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Factor structure of the Self-Report Psychopathy scale (SRP-II) in non-forensic samples

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Abstract

Two studies were conducted to uncover the factor structure of the Self-Report Psychopathy (SRP-II) scale in non-forensic samples. In Study 1 ($N = 289$ students), the full 60 items yielded two large factors explaining 21% of the variance. The first factor was a combination of anti-social behavior, impulsivity, and interpersonal manipulation. The second factor resembled the Big Five factor of emotional stability. These factors do not correspond well with the traditional Behavior and Personality factors found in forensic work. Study 2 ($N = 356$ students) examined the 31 items conceptually assigned to the Personality and Behavior factors by Hare, Harpur, and Hemphill (1989). Correlations with a comprehensive battery of delinquent behaviors indicated that only the Behavioral factor was predictive. The SRP-II total score (either 60 or 31 items) remains valid but its factor structure in non-forensic samples does not parallel that of the standard forensic instrument, the PCL-R.

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1. Introduction

Recently, researchers have taken up the task of applying the forensic concept of psychopathy to non-forensic, non-clinical populations (e.g., Forth, Brown, Hart, & Hare, 1996; Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996; Lynam, Whiteside, & Jones, 1999; Reise & Oliver, 1994; Salekin, Trobst, & Krioukova, 2001; Widiger, 1998). Long before the advent of these scales, the necessity for identifying psychopaths whose behavior may not be extreme enough to warrant legal or clinical

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action had been noted (e.g., Millon, 1981). In fact, this conceptualization was implied in Cleckley's (1941/1982) notion of the "successful psychopath". Until recently, however, the topic has taken a back seat to the study of criminal psychopathy. The transported concept seems increasingly credible given the development of several self-report measures and evidence that they show substantial empirical convergence (Salekin et al., 2001).

Arguably the most important of these is Hare's (1985) Self-Report Psychopathy scale (SRP-II). Although the total score of the SRP-II has proved to be a valid predictor in a variety of settings (e.g., Forth et al., 1996; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Zagon & Jackson, 1994), there is no published information on the factor structure of the instrument.

2. Hare's Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R)

The PCL-R (Hare, 1991) is considered the "gold standard" for measuring psychopathy (Cooke, Kosson, & Michie, 2001). The choice of interview format rested on the assumption that psychopathy is best measured via face-to-face questions in conjunction with file information (Hare, 1991). The instrument has been well-validated in a large body of forensic research conducted by Hare and his associates as well as a variety of independent research teams (for a review, see Harpur, Hart, & Hare, 2002).

Much less research has been conducted with the PCL-R in normal populations. Among the reasons are that: (1) norms are not standardized for non-forensic samples, (2) many of the items are rarely applicable to normal samples (e.g. items assessing criminal activity), and (3) training raters is an expensive and time-consuming process. Given that structured interview methods are not necessary in non-criminal or non-hospitalized individuals, then other more practical methods of measurement are worth considering.

3. Advent of the Self-Report Psychopathy (SRP-II) scale

The potential advantages of a self-report measure motivated Hare (1985) to assemble the 29-item Self-Report Psychopathy (SRP) scale. Other self-report measures subsequently became available (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995; Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996).¹ In addition, psychopathy has been scored from the NEO-PI-R and the California Q-set using prototype templates (Widiger & Lynam, 1998; Reise & Oliver, 1994, respectively). Others became available in batteries of measures of personality disorders but they target the construct of anti-social personality disorder. Nonetheless, only the SRP has the advantage of a close theoretical and historical association with the PCL-R.

To refine the original SRP, Hare and his colleagues assembled the 60 items of the second version (SRP-II) with comprehensiveness in mind (Hare, Harpur, & Hemphill, 1989). Special emphasis was placed on 31 of these items, because they were theoretically aligned with the two

¹ Of course, the MMPI Pd scale has been available for some time, but it shows minimal association with the PCL-R (Hare, 1991).

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