



## Psychopathy, intelligence and conviction history

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### ABSTRACT

The current study examined the relationship between psychopathy, intelligence and two variables describing the conviction history (length of conviction and number of prior convictions). It was hypothesized that psychopathy factors (interpersonal and antisocial factors assuming a 2-factor model or interpersonal, affective, lifestyle and antisocial factors assuming a 4-factor model) would be related in different ways to IQ scores, length of conviction and number of prior convictions. Psychopathy and IQ were assessed using the PCL:SV and the CFT 20-R respectively. Results indicated no association between interpersonal psychopathy features (Factor 1, two-factor model), IQ and the number of prior convictions but a positive association between Factor 1 and the length of conviction. Antisocial features (Factor 2, two-factor model) were negatively related to IQ and the length of conviction and positively related to the number of prior convictions. Results were further differentiated for the four-factor model of psychopathy. The relationship between IQ and psychopathy features was further assessed by statistically isolating the effects of the two factors of psychopathy. It was found that individuals scoring high on interpersonal features of psychopathy are more intelligent than those scoring high on antisocial features, but less intelligent than those scoring low on both psychopathy features. The results underpin the importance of allocating psychopathic individuals to subgroups on the basis of personality characteristics and criminological features. These subgroups may identify different types of offenders and may be highly valuable for defining treatment needs and risk of future violence.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Psychopathy and Crime Features

Although psychopathic individuals are not necessarily criminal, they are at greater risk for behavioral deviancies (Vitacco, Michael, Neumann, & Wodushek, 2008). The nature of these deviancies seems to depend specifically on the way the psychopathic personality traits are expressed in the individual. For example, interpersonal features of psychopathy—superficial charm and manipulation, lack of empathy and callousness (Cleckley, 1941; Hervé, Ling, & Hare, 2000)—have often been found to be associated with planned and instrumental violence with severe consequences (Blair, Mitchell, & Blair, 2008). Psychopathic individuals seem to use manipulative skills and well-established superficial charm to fulfill their goals and desires (Toole, Smith, & Hare, 2008).

According to the two-factor model of psychopathy (Hare, 1991; Harpur, Hare, & Hakistan, 1989) the phenomena of psychopathy are based upon interpersonal and affective features (Factor 1) and behavioral features (Factor 2). This division was later further refined to give

a better fit, resulting in the four-factor model (Hare, 2003) made up of interpersonal, affective, lifestyle and antisocial factors (Factors 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively). Because of the well-planned character of their offences the likelihood of arrest and conviction seems to be low in individuals in whom the first factor of psychopathy is strongly expressed (Lilienfeld, Purcell, & Jones-Alexander, 1997; Porter & Porter, 2007). However, manifestations of psychopathy involving impulsive behavior, antisociality and lack of behavioral control, the second factor according to Hare (1991), have been found to be related to reactive and impulsive violence and to high rates of recidivism and incarceration (Cornell et al., 1996; Huchzermeier et al., 2006; Skeem, Poythress, Edens, Lilienfeld, & Cale, 2003). In accordance with these findings, prisoners manifesting impulsive and antisocial behavior seem to significantly outnumber those with interpersonal features of psychopathy in inmate populations (Köhler, Heinzen, Hinrichs, & Huchzermeier, 2009; Lilienfeld et al., 1997; Scholz & Schmidt, 2003). The high prevalence of impulsive features may be ascribed to the association with behavioral deviancies and to the high risk of being caught (Köhler et al., 2009; Scholz & Schmidt, 2003).

### 1.2. Psychopathy and intelligence

Criminal behavior has been shown to be inversely related to intelligence (Rushton & Timpler, 2009; Walsh, Swogger, & Kosson, 2004).

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This association seems to be highly robust and holds across age, gender and ethnicity (Rushton & Templar, 2009). In particular, more detailed consideration of these results indicates that this relationship holds true for offences resulting from impulsive and reactive behavior but not for highly-planned instrumental offences (Salekin, Neumann, Leistico, & Zalot, 2004; Vitacco et al., 2008). It has therefore been suggested that 'intellectual deficits may be primarily related to impulsivity and not antisocial behavior per se' (Vitacco et al., 2008). In line with these findings and in accordance with clinical descriptions of psychopathic personality (Cleckley, 1941; Fowler, Lilienfeld, & Patrick, 2009) individuals with interpersonal psychopathic features should possess high levels of intellectual ability that enable them to thoroughly plan their actions and be especially skilled in engaging in manipulative social interactions. Individuals with behavioral psychopathic personality features, however, should possess characteristics resembling those of prototypical antisocial delinquents who tend to have low intelligence scores and offend impulsively in a non-planned manner. Despite the theoretical consistency of these assumptions examinations of the relationship between psychopathic personality traits and intelligence in incarcerated offenders have so far delivered mixed and sometimes even controversial results: dividing psychopathic personality traits into two factors Harpur et al. (1989) found no significant correlations between the presence of Factor 1 traits and IQ and only a weak negative correlation between the presence of Factor 2 traits and intelligence scores. Forth, Hart, and Hare (1990) did not find any significant relationship between the variables in a later investigation. However Salekin et al. (2004) reported a positive association between interpersonal features of psychopathy and IQ and a negative association between behavioral features of psychopathy and IQ. Studies that assumed a four-factor model to underlie the construct of psychopathy (interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, antisocial features; (Hare, 2003) claimed to deliver more specific results by investigating the construct more closely. Vitacco, Neumann, and Jackson (2005) found positive correlations between IQ and the interpersonal and affective factors and negative correlations between IQ and the lifestyle and antisocial factors. These results were replicated by Neumann and Hare (2007). Further studies hypothesized that the relationship between intelligence and psychopathy might be more complex than a straightforward correlation and tested interaction effects between intelligence and psychopathy. The results, however, were mixed (Walsh et al., 2004). All these studies used incarcerated samples. It has been suggested that the large amount of common variance between the two factors significantly influences the statistical analysis of the relationship between psychopathy and intelligence and that the predictive value of one factor therefore needs to be isolated from that of the other (Andershed, Kerr, & Stattin, 2002).

## 2. The current study

The current study sought to shed further light on the relationship between psychopathic personality traits, intelligence and two parameters of conviction history: the length of conviction and the number of prior convictions. It was assumed that the inconclusiveness of results from previous studies of psychopathic personality traits and intelligence resulted primarily from the specific properties of the incarcerated population where psychopathy features are assumed to be less stereotypical than in the community. In addition, it was thought that the common variance within the factors of psychopathy and the greater prevalence of impulsive and antisocial than of interpersonal features of psychopathy in criminal populations could have influenced statistical calculations. As a result it would be difficult to consider interpersonal aspects of psychopathy in isolation in incarcerated samples. The present study therefore set out to further investigate the occurrence of psychopathic traits in the incarcerated population. This was done by assessing the relationship between psychopathic personality traits and intelligence while statistically

isolating the effect of each factor of the two-factor model of psychopathy. The following predictions were tested.

### 2.1. Psychopathy and Length of Conviction (LoC) and Number of Convictions (Wörner et al.)

- a. High scores for the behavioral factor of psychopathy (Factor 2) were expected to be associated with short LoC and high NoC. Impulsivity and antisocial behavior have generally been associated with spontaneous and reactive offending and hence with more frequent but shorter incarceration periods (Cornell et al., 1996).
- b. High scores for psychopathy Factor 1 (interpersonal) were expected to be associated with low NoC and long LoC because this group would tend to commit well-planned serious offences.

### 2.2. Psychopathy and IQ

- a. It was expected that individuals exhibiting a high incidence of behavioral psychopathic features (Factor 2) would have lower intelligence scores than all other participants and that this would hold irrespective of their scores on the first factors. The inability to control impulses and the manifestation of dysfunctional behavior strategies has consistently been associated with low IQ scores (Cleckley, 1941; Harpur et al., 1989) and was expected not to be influenced by scores on the first factor.
- b. It was expected that individuals with low psychopathy scores on both factors would exhibit higher intelligence scores than participants with high scores on either of the two factors. Inmates with high psychopathy scores have always been considered a more problematic subgroup of incarcerated offenders than their non-psychopathic counterparts (Moffitt, 1993). It was assumed that this would also be reflected in intelligence scores with non-psychopathic offenders achieving higher IQ scores than psychopathic individuals.
- c. Individuals with high scores on the interpersonal factor (Factor 1) but low scores on the behavioral factor (Factor 2) of psychopathy were expected to be more intelligent than those with high scores on the behavioral factor (Factor 2). On the other hand, these individuals were expected to be less intelligent than non-psychopathic individuals. It was supposed that incarcerated individuals achieving high scores for the interpersonal aspects of psychopathy would not conform to the prototype of the 'successful psychopath' of above-average intelligence but would still constitute a specific subgroup of the prison population and would achieve higher IQ scores than those with high Factor 2 scores, probably using their social skills mainly for manipulation and deception

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Participants

313 violent male offenders in a prison in Northern Germany participated in the current study. Participants were recruited from among those offenders who were assigned to undergo intramural psychotherapy. According to the standard procedure in place this includes all offenders who have been imprisoned for one or more violent offences. Tests were carried out during the diagnostic procedure preceding the actual treatment. The men were informed about the anonymous use of the data for research purposes and gave their written consent. 75.7% of the men were German and had German as their mother tongue. The men were aged between 19 and 59 (mean = 28.6; SD = 6.7) years and had been convicted for violent offences. 24% had no school leaving qualification. 73.8% of participants met criteria for at least one personality disorder. The three most prominent personality disorders were Antisocial (55%), Borderline (26.8%) and Narcissistic (20.9). The average length of the

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