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Psychopathy/antisocial personality disorder conundrum.

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Abstract

Psychopathy has traditionally been characterised as a disorder primarily of personality (particularly affective deficits) and, to a lesser extent, behaviour. Although often used interchangeably, the diagnostic constructs of psychopathy, antisocial personality disorder, and dissocial personality disorder are distinct. In this article, the relevant historical and contemporary literature concerning psychopathy is briefly reviewed. The diagnostic criteria for psychopathy, antisocial personality disorder, and dissocial personality disorder are compared. Consideration is given to the assessment, prevalence, and implications of psychopathy for violence risk and treatment efficacy. The DSM-IV-TR criteria for antisocial personality disorder, in particular, are largely behaviourally based. The ICD criteria for dissocial personality disorder, while paying more attention to affective deficits, also do not represent the broad personality and behavioural components of psychopathy. Since 1980, a great deal of research on these disorders has been conducted, using the Hare Psychopathy Checklist, Revised (PCL-R). The PCL-R assesses both personality (interpersonal and affective) and behavioural (lifestyle and antisocial) deficits. As such, the research and clinical implications of psychopathy, as operationalised by the PCL-R, cannot be readily extrapolated to the diagnoses of antisocial personality disorder and dissocial personality disorder. As currently construed, the diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder grossly over-identifies people, particularly those with offence histories, as meeting the criteria for the diagnosis. For example, research shows that between 50% and 80% of prisoners meet the criteria for a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder, yet only approximately 15% of prisoners would be expected to be psychopathic, as assessed by the PCL-R. As such, the characteristics and research findings drawn from the psychopathy research may not be relevant for those with antisocial or dissocial personality disorder. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

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