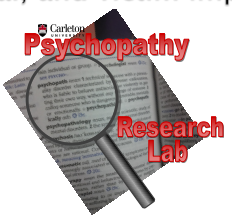
Researching the psychopath: Clinical, legal, and victim implications



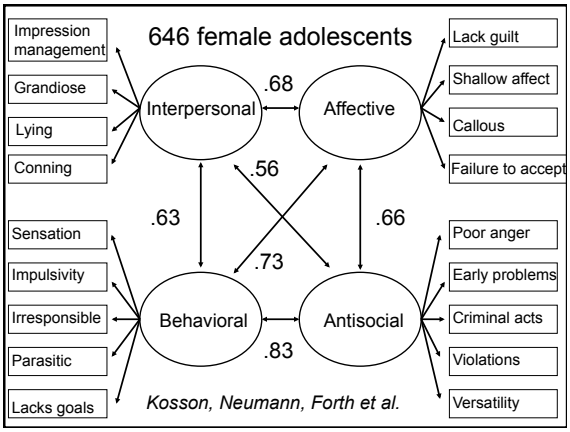
Forensic Psychology Research Centre
Feb 16, 2012

Objectives of PRL

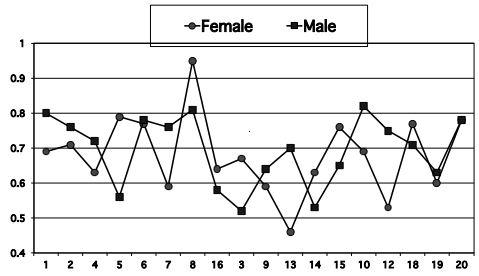
- To understand the underlying etiology of psychopathy
- Develop & test assessment techniques for identifying psychopathy in different populations
- Investigate implications of psychopathy to society

Lab members

- PhD students
  - Krista Richard (2011), Ian Broom (2012), Julie Blais, Heather Clark, Henriette Bergstroem
- MA students
  - Andrew Gray (co-supervised with J. Mills), Janelle Beaudette, Kendra Mcguffin, Chris Gillen
- Honours students
  - Lauren Fine, Simon Lamour, Elizabeth Solodukhin, Ian Syrett
- Volunteers
  - Tina McKay, Becky Grace, Janelle Lebreton, Nick Black, Mary Ritchie, Kim Moore



Factor Loadings: 505 Male vs 646 Female Adolescents



PCL:YV Items

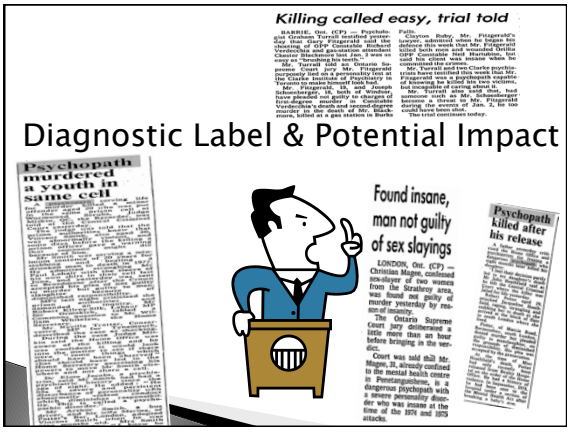
Persistence and Desistance of Offending Study *(Richard, 2011)*

- Do youth who persist in violent offending differ from youth who desist?
- 235 male young offenders
  - 89 (38%) desisters & 146 (62%) persisters
- Follow-up ranged 5 to 24 years (Avg = 14 yrs)

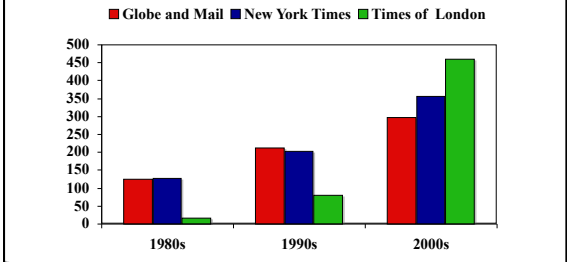
Youth who persisted or desisted from violent offending

Variable	Persisters	Desisters
PCL:YV	26.0	22.7**
SAVRY – Risk	26.0	21.5***
CD symptoms	8.6	7.1***
Age at first offence	11.7	13.1**
Substance abuse	90%	74%**
CD diagnosis	98%	94%
Child abuse	39%	46%
Positive attitude authority/ intervention	9%	22%**
Strong commit. to school	10%	29%***

Diagnostic Label & Potential Impact



Psychopathy in the Media
(Stevens & Forth, 2008)



Psychopathy in youth: Concerns raised by many!

- Psychopathic are traits are normative
- "sticky label"
- "damning label"
  - Book et al., 2006; Edens, 2006; Edens et al., 2002; Farrington, 2005; Forth & Book, 2007, 2010; Forth & Mailloux, 2000;Hart et al., 2002; Ogloff & Lyon, 2000; Petrila & Skeem, 2003; Rutter, 2005; Seagrave & Grisso, 2002; Skeem & Petrila, 2004; Skeem & Cauffman, 2003; Steinberg, 2002; Vincent, 2006; Zinger & Forth, 1998

"Damning" Label: Potential Stigma

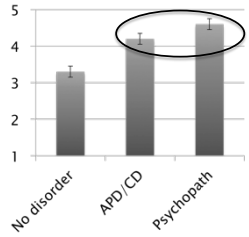
"Juveniles who are branded as psychopaths are more likely to be viewed as incorrigible, less likely to receive rehabilitative dispositions, and more likely to be transferred to the criminal justice system to be tried as adults and face the possibility of adult sanctions."

Steinberg (2002, p. 36)

Diagnostic Labeling Study
(Blais & Forth, revisions)

- What are the potential biasing effects of the psychopathy label?
- 3 (Diagnosis: psychopathy vs APD/ CD vs no diagnosis) x 2 (Age: 15 vs 30) x 2 (Sex: male vs female)
- DV: verdict, violence risk, treatment amenability

Results



- What predicts a verdict?
  - Not defendant age or sex
  - Psychopath: 7.5 times more likely guilty
  - APD/CD: 9 times more likely guilty
- Disordered groups higher risk for violence

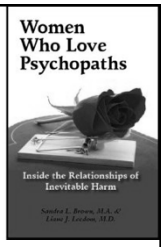
Verdict Rating

Evidence for general labeling effects

Survivors of Psychopaths

1. What are the experiences and effects of victimization by psychopaths?
2. What is the relationship between psychopathy severity, coping, social support, and distress of survivors of psychopaths?

"No matter how you try to explain it, psychopathy is a disorder that poisons everyone in the path of the psychopath and devastates the woman who tries to love him." *(Brown & Leedom, 2008, p. 5)*



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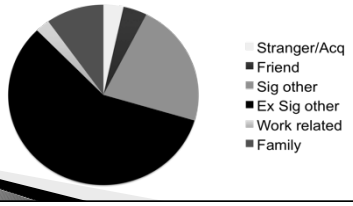
Method

- Internet survey
- Recruited 643 adult victims of psychopaths (12% male and 88% female)
- Psychopaths min score on SRP of 128+
- Age: 18 – 71 yrs (M = 44.5 years)



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How did you meet?

Methods/Places	*Percent*
Community/vacation/hobbies/church	18.1
Work	17.8
On-line dating site	16.1
Bar/party/club	10.9
Friend	9.3
On-line	7.7
Parent/Sibling/Child	6.0
School/University	5.3
Relative	5.1
Other	3.5

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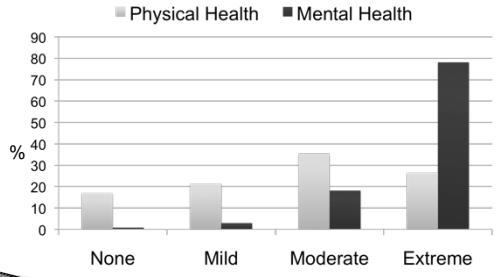
Impact of victimization of physical and mental health



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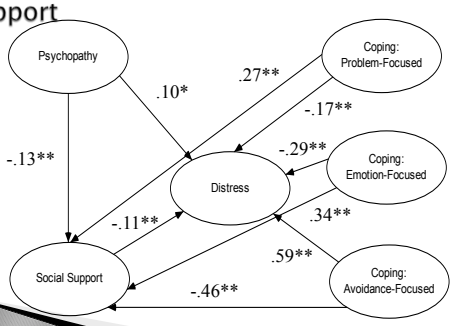
Relationship between Coping Strategies and Psychopathy on Distress and Social Support



Did you notice anything worrisome or unusual about him/her when you first met?

- "After several dates he wanted to get married."
- "The first thing I noticed is that he wanted to keep track of where I was at all times, he wanted to know every detail of my day, and he wanted to keep track of my friends and he also found a way of hacking into my computer to keep track of my activity."
- "His story line did not add up and he was elusive about normal things like who his parents are, even his phone number or email address. We had no luck with investigating him and he LIES, LIES, LIES!!"
- "The whole relationship was one major deception. She lies the way normal people breathe."
- "His pathetic look as he told me his miserable life story. It melted my heart."

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Red Flags

Impressions	*Percent*
None; Nothing	20.0
Evasive; Elusive; Far-fetched stories	14.6
Arrogant; Self-centered; Grandiose	12.9
Too attentive; Excessive flattery	10.7
Hot-tempered; Aggressive; Controlling	8.9
Evoked sympathy; Pity me attitude	7.6
Rapid progression of relationship	7.0
Cold; Unemotional; Intense stare; Empty eyes	5.6
Other	9.8

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Final words

"Humanity needs to know what psychopathy is, how it behaves and the harm it can do if left uncensored and undetected."

Survey Participant (Dec. 30, 2008)

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Thank-you to…

- Participants of studies
  - Adolescent offenders
  - Student participants
  - Survivors who shared their stories
- Online support groups for survivors
- Wonderful group of current and past students

Have a relaxing winter break!