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Differences on Psychopathic traits between Murderers, White Collar Criminals, and the General Offender Population in U.S. and Polish Prisons

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Outline

• Theoretical background
• Aim
• Methodology
• Results
• Conclusions
Introduction

- Psychopathy has been recognised as a crucial psychological construct in the criminal justice system (DeLisi, 2016; Hart & Hare, 1997)
- 35% of homicide offenders were noted for increased psychopathy scores (Hodgins, Mednick et al., 1996)
- Homicidal child molesters scored significantly higher (two SDs above the mean) on total psychopathy than non-homicidal child molesters (Firestone et al., 1998)
- Media portrayals of murderers as psychopaths, alongside the public's fascination with the crime, has led to a common distorted view of a murderer in public perception
Psychopathy

- Psychopathy is a personality characteristic that exists on a continuum.
- Cleckley (1941) proposed the first comprehensive conceptualisation of psychopathy:

  1. Intelligence & superficial charm
  2. Absence of delusions
  3. Lack of neuroticism
  4. Unreliability
  5. Dishonesty & insincerity
  6. Absence of remorse & regret
  7. Antisocial behaviour
  8. Poor judgment & failure to learn from mistakes
  9. Egocentricity
  10. Lack of affective reactions
  11. Absence of insight
  12. Unresponsiveness
  13. Bizarre behaviour
  14. Infrequently suicidal
  15. Impersonal sex life
  16. Lack of any life plan
Hare’s psychopathy measures are problematic

• Weighted toward indicators of behavioural expressions of the disorder (Edens et al., 2001; Patrick et al., 2007; Rogers, 1995)

• This can influence the scales’ predictive utility for criminal behaviour (Cooke et al., 2006; Kennealy et al., 2010)

• Has potentially led to an overestimation of the prevalence of psychopathy in prison populations (Boduszek et al., 2016)
Psychopathic Personality Traits Scale

Psychopathy

Factor 1: Affective Responsiveness
Factor 2: Cognitive Responsiveness
Factor 3: Interpersonal Manipulation
Factor 4: Egocentricity
Aim of the study

To explore differences between homicide offenders, white collar criminals, and offenders from the general population, utilising a new four-dimensional model of psychopathy.
Method

• Participants
  • 771 offenders incarcerated in Pennsylvania in the US
    • Minimum-security $n = 112$
    • Medium-security $n = 186$
    • Maximum-security $n = 473$
    • Females $n = 337$
    • Males $n = 434$
  • 1,261 offenders incarcerated in Poland
    • Medium-security $n = 558$
    • Maximum-security $n = 703$
Method

- Measure
  - The Psychopathic Personality Traits Scale (PPTS; Boduszek et al., 2016)

- Analysis
  - Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)
  - T-test

- Ethics
  - Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Polish Prison Service

- Design
  - Cross-sectional, survey research
ANOVA Results

Figure 1. US psychopathy scores for murderers, white collar criminals, and general offender population. AR = Affective responsiveness, CR = Cognitive responsiveness, IPM = Interpersonal manipulation, EGO = Egocentricity. Murderers score higher than gen. pop. on CR, Cohen’s $d = .22$. White collar criminals score higher than gen. pop. (Cohen’s $d = .43$) and murderers (Cohen’s $d = .61$) on IPM.
Figure 2. US psychopathy scores for Males and Females. Males score higher than Females on AR, Cohen’s $d = .21$. 

**T-test Results**
ANOVA Results

Figure 3. Polish psychopathy scores for murderers, white collar criminals, and general offender population. White collar criminals score higher than gen. pop. on IPM, Cohen’s $d = .20$. 
Results Summary

- United States
  - White collar criminals score higher than the general prison population on IPM
  - White collar criminals score higher than murderers on IPM
  - Murderers score higher than general prison population on CR
  - Males score higher than Females on AR

- Poland
  - White collar criminals score higher than general prison population on IPM
Contributions

• White collar criminals, rather than murderers, score higher on the interpersonal manipulation factor of psychopathy

• Murderers do not score higher than other types of offenders on affective responsiveness (e.g., emotional empathy)

• Despite being popularised in contemporary media portrayals and sustained by previous research, the notion that murder is intrinsically connected with psychopathic tendencies, is not supported within the present exploration

“If I wasn’t studying psychopaths in prison, I’d do it at the stock exchange.”
-Dr Robert Hare
Limitations & Future Directions

• Limitations
  • Cross-sectional design was utilised
  • Self-report measures were used

• Future Directions
  • Explore this theory/new measure of psychopathy & determine if the findings remain consistent in other prison populations
  • Determine if cross-cultural differences remain consistent
  • Investigate differences on psychopathy between single and serial murderers
Questions?
Thank You!