



Subtypes of homicide offenders based on psychopathic traits[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to explore the subtypes of offenders based on psychopathic traits in a sample of 127 adult homicide offenders ($n = 40.3\%$ convicted of murder, $n = 32.6\%$ convicted of aggravated murder, $n = 27.1\%$ convicted of attempted murder). A two-step cluster analysis of the four factors of psychopathy yielded three clusters, which were then compared on the general dimensions of personality defined by the HEXACO model, intelligence, sadism and psychopathology variables conceptualized by the MMPI-202. Cluster 1 was characterized by moderate scores on psychopathy factors, Agreeableness and aggressiveness. Cluster 2 was a psychopathic-like group with the highest scores on psychopathy factors, sadism, aggressiveness and paranoia, and with the lowest scores on Emotionality and Agreeableness. Cluster 3 was a non-psychopathic group with the lowest scores on psychopathy factors and aggressiveness, and with the highest scores on Agreeableness and Honesty–Humility. There were no significant differences between the clusters on intelligence, Openness to experience, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and a number of psychopathological variables, including depression and anxiety. Present findings did not provide support for the distinction between primary and secondary psychopathy. The current study further contributes to the person-oriented research of psychopathy by emphasizing the differences between the individuals with high, moderate and low psychopathic traits.

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1. Introduction

After Cleckley's seminal description of psychopathy (Cleckley, 1941) and Hare's development of the standard assessment tool of psychopathy, the Psychopathy Checklist (Hare, 1980) and its revised version (Psychopathy Checklist-Revised, PCL-R; Hare, 1991), this set of socially aversive personality traits and behaviours has been established as one of the most relevant psychological constructs within the criminal justice system. Psychopathy represents a specific constellation of affective, interpersonal and behavioural features, such as pathological lying, shallow affect, lack of guilt, irresponsibility, impulsivity, and criminal versatility (Hare, 2003; Hare & Neumann, 2008). Early factor analyses of the PCL-R resulted in a two-factor solution of psychopathy: Factor 1 captured psychopathic personality traits consisting of interpersonal and affective deficits, whereas Factor 2 comprised of behavioural features of the construct (Hare, Harpur, Hakstian, Forth, et al., 1990; Harpur, Hare, & Hakstian, 1989). However, recent studies using the

latent variable analysis in a number of different samples have provided support for a four-factor solution with the following components: interpersonal (e.g., conning, grandiose self-worth), affective (e.g., lack of remorse or guilt, shallow affect), lifestyle (e.g., impulsivity, stimulation-seeking behaviour), and antisocial (e.g., poor behavioural controls, early behavioural problems) (see Hare & Neumann, 2008).

Due to the theoretical advancement and development of various assessment tools of psychopathic personality, during the last few decades there has been an exponential growth in empirical research on psychopathy, resulting in important implications for practitioners in a wide array of settings, especially within criminal justice system. The prevalence rate of psychopathy is much higher in the offender population (15–30% according to Hart & Hare, 1997) than in the general population (1%; Babiak & Hare, 2006). It is estimated that psychopathic persons cost the U.S. criminal justice and correctional systems up to \$460 billion per year (Kiehl & Hoffman, 2011), and that they are responsible for committing more than half of all serious criminal acts (Yildirim & Derksen, 2015). Over the last 25 years, psychopathy has been established as a powerful predictor of general, violent, and non-violent criminal recidivism (Leistico, Salekin, DeCoster, & Rogers, 2008; Olver & Wong, 2015; Salekin, Rogers, Ustad, & Sewell, 1998). In addition, psychopathic offenders tend to have more versatile criminal careers and are more violent whilst committing crimes (Porter, Birt, & Boer, 2001; Porter & Porter, 2007; Porter, Woodworth, Earle, Drugge, & Boer, 2003). The relation between psychopathy and aggression has also been confirmed in numerous empirical studies on a variety of

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samples and methodological designs (Reidy, Zeichner, & Seibert, 2011). However, despite the overwhelming evidence that psychopathy is associated with a high risk of offending, there are disturbing findings which imply that psychopathic individuals are still able to manipulate the criminal justice system. Research showed that, in comparison to non-psychopathic offenders, psychopaths are more likely to be granted conditional release (Porter, Brinke, & Wilson, 2009), and to be convicted for a less serious offence than the one for which they had been prosecuted originally (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009).

During the last several years, a new line of empirical research has set out to explore an earlier theoretical notion regarding the existence of different subtypes of psychopathy. The idea that psychopathy represents a heterogeneous phenomenon is almost as old as the modern concept of psychopathy itself. Shortly after Cleckley (1941) established the core characteristics of psychopathy, including superficial charm, absence of delusions and psychoneurotic manifestations, pathologic egocentricity, and general poverty in major affective reactions, Karpman (1941, 1948) suggested that another subtype of psychopathy existed. The latter author argued that these subtypes, namely primary and secondary psychopathy, have certain outer similarities, such as antisocial and irresponsible behaviour, but that they should be distinguished by differences in aetiology and motivation for their behaviour (Karpman, 1941, 1948). The primary psychopathy is characterized by innate deficits in affectivity and profound lack of anxiety, which is similar to Cleckley's description of psychopathic personality. In contrast, the secondary psychopathy represents an acquired condition distinguished by underlying anxiety, depression, and guilt. Karpman also suggested that primary psychopathy includes two distinctive variants: a manipulative psychopath and an aggressive psychopath (Karpman, 1955).

Since Skeem, Poythress, Edens, Lilienfeld, and Cale (2003) presented a comprehensive summary of seminal theories and contemporary research regarding heterogeneity of psychopathy, there has been an increase in empirical research addressing this issue. They suggested that primary and secondary psychopathy may be differentiated by aetiology and levels of factors that underlie the PCL-R, trait anxiety, borderline personality traits, and narcissism. Features of primary psychopathy include marked heritability, narcissism, affective deficits expressed by Factor 1, and low anxiety, whereas secondary psychopaths are characterized by high Factor 2 scores, anxiety, and borderline personality traits that are rooted in adverse environmental influences. However, other authors cautioned that a label of secondary psychopathy might be inappropriate as it suggests that those individuals are prototypical psychopaths as conceptualized in Cleckley's and Hare's work (Mokros et al., 2015). Therefore, it was proposed that description of the secondary psychopathy should be labelled as pseudo-psychopathy or sociopathy, to avoid confusing it with psychopathy in the traditional sense of the term (Mokros et al., 2015; Neumann, Vitacco, & Mokros, 2015).

1.1. Person-centered research of psychopathy

In light of the aforementioned issues, a number of cluster-analytic studies have been conducted in order to explore the existence of proposed psychopathic subtypes across diverse samples including adult and juvenile offenders (Kimonis, Skeem, Cauffman, & Dmitrieva, 2011; Olver, Sewall, Sarty, Lewis, & Wong, 2015), male and female participants (Falkenbach, Stern, & Creevy, 2014; Lee & Salekin, 2010), and the community samples (Coid, Freestone, & Ullrich, 2012; Drislane et al., 2014). In some studies, only scores on psychopathy factors were used as clustering variables (Olver et al., 2015; Vincent, Vitacco, Grisso, & Corrado, 2003), whereas others included additional variables such as trait anxiety, narcissism, and alcohol or drug abuse/dependence (Falkenbach et al., 2014; Skeem, Johansson, Andershed, Kerr, & Loudon, 2007; Vassileva, Kosson, Abramowitz, & Conrod, 2005). These studies also differ by whether they used a preselected sample of

psychopathic persons or a total sample of participants with diverse levels of psychopathic traits. Overall, the studies of highly psychopathic samples (Kimonis et al., 2011; Lee & Salekin, 2010; Olver et al., 2015; Skeem et al., 2007) commonly reported a two-cluster solution consistent with a theoretical description of primary and secondary variants of psychopathy. Relative to primary psychopaths, the secondary psychopaths manifested higher levels of internalizing problems including anxiety and depression, more pronounced borderline personality traits, and inferior interpersonal functioning (Drislane et al., 2014; Gill & Stickle, 2016; Skeem et al., 2007). However, the results of cluster-analytic studies that employed heterogeneous samples were less congruent – most studies suggested a four-group solution (Falkenbach, Barese, Balash, Reinhard, & Hughs, 2015; Falkenbach, Poythress, & Creevy, 2008; Vassileva et al., 2005), yet three-, five-, or even six-cluster solutions also appeared (Andershed, Köhler, Eno Loudon, & Hinrichs, 2008; Coid et al., 2012; Falkenbach et al., 2014). Despite important differences between these studies, including the number of derived clusters, many authors concluded that two clusters interpreted as primary and secondary psychopathy had emerged (Falkenbach et al., 2008; Falkenbach et al., 2015; Gill & Stickle, 2016; Vassileva et al., 2005).

Lately, a number of researchers are turning to a latent profile analysis (LPA) in order to identify homogeneous subgroups of offenders based on the factors of psychopathy (Hare, 2016; Neumann et al., 2015). Similar to cluster-analytic studies, LPA studies were conducted either on a preselected sample of psychopathic offenders or on a total sample of offenders. Mokros et al. (2015) utilized LPA to identify latent classes in a large sample of male psychopathic offenders who scored at least 27 on the PCL-R. Authors reported a three-class solution, the components of which were labelled as Manipulative (Latent Class 1; LC1), Aggressive (LC2), and Sociopathic (LC3). They interpreted the Manipulative and Aggressive classes as variants of psychopathy, distinguished by the preferred method of accomplishing their objectives. However, the Sociopathic class was interpreted as a pseudo-psychopathic subgroup because, despite their antisocial behaviour, it lacked the affective deficits crucial to psychopathy. As the PCL-R threshold was subsequently raised to 30, LPA yielded a two-class solution matching the descriptions of manipulative and aggressive psychopathy, thus confirming the notion that the Sociopathic class was not a true variant of psychopathy after all (Hare, 2016).

The results of LPA studies of total samples of offenders yielded a four-class solution. Neumann et al. (2015) reported the results of studies on four large samples, including male offender samples and forensic psychiatric samples, which revealed much the same four-class solution. These classes were interpreted as follows: a prototypical psychopath class (LC1), which displayed high scores on all PCL-R factors; a callous-conning offender class (LC2) with higher scores on Interpersonal and Affective factors relative to the other two PCL-R factors; a sociopathic offender class (LC3) with higher scores on Lifestyle and Antisocial factors relative to other PCL-R factors; and a non-psychopathic general offender class (LC4). In summary, the LPA studies indicated that two variants of psychopaths exist – an aggressive and a manipulative variant – and that they should be differentiated from pseudo-psychopaths, that is, callous-conning offenders and sociopathic offenders, and non-psychopathic offenders.

1.2. The present study

Considering the above-mentioned importance of psychopathy for the criminal and violent behaviour, and the issues regarding its heterogeneity, the current study set out to explore subtypes of homicide offenders based on the four factors of psychopathy. In order to assess the individual differences among the subtypes, the derived clusters were compared on major dimensions of personality, intelligence, psychopathology, and sadism. The HEXACO model of personality was chosen as the framework for personality assessment because it has

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