

To What Extent Do Psychopathic Personality Traits Predict Violent Criminal Behavior among Adolescents

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Abstract. A characteristic test is a scientific procedure designed to measure a particular characteristic, such as behavior. The characteristic tests are used to predict the criminal behavior of people. This essay explores to what extent do psychopathic personality traits predict violent criminal behavior among adolescents. Specifically, the essay is going to be divided into two sections. Firstly, how psychopathic personality traits, particularly Callous-Unemotional (CU) traits, impulsivity, and antisocial behavior, can predict violent criminal behavior in adolescents. The essay will first review existing research on the link between psychopathic traits and violent crime in adolescents, focusing on studies that use tools like the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI) and the Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL-YV) to measure CU traits, impulsivity, and antisocial tendencies. Secondly, this essay will also explore the differences between adolescents and adults in terms of how psychiatric traits predict violent criminal behaviors. We will analyze the manifestations of traits such as CU and impulsivity in adolescents and adults, and explore how the differences affect the predictors of criminal behaviors. Also, in this essay, we will discuss more relevant reasons which will cause violent behavior, such as brain development, environmental upbringing, and adolescent personality changes. To summarize the main points from a number of current research studies, and analyze how psychiatric traits change over time, the essay aims to provide a clearer version of how psychiatric traits affect violent behaviors in adolescents, and what different roles these traits play in adults.

Keywords: Psychopathic Personality Traits, Violent Criminal Behavior, Adolescents.

1. Introduction

The issue of adolescent violence has become an important point in psychological research and social concern. These behaviors usually emerge during critical periods of emotional and cognitive development, making them particularly challenging to address [1]. Adolescence is a period of massive change. At this period, they experience significant emotional fluctuations, and their decision-making abilities and social relationships also face major changes. These changes may influence whether young people engage in aggressive or violent behaviors. Therefore, early identification of risk factors is crucial for formulating effective intervention strategies.

One of the most important risk factors extensively discussed in research is psychopathic personality traits, which the mainly manifested as callousness (CU), impulsivity, and antisocial

behavior. These traits are closely related to adolescents' aggression, violence, and delinquent behaviors [2,3]. The CU traits, which feature a lack of empathy, guilt, and emotional warmth, are deemed to be the main defining points of psychopathy and serve as an indicator of the chances of becoming violent in the future [4]. Adolescents with higher levels of CU traits often show characteristics such as manipulative tendencies, emotional detachment, and emotional numbness. These characteristics could collectively serve as the basis for the various forms of aggression which seen in society [5]. Additionally, impulsivity, which is an action tendency without considering or deep thinking, plays a crucial role in violent behaviors. Adolescents are not mature enough; they normally with a very low capacity to fully understand or measure the impacts of their impulsive actions, are much easier to engage in risky and unmeasured actions [6].

Over the past twenty years, researchers have developed a number of tools to measure different levels of psychopathic traits in adolescents. The Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI) [2] and the Youth Version of the Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-YV) [7] are two of the most popular and important tools in measuring adolescents' psychopathic traits. These measurement tools can detect antisocial tendencies and impulsive behaviors, and give researchers a better understanding of connections between adolescent psychopathy and violent behavior. There is a growing consensus among the experts that adolescents with higher level of psychopathic traits are more probable to be totally involved in violent crimes [6].

From the perspective of this working hypothesis, it is expected that the adolescent samples with high level CU traits and impulsivity will demonstrate at least 50% higher tendency towards violent crime than those with their peers. This distinctly draws our attention to the value of these traits, which, when identified at early stages, the sooner the right kind of help base is established to eradicate the increase of future violence behavior.

2. Literature review

The Callous Unemotional (CU) trait is characterized by a lack of empathy for other people,, absence of guilt and emotions. These traits are regarded as the core of psychopathology and have been proven to be powerful predictors of violent behavior among adolescents. For measuring Callous Unemotional (CU) traits in a youth group, the Psychological Youth Inventory is recommended (YPI) [2], which was designed to evaluate CU traits in adolescents including lack of empathy, absence of guilt, and coldness toward others. The YPI is a tool widely used in researches to evaluate and quantify CU behaviors, which are in line with both aggression and violence in youths.

Adolescents with the high CU traits are admitted to perform more aggressive and violent acts [2]. These traits mostly manifest as cold-heartedness, manipulative interpersonal style along with insensitivity to the feelings of other people. Empirical investigations proved that CU traits in adolescents correlate with a higher chance of anti-social behaviors and violent offenses to be committed, which are characterized by high levels of aggression and low levels of their own respect or regard for others.

Besides, impulsivity is another feature of psychopathy and relies on acting suddenly, without well-considering consequences. Impulsivity. In adolescents, impulsivity is closely associated with various violent behaviors, including physical assaults and property crimes [6]. There is often a description used for individual levels of impulsivity, which is the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11). The BIS-11 is a tool designed to be used by adolescents to assess impulsivity at a number of points related to it, including motor impulsivity, attention lapse and unplanned impulsivity. This scale has undergone several applications to predict acts like individual aggression and violence since impulsivity is inherited in reckless actions linked to such violent crimes.

The impulsivity of adolescents can intensify violent tendencies, particularly when combined with CU traits. Adolescents exhibiting both high CU traits and impulsivity are more likely to engage in spontaneous, reckless violent acts without considering long-term consequences [7]. Moreover, the youth with combined CU and impulsivity present the most dangerous mixture and volatility for a violent behavior since they often lack of emotional regulation capabilities and tend to act in inappropriate ways. Understanding how these traits contribute to violent criminal behavior is crucial for predicting future offenses and designing appropriate intervention programs.

3. The difference between adolescents and adults

There are significant differences in psychological characteristics and behaviors between adolescents and adults, which is particularly evident in predicting criminal behavior. Adolescents are at a dramatic stage of physical and mental development, which their impulsivity, emotional reaction, and behavior are more prominent as compared to adults [8].

From the study "Psychopathic Traits in Adolescent Offenders: An Evaluation of Criminal History, Clinical, and Psychosocial Correlates" [8], researchers delved into the connection between adolescent characteristic traits and criminal history. The study sample included 226 adolescents aged 12 to 19 from diverse backgrounds (83% Caucasian, 7% African Canadians, 4% Indigenous, and 6% other ethnic groups). Eighty-six percent of the adolescents had nonviolent criminal records, averaging 5.4 offenses (SD = 5.91). In contrast, only 15% had violent criminal records, averaging 1.2 offenses (SD = 2.34). Different from adults crime, which are often happening in stability and severity, adolescents' behaviors are usually highly mechanized, with a combination of impulsivity, emotions and under pressure, and exposed suddenly. The reasons may also include peer pressure, family dynamics, and social relationships [9].

The study used several measuring tools, such as the Youth Antisocial Property Scale (YPI) and the Youth Antisocial Behavior Checklist (PCL-YV), to measure antisocial traits and violent behaviors. These tools effectively evaluate the level of adolescents callousness (CU), impulsivity, and antisocial behaviors [7]. There is a famous research result which is often used as a sepcific example of studies. According to the result, the score of PCL-YV scale for adolescents sample group who falling into the high psychopathic traits was above 25. Additionally, the Youth Self-Rating Scale (YSR) which used to measure extraneous behaviors including delinquency and aggression, also being used to assess the same sample group, the results were estimated at 62.89 (SD = 10.66), which are indicated as high level aggressiveness in the sample [9].

In addition, the differences between adolescents and adults are also influenced in the way that how psychopathic traits are expressing. The research indicates that compared to adults, adolescents who lack of the ability to control their spontaneous emotions in stressful situation are more likely to do extreme actions. For instance, adolescents score an average of 83.09 points (SD = 36.28) in aggression questionnaire of the study, suggestive of high frequency in the aggressive behavior field. Adults on the other hand usually mean better emotional regulation and mature relationship management compared to adolescence, which is further supported by better impulse control. None of the adults, generally, display CU traits but when they occasionally do, then these traits are more persistent and more severe than in youth, implying that CU traits are good predictors of violent crime [10].

However, for adults, seven major personality traits will help predicting the possibility of violent crime: high levels of psychopathic, neurotic, extraverted, aggressive, anxious and adventurous. These might make adults drop the comfort zone, even go defending bias in an extremist way. Senseful studies by Eriksson and Krueger et al. demonstrate that these personality traits effectively predict

adult criminal tendencies. Relying on the Eysenck three-factor approach to personality, he described psychotism as a concern over aggression, emotional detachment, and selfishness, neuroticism as a spectrum of emotional instability and anxiety, and extraversion as a desire to experience outdoor activities and social status. The current paper contains a number of studies about violent crime in relation to various parameters, including psychoticism and neuroticism in the personality model. For instance, in a study by Delcea and Enaches [11] with a total number of 492 participants, revealed that individuals with higher psychopathic ($M = 51.33$, $SD = 9.87$) and neurotic ($M = 51.92$, $SD = 9.70$) scores aligned with higher criminal actions. Particularly, psychoticism ($r=0.46$, $p<0.01$) and neuroticism ($r=0.70$, $p<0.01$) have shown that individuals with these psychological states tend to commit crime more easily.

Other research also gives credence to the idea that personality traits and a criminal lifestyle are interrelated. For example, Cauffman et al. and his colleagues of the Swedish prisons found that the most dangerous criminals imprisoned were more likely to exhibit psychopath traits. The second most calculated factor was aggressiveness, impulsivity and aggression. Back to the research of Delcea and Enache [11], which was based on drug addiction, they also found that addiction was a better predictor of criminal behaviors. High levels of addiction scores ($M = 56.54$, $S.E. = 15.76$) were positively connected to people having criminal action ($r = .15$, $p < .01$), which meant people having these addiction levels were more likely involved in criminal activities. Trait criminality ($M = 56.54$, $SD = 15.76$) was in the same way strongly associated with committing crime ($r = .12$, $p < .01$), reinforcing the notion that "those who disregard others rights are more prone to crime."

Furthermore, addiction is considered as a major precursory factor for criminal behavior. In addition to that, studies such as those of Brochu et al. and Lind et al. explicitly indicate that alcohol use, gambling, and substance abuse, etc. are strong offenders of illegal activities. In Fehrman et al., the study examined 1,885 drug users and it was found out that the majority of people with the highest levels of impulsivity and sensation-seeking drug users were most likely more involved in other illegal behaviors compared to non-drug users. On the study of Delcea and Enache [11], the relationship between addiction and crime was demonstrated significantly. Every time a unit of addiction increased, the odds of committing a crime by 3% ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.03$, $p = 0.002$).

Overall, even similarities of psychopathic traits in all adolescents and adult violators, but it can be stated that the adolescents who are physically and mentally mature are distinguishable for reasons of the physiological changes during their development, which affect the ways they express their impulses, emotions, and social behaviors. Despite fact that previous research suggested similar characteristics in adult offenders' and adolescent offenders' traits, the data reported in this paper strongly support the idea that adolescents' impulsivity and emotional reactivity drastically increase the likelihood of committing murder or assault to non-violent persons [12], which happens as a result of the quick change in their emotions under the influence of external factors.

4. Limitation

In this point, some researchers think that in addition to personality being a major predictor of strongly violent behavior types, environmental factors also must be considered as a reason for this. In the case study of adolescents reported herein, daily life in the family, for example, being raised by a single parent or disruption in living situations, may significantly affect children's behavior and character traits. On the contrary, adolescents especially those with psychopathic traits, compared with children who have a background of abuse, those who grow up in a family-supported environment, have significantly lower levels of violent behaviors. This selective attention can indicate that psychopathic traits is indeed a risk factor. In addition, experiences of physical and

sexual abuse are associated with maladaptive behaviors, which is also a factor contributing to psychopathic traits. Social relationships, such as family relationship and the influence among peers, are all important factors to affect the tendencies of aggression and crime. Therefore, psychological traits are not only caused by biological factors; family environment, personal misfortune and social relationships also have significant influences on them. Both natural and unnatural factors play a crucial role in shaping of human personality.

5. Conclusion

As a result, the psychopathic traits of juvenile delinquents, especially CU, impulsivity and antisocial behavior, can fully explain the violent criminal actions of adolescents. The essay also clarifies that since the psychopathic characteristics of adolescents are closely related to aggressive and violent behaviors, so early prediction of psychopathic traits is in priority. Furthermore, the connections between psychopathic traits and violent crimes is very complicated. It is certain that psychopathic traits often lead to violent behaviors. On the other hand, the reasons why tools such as the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI) and the Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL-YV) are helpful to criminal justice practitioners are also difficult to understand.

Adolescents is a special period of the life which with high speed development, combine with unstable in both emotional and cognitive. In this situation, adolescents is easily to be involved in impulsive behaviors as well as aggressive responses. Although, there are many reasons for a person to commit a crime, environment is a factor which is very likely to shape an adolescents' personality and lead to a crime. For example, supportive family environment or abuses plays an important role in the development of psychopathic traits. Therefore, the combination of biological factors and environmental influences make the predicting of criminal behaviors becoming more complex.

Psychopathic traits are very useful markers for judging violent behavior. However, in addition to considering physiological and social factors, Psychopathic traits are very useful markers for judging violent behavior. However, in addition to considering physiological and social factors, also study to work out more related factors. This is crucial for creating early intervention programs that focus on emotional control, empathy and impulse management to effectively reduce violence and maintain a healthier lifestyle. Future research must delve deeply into how these psychopathic traits gradually formed and how various intervention measures can minimize the criminal opportunities for young people.

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