



## Pro-bullying attitudes among incarcerated juvenile delinquents: Antisocial behavior, psychopathic tendencies and violent crime



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### ABSTRACT

The objective was to evaluate a new scale aimed at assessing antisocial attitudes, the Pro-bullying Attitude Scale (PAS), on a group of 259 voluntarily-recruited male juvenile delinquents from a juvenile correctional institution in Arkhangelsk, North-western Russia. Exploratory factor analysis gave a two-factor solution: Factor 1 denoted Callous/Dominance and Factor 2 denoted Manipulativeness/Impulsiveness. Subjects with complete data on PAS and Childhood Psychopathy Scale (CPS) ( $n = 171$ ) were divided into extreme groups (first and fourth quartiles) according to their total scores on PAS and the two factor scores, respectively. The extreme groups of total PAS and PAS Factor 1 differed in CPS ratings and in violent behavior as assessed by the Antisocial Behavior Checklist (ABC). They also differed in the personality dimension Harm Avoidance as measured by use of the Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI), and in delinquent and aggressive behavior as assessed by the Youth Self Report (YSR). The extreme groups of PAS Factor 2, in turn, differed in aggressive behavior as assessed by the YSR, and in the TCI scale Self-Directedness. When PAS was used as a continuous variable, total PAS and PAS Factor 1 (Callous/Dominance) were significantly positively related to registered violent crime. The possible usefulness of PAS in identifying high-risk individuals for bullying tendencies among incarcerated delinquents is discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Rationale

Antisocial behavior is common among young people, especially in teenage boys (Moffitt, 1993; Murray & Farrington, 2010). In fact, it is occurring so frequently that some authors have suggested that teenage antisocial behavior to some extent could be viewed as normative (Eklund & af Klinteberg, 2006; Lynam, 1996). There is also evidence that 50% of those who are delinquent in adolescence continue in criminality into adulthood (Farrington, 2005). At the same time many delinquent youths desist from criminality (Moffitt, 1993). There is a challenge for researchers and clinicians to identify those at risk of becoming chronic antisocial individuals and to further investigate the factors related to antisocial involvement in this group. There is also a need for assessment instruments, which would help in detecting individuals at risk of developing an antisocial life-style. Using the concepts of antisocial attitudes, proactive aggression, bullying, and psychopathy as a theoretical background, our aim was to develop an instrument

that through individual perceptions and attitudes might assist in identifying youth at risk for violent and persistent offending. Such a self-assessment tool can be used potentially as a complementary measure in conducting individual risk-assessments, especially in environments with limited resources.

### 1.2. Antisocial attitudes

An attitude is, according to Ajzen (1988), a relatively stable evaluative process, which makes it more probable for a person to behave in a certain way, according to his or her attitudes. When it comes to antisocial attitudes, there is a line of research that demonstrates a link between: antisocial attitudes and antisocial behavior (Gendreau, 1996); antisocial attitudes and criminal and violent recidivism (Mills, Kroner, & Hemmati, 2004; Simourd & van de Ven, 1999); and between antisocial attitudes and prison misconduct (Gendreau, Goggin, & Law, 1997). Together with antisocial peers, antisocial attitudes are one of the strongest predictors of future delinquency (Simourd, Hoge, Andrews, & Leschied, 1994). Yet, in spite of its theoretical and empirical relevance to criminal behavior, the criminal attitude construct has been generally overlooked in the mainstream assessment and treatment of offenders (Farrington, 2014; Simourd & Olver, 2002). Antisocial attitudes can be regarded as a readiness to act in an antisocial way, and such attitude

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assessment among norm-breaking youth is important for identifying those who are at risk of developing a chronic antisocial life-style.

### 1.3. Proactive aggression

There is also a great deal of evidence showing a continuum of severe aggressive, violent, and antisocial behavior. This pattern seems to be enduring, from early childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood (Brame, Nagin, & Tremblay, 2001; Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson, & Gariépy, 1989; Nagin & Tremblay, 2001). Aggressiveness shows high rank-order stability across development, indicating that those who are more aggressive in early childhood tend to be more aggressive as adults (Tremblay & Nagin, 2005). The concept of proactive aggression in understanding more severe forms of aggression has been shown to be important in numerous studies. According to Dodge's (1991) definition, proactive aggression includes unprovoked behaviors directed toward specific social goals, as well as behaviors directed toward position or object acquisition. The use of aggression as an instrument in order to achieve social goals (e.g. high status) was perceived more positively by the proactive aggressive children and these goals were preferred over the relational goals (Glick & Gibbs, 2011). Proactive aggression can be seen as resulting from distorted or deviant processing of social information where aggressive acts are valued positively, with no regard for the feelings of the victims (Crick & Dodge, 1999). It has been shown that the use of proactive aggression in early adolescence can predict later delinquent involvement (Fite, Colder, Lochman, & Wells, 2008; Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2002; Vitaro, Gendreau, Tremblay, & Oligny, 1998). It has also been shown that proactive aggression is a unique predictor of delinquency-related violence (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay, & Lavoie, 2001). Proactive aggression in adolescence is also associated with antisocial behavior in adulthood and adult psychopathic features (Fite, Raine, Stouthamer-Loeber, Loeber, & Pardini, 2010). Continuation of proactive aggression seems to be primarily genetically mediated (Tuvblad, Raine, Zheng, & Baker, 2009).

### 1.4. Bullying

Bullying is usually defined as repeated oppression of a less powerful person by a more powerful one (Farrington, 1993), and proactive aggression is described as the characteristic type of aggression displayed by bullies (Fossati et al., 2009; MacAdams & Schmidt, 2007). A longitudinal relationship between school bullying and later antisocial behavior from childhood to adolescence (Lösel & Bender, 2011), and from adolescence to adulthood has been shown (Bender & Lösel, 2011). Baldry and Farrington (2000), in their study of girls and boys aged 11–14, found that the association between bullying and delinquency was stronger for boys and for older students. They also suggested that bullying might be a developmental sequence leading to delinquency. Bullying also frequently occurs in prisons (Ireland, 1999a) and those who have had more extensive criminal careers and have spent more time imprisoned were most likely to engage in bullying while incarcerated (Power, Dyson, & Wozniak, 1997). In another study of bullying in prisons, those classed as bullies showed higher scores than non-bullies on both direct and indirect verbal and physical aggressions (Archer, Ireland, & Power, 2007). In a study of college students, those who retrospectively reported being bullies in high school had higher scores in criminal thinking, proactive aggression, psychopathy, and had more criminal infractions (Ragatz, Andersen, Fremouw, & Schwarz, 2011). In a study of normal adolescent boys and girls, Jolliffe and Farrington (2010) found that low affective empathy was independently related to bullying in males. Further, results indicating lack of empathy among prison inmates toward victims of prison bullying have been reported (Ireland, 1999b).

Even though there are similarities between bullying and proactive aggression, the concepts are different, as bullying does not necessary include proactive aggression and proactive aggression does not necessary include bullying. Both of these norm-breaking behaviors however seem

to pave the way for future violent and antisocial behavior and may therefore be important signals of future problems.

### 1.5. Psychopathy

Psychopathy represents a specific pattern of behavior, which becomes apparent during childhood and continues through the life span (Frick, Kimonis, Dandeaux, & Farrel, 2003; Lynam, Caspi, Moffitt, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2007). It is characterized by callous, unemotional, manipulative interpersonal interactions. Psychopathic subjects also tend to demonstrate violent behavior more frequently than other subjects, which seems to be more often motivated by instrumental (e.g. material gain, revenge), rather than reactive reasons (e.g. state of high emotional arousal) (Cornell et al., 1996; Serin, 1991; Williamson, Hare, & Wong, 1987). In a sample of male forensic patients, psychopathic traits demonstrated no relationship to reactive aggression, but were a robust predictor of instrumental aggression (Vitacco et al., 2009). Even in a normal population, the psychopathy scores could differentiate between proactive and reactive aggressors (Nouvion, Cherek, Lane, Tcheremissine, & Lieving, 2007). Psychopathic traits predicted aggression and delinquency for both boys and girls in a general population sample (Marsee, Silverthorn, & Frick, 2005). In juvenile offenders, psychopathic traits were significantly related to violent behavior and to severity and instrumentality of prior violence (Murrie, Cornell, Kaplan, McConville, & Levy-Elkon, 2004). In Russian incarcerated juvenile offenders those with more psychopathic traits had higher levels of violent behavior and also regarded antisocial attitudes as more 'normative' (Väfors Fritz, Wiklund, Kopsöv, af Klinteberg, & Ruchkin, 2008).

Psychopathic traits are most reliably assessed by the structured interviews, such as the Psychopathy Checklist–Revised, PCL-R (Hare, 1991; 2003) and the Psychopathy Checklist–Youth Version, PCL-YV (Forth, Kosson, & Hare, 2003). However, several other valid, questionnaire-based instruments have been developed that utilize both the informant-based approach and even the self-report format, including the Antisocial Process Screening Device, APSD (Frick & Hare, 2001) and the Child Psychopathy Scale, CPS (Lynam, 1997). There have also been studies that looked at psychopathy as a constellation of traditional personality traits measured by self-reports. Higher psychopathy scores were, for example, negatively correlated with the Big Five personality traits Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and positively correlated with Neuroticism (Lynam et al., 2005). There is also a relation between psychopathy and personality traits as measured by the Karolinska Scales of Personality (KSP) indicating higher Impulsiveness and Sensation Seeking as well as higher Somatic Anxiety, Verbal Aggression and hostility traits in high psychopathy groups (af Klinteberg, Humble, & Schalling, 1992), and by Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI), with higher psychopathy scores being associated with higher scores on Novelty Seeking and lower scores on Harm Avoidance and Cooperativeness (Snowden & Gray, 2010).

### 1.6. The role of the four concepts

There is a substantial overlap between the above-mentioned concepts, which can be described as a combination of certain cognitive, emotional and behavioral characteristics that in the long run can lead to chronic antisocial behavior. Cognitive aspects are characterized by specific personal beliefs, such as moral justification to act in a certain way, for example to oppress those who are vulnerable, as well as to step over certain boundaries such as common societal norms and values. They also include a positive apprehension of the proactive use of aggression in order to achieve personal goals, such as better self-esteem, social status or material gain. Emotional aspects include a clear reduced level of empathy and compassion, particularly toward the victim. The behavioral component is characterized by conduct that oversteps the boundaries generally accepted in a society, including acts of aggression.

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