responsibility who were in common female prisons.

Like men of mafia, the women of mafia have a low prevalence of the psychopathic dimension.

Further research is necessary to identify the psychopathic dimension in larger samples of women, and then compare them with similar male samples.

1. Introduction

Women within the Mafia organizations have always performed traditional tasks in the private sphere. These tasks mainly concern the education of sons and daughters, the incitement to revenge, the support of the male reputation and maternal selection of spouses.

In agreement with the majority of experts and authors, the Mafia is a doubtless male organization (Fiume, 1989): in particular the role of women is difficult to clarify with the common instruments of criminological analysis. For instance, as Siebert, (1996, p.69) outlines "The issue around the clear complicity of the wives and daughters of bosses remains unresolved". However, as regard to research in the field of Mafia psychology, the literature is rather controversial, in fact until thirty years

ago, the names and the presence of women hardly appeared in judicial acts and they are not treated directly as guilty for crimes (see: Fiandaca, 2007; Zaccaria, 2010). Hence, the women's emancipation has led to significant transformations in the role that such women play in the patriarchal and rigid world of mafia (Graziosi, 1993); nevertheless, some authors (Baris Cayli, 2016; Allum & Marchi, 2018) indicate that women are enrolled into the clan's management and activities out of necessity during periods of crisis, although they are not yet involved in decision-making in their clans (Madeo, 1992).

Some judges have refused the model according to which, in Mafia crimes, women are not considered to be accomplishes and have begun considering women as an essential component of Mafia; judicial data highlight that an increasing number of women are prosecuted for Mafia-

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related crimes, and the number of Mafia women in prison is growing. More specifically, the Mafia has assigned its woman a critical task: they are expected to pass on the Mafia culture to their children; and they are also being asked to develop in the outside world the power of Mafia system (Graziosi, 2001).

Passing down the cultural mafia code is of vital importance and it is a fundamental responsibility that belongs to the female universe. In the 'Ndrangheta as well as in Cosa Nostra, the allegory of the family is used to define the roles outside their own household. Unmarried women who help the mafia organization are given the role of "sisters of omertà". The mother is the main person with the responsibility of passing down the mafia cultural code.

The mother figure has a central role in the children's educational process. Her job is to instill certain "values" in her children, which she defines as "right" but are contrary to the principles taught in the greater civil society (Transirico, 1994). The main "values" that are passed down concern silence, revenge, contempt for the public authority and the gender difference. The onerous task of training new mafia members belongs to the women. The offspring learn about the criminal activity during the primary socialization phase. The children acquire the mafia cultural model through observation and participation until they internalize it. Women are respected, as they are mothers and conceive children and they are the ones who inculcate the male mentality. Mothers must teach their daughters to subordinate themselves to men's authority.

Gender differences plays a central role within the mafia organization.

It is by emphasizing the maternal role that women are recognized in a context, which is dominated by the male presence and authority. The centrality of the family, a meeting place for affections but also for the mafia business, amplifies the importance of the female figure. This is an ambiguous participation, since external violence leaves no room for the expression of female subjectivity (Alessandra, 2012).

The second active function that women have within the mafia organizations is the incitement to revenge. The 'Ndrangheta considers it as a "pedagogy of revenge", a term used by the sociologist Renate Siebert (Siebert, 1994) to indicate the continuous incitement of the children to avenge the honor of their murdered father. Revenge is a clear principle taught within the organization, as what happened in Duisburg.[1] Women are the guardians of the offended honor of their own men.

The concept of revenge is linked to the concept of honor and shame. Revenge is considered as the cornerstone of an alternative legal system. There are symbolic elements that characterize revenge. The scheduling of the revenge is one of the elements. Another widespread practice is to direct retaliation against the relatives of the person to be retaliated against, the so-called transverse revenge. The women play a leading role in the "memory of revenge". Thus, the woman constantly reminds her children or husband that they cannot leave the murderers of their loved ones unpunished. Her strategy is to leverage the feeling of shame that a lack of revenge would arouse in her peers and in their respective families. The woman's desire to take revenge is therefore taken into consideration even if she is not part of the organization (Siebert, 1994).

In addition to these traditional tasks, women also play important roles in the criminal field, which mainly consist of supporting and acting on behalf of the men. The criminal role of women emerged during the seventies and eighties following two important processes of transformation: one is endogenous to the mafia associations and it is linked to the type of illicit business as well as the internal structure; the other is exogenous and it is linked to social; all transformations in regards to

women's education, work and social customs (Alessandra, 2012).

The sectors in which women have been mostly employed are those of drug trafficking and the economic and financial sectors. However, in recent decades women have become more directly involved in the management of the mafia power. This occurs especially when the male figure is absent because he is imprisoned or has taken flight.

In the role of a messenger, women carry the so-called "*ambasciate*" (written or oral messages) on behalf of the clan members from inside the prison to the outside, or from one hiding place to the other (Pino, 1988).

Women attain positions of command in the militaristic mafia structure when their man is absent (arrested or fugitive). Women are thus delegated positions of temporary power and are used in positions of command only because men need them in such roles. The female power in the mafia, then, is always delegated and temporary: the temporary delegation of power takes place because of the absence of a man and it does not affect the traditional system (Madeo, 1992).

2. Mafia and the psychopathic dimension

In recent decades we have become accustomed to reading in the news about brutal mafia crimes in our country, which are often striking and of high symbolic content. They usually concern wars between bloody rival mafia "*cosche*", which result in numerous deaths. Hundreds of murders occurred during the so-called second mafia war of the 80s. Among the victims were children who were brutally murdered just because they belonged to the families involved. For this reason, we consider mafia men as self-centered, cold and emotionally detached people, who have no remorse and are unable to feel empathy or pity for others, even less for their own victims. They do not hesitate to plunder, break the law and kill. In a few words, this is the profile of a psychopath.

Members of a mafia organization might once have been diagnosable according to DSM criteria. A personality disorder in the first edition was "dyssocial reaction," which designated individuals who:

> "... manifest disregard for the usual social codes, and often come in conflict with them, as the result of having lived all their lives in an abnormal moral envionment. They may be capable of strong loyalties. These individuals typically do not show significant personality deviations other than those implied by adherence to the values or code of their own predatory, criminal, or other social group. The term includes such diagnoses as 'pseudosocial personality' and psychopathic personality with asocial and amoral trend" (American Psychiatric Association, 1952).

Today, spelled with an "i", "dissocial" carries various meanings from antisocial, or criminal with or without pathology as in "dissocial behaviors" (Saß & Felthous, 2007, pp. 9–30) to a pathological personality disorder akin to antisocial personality disorder or psychopathy with inability to maintain enduring relationships as in "dissocial personality disorder" of ICD-10 (World Health Organization, 1989), quite unlike the dyssocial reaction in the first DSM. Yet, the early DSM concept endures in the lexicon of psychiatric concepts today: "Dyssocial in psychiatry… usually implies that the pathology is not wholly endogenous and may be the result of having been reared or having lived in a subgroup whose social code differed from that of the general society" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 206).

In contradistinction to "Antisocial Reaction," for which the individuals, per DSM I, "maintain no real loyalties to any person, group or code," carried over into the ASPD of later DSM editions, the dissocial personality disorder of ICD-10, psychopathy of Cleckley (1976) and of Hare (1980) respectively which were marked by irresponsibility, dyssocial reaction or personalities came to be regarded as non-pathological. "Dyssocial" was dropped as a descriptor in subsequent editions of the DSM, leaving open the question of whether mafia members are afflicted by any degree or kind of psychopathy.

As a matter of fact, the psychopathic dimension is characterized by

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[1] On August 15, 2007 in Duisburg (Germany) six people were killed during their dinner in a restaurant. Afterwards the investigators discovered that this killing was the lastest episode of an ancient revenge and counter-revenge between two opposing 'Ndrangheta clans, the Nirta-Strangio and the Pelle-Vottari, that had begun many years ago.

the presence of specific emotional, interpersonal and behavioral components, such as grandiosity, egocentrism, emotional coldness, lack of empathy, remorse, impulsiveness and a tendency to manipulate. Psychopathy leads to a parasitic life, to behaviors that systematically violate norms, social and legal rules.

Recently, a study investigated the psychological structure of mafia organizations (Schimmenti, Caprì, La Barbera, et al., 2014): group identification, feelings, behaviors, values and beliefs. This study demonstrated that, contrary to what the authors would expect and what people would normally think about mafia men "as a group, they had significantly lower factor 1 (interpersonal/affective) and total PCL-R scores than the offenders they were compared to, but their factor 2 lifestyle/antisocial) scores were similar" (page 325).

On the other hand, gender differences have been recognized in the expression of the psychopathic dimension. Generally, empirical research on gender differences indicates that psychopathic dimension is less common in women than in men (Jackson, Jackson, Rogers, Neumann, & Lambert, 2002; Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell, 1997; Warren et al., 2003).

Psychopathic women tend to be less aggressive than men, but more seductive in their manipulative purposes, aimed at pursuing superficial romantic relationships (Verona, Sprague, & Sadeh, 2012). In addition, female psychopathy shows significant impulsiveness (Edwards & Verona, 2016), as there is a clear connection between psychopathy and alcohol/drug abuse (Giordano & Cernkovich, 1997). However, this seems to be absent in mafia men, even if they show psychopathic traits (Schimmenti et al., 2014) and a high rate of non-suicidal self-injurious episodes too as an expression of impulsivity (Lehmann & Ittel, 2012; Sevecke, Cehmkuhl, & Krischer, 2009).

The interpersonal symptoms in female psychopaths tend to express less superficial charm and grandiosity than in men (Wynn, Hoiseth, & Pattersen, 2012). Moreover, assessments with the PCL-R (Hare, 2003), which is the most used tool to identify the psychopathic dimension, show values that indicate the peculiar differences between psychopathic women and men. Thus, psychopathic women would have lower PCL-RF2 Factor scores compared to male psychopathic subjects (Carabellese et al., 2018; Verona et al., 2012).

In particular, psychopathic women have lower scores for the antisocial component of Factor 2 than psychopathic men, while the "lifestyle" component scores overlap with those of psychopathic men (Fanti, 2013; Miller, Dir, & Gentile, 2010). In contrast to psychopathic men, they obtain higher scores for the interpersonal and affective components (Factor 1) of the PCL-R compared to psychopathic men (Forouzan & Cooke, 2005; Verona eet al., 2012; Fanti, 2013; Carabellese et al., 2019). On the other hand, mafia men (Schimmenti et al., 2014) would have "lower scores than [other male prisoners] for the interpersonal, affective and lifestyle traits of psychopathy" (page 328).

Most likely psychopathy in females causes antisocial behavior that is characterized by manipulativeness and a tendency to deceive and simulate, and to show behaviors mostly related to crimes against property (theft, drug dealing, fraud) (Wynn et al., 2012). For all these reasons clinicians may overlook the psychopathic dimension in women due to stereotypes associated to the gender role of women versus men (Carabellese et al., 2020). A seductive and manipulative woman who manifests antisocial behaviors will more likely be defined as hysterical, histrionic or borderline (Wynn et al., 2012). It has been suggested that BPD in women represents a phenotypic expression of psychopathy (Carabellese et al., 2018; Cooke & Michie, 2001; Giordano & Cernkovich, 1997; Sprague, Javadani, Sadeh, et al., 2012; Verona & Vitale, 2018). At the same time, in recent years the women's role in criminal organizations has become more important than it was in the past. In recent decades, the role of women has shifted. With many of the men in prison or buried underground, women have started to step into the power void to take charge, but to our knowledge no studies have been performed on mafia women.

In light of what has been said so far, the authors examined a sample of 20 convicted mafia women, who were imprisoned in a high security prison in Puglia, all but one coming from Campania and Calabria, the regions of historical, strong criminal organizations such as Camorra and 'Ndrangheta respectively. They led their organizations after the imprisonment or the death of the previous bosses (usually husband, father or brother), so they had inherited their role and successfully carried on the criminal business.

During our research we compared the sample of mafia women held in a high security prison with a sample of female offenders with full criminal responsibility held in common female prisons.

Our interest was focused on identifying the prevalence of the psychopathic dimension in mafia women. Because of their role, they could exhibit higher levels of psychopathy than others or they could be able to manipulate others and practice criminal acts without remorse.

Therefore, it was then the aim of the authors to identify the presence or absence of traumatic experiences in mafia women during childhood, the possible role of such experiences in the development of psychopathy in adulthood (Schimmenti, Di Carlo, Passanisi, et al., 2015) and the style of attachment shown by mafia women.

Our research had several objectives: 1) to identify the prevalence of and measure the psychopathic dimension in mafia women; 2) to evaluate the values of the four different components of PCL-R F1 and F2 factors in mafia women, and determine whether or not these women were psychopathic; 3) to identify possible traumatic experiences in their background; 4) to evaluate the possible role of such traumatic childhood experiences in the development of psychopathy in mafia women during adulthood; and 5) to identify the style of attachment of mafia women, especially those women with traumatic childhood experiences.

2.1.1. Our research

This research represents a further phase in a line of research begun in 2012, continued in the following years and is still ongoing. In the first phase of the study, completed in 2013, we found a specific phenotypical expression of female psychopathy in BPD. Carried out in 2014, the second phase identified phenotypic expressions of psychopathic female offenders. These data are consistent with the existence of a gray area in the spectrum of phenotypic features of the female psychopathy. The number of women with psychopathic traits but without meeting the threshold of psychopathy could remain underestimated. In the third phase, which continued throughout year 2016, we compared the group of OPG of Castiglione delle Stiviere female offenders (66 women) affected by a mental disorder, with a sample of 49 female prisoners among the 70 convicted women imprisoned in all the penitentiaries in Puglia. It became apparent that the psychopathic dimension in women could be expressed through a variety of criminal behaviors not necessarily violent, but clearly related to typical female psychopathic features such as manipulativeness.

Then, we continued to evaluate the female offenders from throughout the country in the Judicial Psychiatric Hospital (OPG) of Castiglione delle Stiviere – the only security hopsital that admitted female offenders who had been found Not Guilty by Reasons of Insanity (NGRI) or of diminished-responsibility and were determined to be

dangerous to society because of the risk of criminal recidivism – also after its closure[2] (Carabellese & Felthous, 2016) and its conversion to Poli-REMS.

In the fourth phase of our research, which continued until March 2017, we compared the female murderers coming from Castigione delle Stiviere REMS (41 women among 106 women) with a sample of 10 female murderers among the 102 female prisoners in all the penitentiaries in Puglia (Trani, Lecce, Taranto and Foggia) from October 2016 to March 2017.

In this present research, we compared the 20 mafia women who consented to participate in the research, who were among the 32 women detained in maximum security prison in Lecce, with women detained in the female prisons in Puglia. The female prisoners detained in the prisons of Puglia came from all the regions of Southern Italy. The high security prison of Lecce houses mafia women from Campania and especially from Calabria (about 80% of our sample), the regions of historical, strong criminal organizations, such as Camorra and 'Ndrangheta, respectively. One woman was from Puglia (Sacra Corona Unita, Puglia criminal organization).

The research was conducted in compliance with the rules and recommendations provided by the ethics committee of each facility in which the research was carried out (Female Prisons of Puglia) and after the necessary authorizations were granted by the competent authorities (Penitentiary Administration Department of the Ministry of Justice and of Puglia). The women were informed about the purpose of the research and agreed to participate by providing their written informed consent. All data were processed anonymously.

2.1.2. Research methodology and instruments

A version of the PCL-R validated for the Italian population (Caretti, Manzi, Schimmenti, & Seragusa, 2011) was administered to all the subjects. The scores of the two different components of factors F1 and F2 were recorded, as well as the values of the different components within factors F1 and F2. A threshold score of PCL-R equal to or greater than 25 was established to identify the condition of psychopathy, as indicated in studies conducted on European populations (Hicks, Vaidyanathan, & Patrick, 2010; Strand & Belfrage, 2005) and as applied in our previous research (Carabellese et al., 2018; Carabellese et al., 2019; Carabellese et al., 2020). The psychopathic dimension was graded by dividing the sample into three different groups according to the total PCL-R score obtained: 1) PCL-$R \geq 25$; 2) PCL-R between 20 and 24; 3) PCL-$R \leq 19$.

We administered the Italian version of the HCR-20^{V3} (Douglas, Hart, Webster, & Belfrage, 2013), which is currently being validated (Caretti et al., 2019). We took into consideration only the H8 item, which investigates the presence of any traumatic childhood experiences in both the "victimization/trauma" variable and in the "adverse experiences of care" variable, as indicated by the same instrument used.

We then proceeded with the PID-5 IRF, the Personality Inventory for the DSM-5 Informant Report to determine major psychiatric disorders and personality traits and to identify the attachment styles of women (Somma et al., 2019), recently validated for the Italian population (Fossati, Borroni, & Somma, 2015). This tool was developed by the American Psychiatric Association for the dimensional assessment of personality. It is a self-report personality assessment tool composed of

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[2] After the closure of High Security Hospitals, named OPG, *Ospedali Psichiatrici Giudiziari* (Decree-Law Number 211, which became legally effective on February 17, 2012 (art. Number 9) in March of 2015, one or more Residences for the Execution of Security Measures (REMS) (Decree-Law no. 81 of May 30, 2014), were established as replacements for OPGs. REMS are facilities established in Italian regions each with a maximum of 20 beds, which are responsible for keeping socially dangerous offenders within the proper level of security and for providing a clear therapeutic approach aimed at their social reintegration back into the community. A Poli-REMS consists of two (or more) REMS facilities under a single administration.

220 items, ranked on a scale from 0 to 2, that can also be administered by an examiner (PID-5 IRF). The PID-5 initially provides scores for 25 specific traits, which are then organized into five specific domains of the pathological personality (negative affectivity, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition, psychoticism). The examiners who used the PCL-R were different from the examiners who administered the PID-5 IRF.

All researchers had been trained to use the PCL-R and the PID-5 by an official licensed trainer before the research was initiated (Prof. Vincenzo Caretti).

We also collected clinical-historical information (possible pathologies reported in their records, age, marital status, education level, family and psychiatric history), and type of crime committed.

Eventually, all the data obtained were statistically analyzed, for which the STATA MP 13.3 software was used. The Pearson correlation coefficient and linear regression were used to verify the presence of correlations between the variables considered.

Here we will proceed with a description of the sample and the data that emerged.

2.1.3. Sample description

The two samples were composed of 20 mafia women detained in a high security prison and 49 women detained in female prisons in the Southern Italian region of Puglia.

2.1.4. Mafia women detained in a high security prison

This sample ($n = 20$) was mainly composed of young women (11 of them were between 25 and 44 years old and 9 of them were between 45 and 64 years old). They were all Italian citizens and they were all detained in a high security system, which was particularly restrictive (Article 41 bis of the Prison Administration Act), since they were definitively convicted for a mafia-related crime (Article 416 bis of the Italian Criminal Code). Sixty percent of these women had a low level of education (8 years or less). Eighty percent of them were married and only 25% had criminal records (three related to a mafia association and two related to drug dealing). Only one woman had a positive history of drug abuse. Thirty percent ($n = 6$) had a psychiatric diagnosis reported in their records: 4 had major depression and 2 had an adjustment disorder with anxiety.

With regard to the PCL-R, only one woman exceeded the indicated cut-off (≥ 25), which indicates the presence of psychopathy and another one showed only psychopathic traits (total PCL-R between 20 and 24). However, the clear majority (90%) had a total PCL-R score lower than 19 (Table 1). By observing the breakdown of the scores in the various subscales of the total PCL-R score, we can see how component 4 of F2, concerning the antisocial behavior, is the main component that lowered the total PCL-R score (Table 2–3).

As for Item 8 of the HCR-20, only two women reported having experienced premature loss of a parent (the father, who was murdered) during their childhood.

Regarding the personality characteristics (PID 5-IRF) of this sample, we observed higher values especially in the area of negative emotions: anxiety, emotional lability and separation anxiety (Table 4). There was no statistically significant correlation between the various personality traits assessed with PID 5, the total PCL-R score or the related subscales. Finally, we observed that these women showed no relevant indices, essentially in any of the areas of clinical relevance, except for emotional lability and anxiety, which were probably affected by the particularly harsh and restrictive conditions of their detention as members of mafia organizations. On the whole, however, the mafia women showed good resilience and ability to adapt to a rigorous prison system and the prospect of long prison sentences without being able to benefit from alternative, less severe detention measures.

2.1.5. Women detained in the female prisons in Puglia

The group of non-mafia female prisoners included 49 subjects, mostly young women between the ages of 25 and 44 (53%). 77.5% were

Italian citizens and most of them had a low level of education (only 15% of them had graduated from secondary school). They had been convicted of the following offenses: theft or robbery (38%), drug-related crimes (31%), personal injury (16%), murder or attempted murder (10%), and prostitution (5%).

Only 20% ($n = 10$) of the female prisoners had a psychiatric diagnosis in their clinical record (5 were diagnosed with a mood disorder, 2 with a schizophrenia spectrum disorder, 3 with an anxiety disorder). 30% of the female prisoners had previously reported abuse of narcotics.

Regarding the PCL-R, 7 women (14%) exceeded the indicated cut-off (≥ 25) which indicates the presence of psychopathy and 6 others (12%) showed psychopathic traits (total PCL-R between 20 and 24), while the remaining 36 had a total PCL-R score of below 19 (Table 1). By observing the breakdown of the scores in the various subscales of the total PCL-R, we see how in this group of women, contrary to what was observed in the group of high security prisoners, the averages of the F1 and F2 factors are substantially overlapping (Tables 5 & 6); If we refer specifically to each of the four components, we observe that the values for component 4 of F2 (antisocial behavior) are considerably higher.

On the other hand, looking at the personality profile, we observe a substantially similar profile between the two samples with higher scores in the area of negative emotions and low scores in the other areas (Table 7). However, there are no significant positive correlations between all the PID 5 facets and the scores obtained with the PCL-R scale for psychopathy. Instead, there is a negative correlation between the total PCL-R, F1 and F2 and anxiety and between total PCL-R and detachment (Table 8).

Finally, we observe a positive finding in Item 8 of the HCR-20 in 7 cases (in two cases with loss of a parent during childhood and in 5 other cases with child maltreatment experiences).

With regard to personality traits Capraro and colleagues (Capraro et al., 2018) in their study on men of Camorra and Cosa Nostra, found a significant presence of borderline personality organization in both groups.

Regarding the crimes committed, the group of women with PCL-R total score ≥ 25 (Group 1) mostly committed crimes against the person (42.5%), and crimes against property (28.5%). In the group with PCL-R scores between 24 and 20 (Group 2), 50% of the women committed crimes against property and 33%, drug dealing. In the group with PCL-$R \leq 19$ (Group 3), women committed crimes against property (40%), drug dealing (31%) and against the person (23%).

The scores obtained for the facet of anxiety in Group 3 were higher compared to the first two groups (0.59, 0.7 and 1.8, respectively). However, there are no significant positive correlations between all the PID 5 facets and the scores obtained with the PCL-R scale for psychopathy. Instead, there is a negative correlation between the total PCL-R, F1 and F2 and anxiety and between total PCL-R and detachment.

3. Discussion

Even the mafia women in our sample, as well as the mafia men investigated by Schimmenti et al. (2014), do not have a clear psychopathic profile. On the contrary, it seems that the inclusion in this type of criminal organization, especially at its highest levels, excludes those women who have psychopathic traits in their personality set. As a matter of fact, only one woman among the 20 mafia women in our sample had a total PCL-R value that was higher than the cut-off set by us to evaluate the psychopathological dimension and only one reported values between 20 and 24. Instead, 90% of them had low total PCL-R values. Moreover, the value of the antisocial component of F2 was constantly low.

On the other hand, the PCL-R values of the women detained for common crimes showed percentages of psychopathy that are not dissimilar to those reported in the literature: 11–17.4% (Andershed, 2012; Grann, 2000; Millon, Simonsen, & Birket-Smith, 1998; Salekin et al., 1997; Warren et al., 2003).

The psychopathic dimension, both when it was more evident and when it was latent in our sample, manifested itself with high PCL-R Factor F1 scores (both components 1 and 2). Regarding factor F2, its lifestyle component is the main one with higher scores. The antisocial conduct component was constantly low, except in common prisoners. This confirms that the expression of the psychopathic dimension in women is different from that in men with psychopathic traits (Carabellese et al., 2018).

As previously stated, mafia prisoners show considerably lower antisocial behavior scores. Therefore, in agreement with what was mentioned in the introduction, we could hypothesize that even today women do not play an active role within the criminal organization until they are forced to by the loss of their man, as it is also shown by their low percentage of prior criminal records. Moreover, even when directly involved in criminal roles, women hold financial management and organization roles and are not directly involved in blood crimes, where the coldness and lack of empathy for the victim, typical psychopathic traits, could be more "useful".

Regarding the exposure to traumatic experiences and/or abuse and violence during childhood, this only emerges in common prisoners (about 20% of them). It occurs much less often in mafia women, even though the family lives of these women are full of tragic events. The memory of these events is preserved in their personal history and, for the cultural reasons mentioned above, in the accounts that are passed down to their families. In mafia women, we can assume that protective factors from anxiety and separation experiences have been effectively introjected, thus the women of this sample do not seem to show striking discomfort either from the harsh prison regime to which they are subjected or from their personal histories which they have endured. Besides, they seem to rapidly accept and efficiently adapt to the social changes and the new roles they must face. In addition, when they arrive, they seem to accept the consequences, the severe sentences and the harsh prison conditions.

In contrast, common female prisoners show levels of psychological suffering of clinical relevance (Di Giacomo and Clerici, 2018) more frequently than the group of mafia women, despite the fact that the prison regime to which they are subjected grants them large margins of freedom within the prison walls (cells are closed only during sleeping hours; they are free to move inside the prison, they can cook their own meals and keep their newborns with them for the first years of their life). In addition, common prisoners are offered rehabilitation opportunities (many of them are engaged in paid work activities that keep them busy for several hours a day).

4. Conclusions

The intrinsic limitation of this study is that it refers exclusively to a numerically small sample of women, specifically mafia women. On the other hand, it is necessary to consider the extreme difficulty in gaining access to prisoners with this type of criminal conviction, whether they are men or women, who are subjected to a very strict prison regime and with very limited access the outside world, even for purposes of research.

In summary:

1) This study confirmed that there is a near absence of the psychopathological dimension of psychopathy in mafia women, as it is for mafia men who were investigated by others.
2) Mafia women do not show higher levels of anxiety or emotional lability, despite the particularly harsh prison regime to which they are subjected. Also, although such data were not confirmed by a psychometric scale, the mafia women appeared to the researchers paradoxically to have adapted better to prison conditions than common prisoners, although they often had many more years left to serve in prison and under much more severe and restrictive conditions of confinement.

3) Findings in the literature on the prevalence of the psychopathic dimension in prisoners detained for common crimes were confirmed.
4) The women in our sample who manifested the psychopathic dimension, whether it was particularly evident or less pronounced, had higher F1 Factor scores, for both the interpersonal and affective component; the value of the antisocial component of factor F2 was lower; which confirms a specific expression of psychopathy in the female gender compared to what is observed in psychopathic men.
5) Among the women in our sample, the psychopathic dimension reflects past traumatic and/or violent experiences and/or abuses, but only in the common female prisoners. Among the latter, those with higher levels of psychopathy committed mostly violent crimes, unlike what is usually reported in the literature for psychopathic females.
6) In some ways, the mafia women seem to have been psychologically protected because of their specific culture and their family background, even in their new roles as "family" leaders.

As this is the first attempt to study females who have become operatives within a mafia organization, research involving female mafia members of other mafia clans, such as the Costa Nostra, would help to confirm the generalizability of these findings. Further research is necessary to identify the psychopathic dimension in more diverse and numerous samples of women, and then compare them with similar male samples.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2020.101600.

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