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Brief report: Self-reported psychopathic-like features among Finnish community youth: Investigation of the factor structure of the antisocial personality screening device

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A B S T R A C T

The Antisocial Process Screening Device- Self-Report (APSD-SR) is a self-report measure for assessment of psychopathic traits in adolescents. The present study aimed to investigate the factor structure and internal consistency of the APSD-SR in a sample of 4855 Finnish community adolescents. A three-factor structure with factors representing impulsivity (IMP), narcissism (NAR) and callous-unemotional (CU) features was found. Internal consistency indices ranged from moderate to good. The findings provide promising data on applicability of the APSD-SR instrument to Scandinavian youth. Results have implications for researchers and clinicians interested in measuring adolescent psychopathy.

Introduction

Psychopathy consists of a set of affective, interpersonal, and behavioral features, such as callousness, grandiosity, shallow emotions, lack of empathy, manipulativeness, and persistent violation of social norms (Hare, 1991) Growing literature shows that psychopathic features designate a group of youth who engage in particularly persistent, severe, and aggressive antisocial behavior (Asscher et al., 2011). In the fifth version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V, APA, 2013) diagnosis of childhood conduct disorder includes a specifier of callous-unemotional features, which captures the interpersonal-affective dimension of the psychopathy construct. The need for assessment of psychopathic features in youth is likely to increase.

Recent reports support the validity of juvenile self-report psychopathy scales (Vaughn & Howard, 2005). The most researched among these is The Antisocial Process Screening Device—Self-Report (APSD-SR), which is based on parent and teacher versions of the instrument (Frick & Hare, 2001). However, the factor structure of the APSD-SR is inconsistent across studies. Using the teacher and parent versions, Frick, O'Brien, Wootton, and McBurnett (1994) reported two factors: a callous-unemotional (CU) factor, which captured the interpersonal-affective dimensions of psychopathy, and an impulsivity-conduct

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problems factor. Later, Frick, Bodin, and Barry (2000) reported a three-factor model in a large US community sample and a clinical sample: the CU factor as well as factors consisting of narcissistic (e.g. grandiosity, insincere charm) (NAR) and impulsive (IMP) traits. Using the self-report version, this three-factor model has since been replicated in offender samples (Spain, Douglas, Poythress, & Epstein, 2004; Vitacco, Rogers, & Neumann, 2003) and in a Flemish community sample (Bijttebier & Decoene, 2009). However, recently in a Portuguese sample consisting of both community and incarcerated youth (Pechorro, Maroco, Poiares, & Xavier, 2011) the two-factor solution (CU-factor and Impulsiveness–Conduct problems -factor) was supported. Further, questions about internal consistency of the measure remain (Muñoz & Frick, 2007), and similarly to adults, the research on adolescent psychopathy has focused heavily on criminal and clinical populations. The present study aimed to address these issues: we tested the factorial structure of APSD-SR in a nationally representative Finnish sample of community youth.

Method

The procedure and subjects

This study is part of the Finnish Self-Report Delinquency Study (FSRD-2012), a series of nationally representative self-report surveys of juvenile delinquency (Kivivuori, 2009). In 2012, the FSRD-12 was conducted in 51 municipal comprehensive schools. The schools constitute a random cluster sample where geographical area and community residential density were used as stratification criteria. All pupils, including those placed in special needs education (SNE) classes, were asked to participate. The survey was completed anonymously via computer during a regular class supervised by a trained teacher. Formal ethical approval of the parents was not required for this study in accordance with regulations of the Finnish Advisory Board of Research Integrity (2009).

Of the targeted pupils, 80% completed the survey questionnaire. The computerized data questionnaire did not allow for missing responses. Thus, all students answered every question. The final sample consists of 4855 ninth-grade pupils (mean age 15.3 years, sd = 0.55), 97.5% of whom were born in Finland. Gender distribution was equal (50.9% female and 49.1% male). During the past year, 30.9% of the respondents had participated in full- or part-time special education.[1]

For the purpose of this study the APSD-SR was translated into Finnish by the first author and cross-checked by co-author (E.A.). The measure consists of 20 items, scored on a 3-point scale (*0 = not at all true, 1 = sometimes true, 2 = definitely true)*, with higher score representing higher level of the trait. The total score and the subscale composite scores are obtained by adding the respective items.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the SPSS (v.20) and Psych-package (Revelle, 2013) in R version 3.01 (R Core team, 2013). Appropriate sample weights were used to ensure the representativeness of the sample.

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

Similarly to recent studies of the APSD in different cultures (Fritz, Ruchkin, Kaposov, & Klinteberg, 2008; Pechorro et al., 2011), we attempted to replicate the two- (Frick et al., 1994) and three-factor structures obtained in previous studies (Frick et al., 2000; Vitacco et al., 2003). In this sample, two factor model produced a poor fit ($\chi 2 = 6820.03$, df = 151, NNFI = .77. RMSEA = .095), whereas the three factor model produced a close to an adequate fit ($\chi 2 = 599.4$, df = 133, NNFI = .873. RMSEA = .072). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was deemed appropriate to investigate the factor structure of the sample, as the fits using the CFA were not adequate and in other recent studies different factor structures have been obtained.

Explorative factor analysis (EFA)

All 20 items were subjected to maximum likelihood factor analysis. Polychoric correlation coefficients were used. Loadings greater than or equal to .30 were considered significant (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The commonly used Kaiser criterion (i.e. eigenvalues ≥ 1) and Cattell's (1966) scree plot test, as well as parallel analysis (Horn, 1965), were employed in deciding the number of factors. After identifying the most appropriate solution, alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) mean corrected item-to-total correlations (MCITC) and mean inter-item correlations (MIC) were calculated to assess internal consistency for each subscale.

The parallel analysis and eigenvalue criteria suggested a four-factor solution, whereas the scree plot suggested a three-factor model. Both solutions were explored. When three-factor maximum likelihood solution with oblimin rotation was employed, a factor structure resembling that found by Frick et al. (2000) was obtained (Table 1). All items except item 19 (does not show emotions) loaded on at least one of the factors. Items of the first factor reflected impulsivity (e.g. acts without

[1] Finnish schools provide extensive special needs education and the threshold for additional support is very low, which explains the high percentage.