

Profiling of Crimes Committed by Psychopathic Offenders

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Criminal profiling is a process according to the behavioral pattern of offender to analyze the characteristics of the unsub. This article aims to review specific type of offender, psychopaths, to analyze their features during the crimes. It will firstly introduce the concept of psychopath and their criminality from genetic, biological, and environmental perspective. Then the characteristics of psychopathic offenders will be analyzed as well as motive, criminal scene analysis. Thirdly, three types of crimes that psychopaths are highly involved will be discussed. Finally, from the perspective of victimology, it also discusses the features of victims that psychopathic offenders choose.

Keywords: psychopaths, offender profiling, criminal analysis

Introduction

Psychopathy has been long discussed in clinical and forensic settings, which has a long history that originated from “moral insanity” to the modern word “psychopathy”. It is a form of mental illness as well as personality disorder to describe a group of people who manifest symptoms in superficially charming, and lack of empathy and remorse, callous and unemotional with antisocial behaviors. Therefore, psychopaths have always associated with criminal justice, accounting for 25% of the incarcerated individuals while 1% in general population. In Britain, psychopaths accounted for 0.6% in average families while 7-8% in incarcerated individuals (Coid et al., 2009).

The primary tool to measure the psychopathic traits in clinical and forensic settings is PCL-R (The Psychopathy Check List-Revised), which categorized the psychopathic traits into 20 items or four facets in two factors: Factor 1: interpersonal and affective, Factor 2: lifestyle and antisocial. Psychopathy will be diagnosed if scores in these two factors are above 30. Based on the PCL, different version of the scales have also been developed, such as PCL-SV, a short version of PCL; PCL-YV, a version used for youths. Other famous tools to measure clinical psychopathic traits are Psychopathic Personality Inventory and Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale. Although PCL contributed a lot to the clinical and academic measurement of psychopathy, some experts pointed out the defect of it. The two factors are relatively independent so that we cannot see how much the two factors could respectively account for psychopathy. And it could not identify and explain the subtype of psychopathy, with whom the level of anxiety is significantly higher.

It should be noted that the diagnosis of psychopathy does not specifically appear in the DSM-IV for the psychopathic disorder is an intricate term to explain the psychopathological mechanism. But DSM-IV does mention that “ASPD has also been referred to as psychopathy, sociopath, or dissocial personality disorder”. Researches indicated that this is associated with the subtype of psychopaths. Clinically, psychopaths could be

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classified into primary and secondary psychopaths (Karpman, 1941). The former is more related to biological abnormality, less activate amygdala to lead to their affective and attention deficit with low level of anxiety. The latter is mainly caused by acquired environment, such as social disadvantages, parental issue with higher level of anxiety and impulsivity. The clinical diagnosis of ASPD focuses more on overall antisocial tendencies and behaviors that are more alike Factor 2 in PCL-R, but psychopathy not only need antisocial dimension to diagnose but also need the affective aspect and personality traits. Therefore, primary psychopathy is also called prototypic psychopaths, secondary psychopaths is also called sociopaths, more similar to ASPD (Mokros et al., 2015), and arousal of emotion is a key point to distinguish. This also could explain the present situation that most psychopaths could meet the criteria of ASPD, but only one-thirds of individuals with ASPD could meet the standard of psychopaths (Hare, 1996). So far, the concept of psychopathy still has no clear boundary among disorders with similar clinical manifestations, especially with ASPD. There indeed are overlap clinical symptoms between psychopathy and antisocial personality disorder and that's the direction that new version of DSM is working on.

Criminality of Psychopaths

Some agreed that psychopaths are born, not made while specialists argued that interaction between gene and environment is more reasonable (Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick, & Lilienfeld, 2011). Substantial researches from the perspective of interaction between psychopathic individuals and society as well as criminology evidenced the close link between psychopaths and crimes (Hare, 1996; Meloy, 2000). By the way they think cognitively, the personality traits and psychological status could possibly externalize to antisocial behaviors; thus crime is a logical outcome of psychopathy. Criminality of psychopathic offenders could be implied in genetic, biological, and environmental perspective.

The hypothesis about the heritability of psychopathic traits was proposed long before (Karpman, 1941). At present many empirical studies have proved this assumption and agree that psychopathic traits, specially callous and unemotional, are heritable. Callous and unemotional is one of the core elements in psychopathic characteristics that could appear in both adults and adolescents. Viding, Blair, Moffitt, and Plomin (2005) conducted the research based on the great amount of samples of twins (3,687 pairs) to observe both the callous unemotional traits and antisocial behaviors and how they were affected by heredity. Results showed that as the core element of psychopathy, CU traits is genetically heritable, which suggested that heredity plays the most important role of psychopathy (Viding et al., 2005). Children with high level of antisocial behavior and high CU trait showed high level of genetic impact and shared environment did not influence the result, while children with high level of antisocial behavior but low in CU trait showed a moderate genetic impact and shared environment could influence outcome. This study evidenced that callous and unemotional trait is highly heritable among psychopathy.

Researchers found that some biological abnormalities also contribute to psychopathy that highly potentiates the possibility of committing crimes. Existing research mainly identified three encephalic regions significantly different from average: amygdala, prefrontal cortex, and ventral striatum. Amygdala is a region that closely relates to the process and arousal of emotion, but for psychopaths it will be less activate to emotional stimuli. Psychopaths' volume of amygdala structurally showed a decreasing trend (Yang et al., 2005) and their amygdala' function to moral reasoning is limited (Glenn, Raine, & Schug, 2009), which could be supported by their bad performance on passive avoidance (Newman & Kosson, 1986), affective recognition

(Dadds et al., 2006) as well as fear conditioning (Birbaumer et al., 2005). In affective recognition task, psychopaths also cannot effectively recognize both fearful expression and vocal (Blair et al., 2002). Therefore, they cannot inhibit their criminal action during their crimes for their impaired function of amygdala. Frontal cortex, a region that plays a great important role in moral reasoning and decision-making, manifested abnormalities in its gray matter volume and function (Yang et al., 2005). Especially the orbitofrontal cortex, functioning in understanding the emotion of others (Völlm et al., 2006) and responding to the affective stimuli, also performed less activation in fear conditioning task (Birbaumer et al., 2005). Early research also suggested that psychopathic traits, especially pathological lying, shallow affect, lack of remorse, could be caused by the damage of OFC in the early age in life (Anderson et al., 2013). These results suggested that psychopathic traits are closely related to the abnormality in frontal cortex and contribute to the criminality of psychopathic individuals. Neurophysiologists also found that antisocial individuals' ventral striatum showed a more activation when they saw others in pain (Decety, Michalska, Akitsuki, & Lahey, 2009). This could be externalized on the sadistic features in violent crimes; they will obtain sexual or nonsexual pleasure by torturing victims. When they got reward, their brain released much more dopamine than normal people, which means this pleasure actuates them to achieve the goals no matter what it might cost. These results of researches suggested that more activation on striatum is associated with sadism, which will be one of the factors for psychopaths to commit violent crimes.

From perspective of criminology, relation between criminals and environment is always one of the points to explain criminal behaviors. For psychopathic offenders, environment also plays a role of direct or indirect factor to promote the possibility of committing crimes. Lee and Kim (2020) conducted the research in a perspective of person-environmental nexus, and examined the relationship among psychopathic traits, criminal behaviors, and risk factors (environmental influence). And they found out psychopathic traits are closely associated with criminal behaviors (especially aggressive offending) as well as different risk factors, which means risk factors play roles of mediating variables to precipitated the connection between psychopathic traits and criminal behaviors. More specifically, in aggressive offending cases, four environmental factors are more powerful to precipitate the connection than others; they are: (1) deviant peer association, (2) gang membership, (3) experienced victimization, and (4) observed victimization. Besides that, researches also suggested that foster care, physical abuse, academic behavior problems, and experience of being expelled from school are main factors that contribute to the formation of psychopathy (Campbell, Porter, & Santor, 2004). These factors above provide the forensic implications to lessen the impact of risk factors on psychopathic individuals and thus reduce the psychopaths' criminal behavior.

Characteristics of Psychopathic Offenders

Psychopathic personalities are closely linked to criminal behaviors of individuals of child, adolescent, and adult. In the early age of life, "callous and unemotional" trait among child and adolescent is regarded as a core psychopathic trait (Lynam, 2002; Waschbusch et al., 2007). Study showed that "callous and unemotional" trait, like shallow affect and lack of remorse, is a strong indicator to predict the criminal behaviors in the following years for male in early adulthood, even if the risk factors are well controlled (Kahn, Byrd, & Pardini, 2013). By examining the relationship between personality disorders and psychopathic violent offenders, results suggested that antisocial, paranoid, narcissistic, histrionic, borderline, and passive-aggressive personality disorders are positively and closely related to PCL-R scores (Blackburn & Coid, 1998). Researches also found that those

who committed more crimes in early age displayed a more severe level of psychopathy, especially in the characteristics of impulsivity, thrill-seeking, callous and unemotional, narcissistic and manipulative (Klinterberg, Hum, & Schalling, 1992).

Psychopathic offenders also manifested a pattern of age of crimes. Psychopathic characteristics remain relatively stable in the development of life path; thus these features that appeared in early age could probably continue to adulthood (Bartol, 2002). Therefore, in early age of life, psychopathic juvenile will display externalizing behaviors, conduct disorders, or even delinquent behaviors (Campbell et al., 2004). There is a close relationship between psychopathic traits and age of first crime; research suggested that compared with non-psychopaths (17.45), the age of first crime of psychopaths (12.5) is much earlier (Blackburn & Coid, 1998). From the whole development of life path, study suggested that 40 is a dividing line of criminal behaviors of psychopaths. The density and concentration of crimes mainly cluster before 40; after that, the conviction rate and time spent in prison are relatively decreased (Hare, McPherson, & Forth, 1988). Psychopaths from age of 16 to 40, months in prison and conviction rate are dramatically increased, consistent with the past research that psychopaths tend to be “burn out” in the middle age.

High recidivism and diversification of crimes are also the characteristics of psychopathic offenders. The results of bad performance on passive avoidance and fear conditioning suggested psychopaths could not associate their acts with aversive stimuli and thus could not effectively avoid (Newman & Kosson, 1986). Similarly, psychopathic offenders could not associate their criminal behaviors with legal sanction and thus could not stop it. This could be one of reasons to explain the result that conviction rate of psychopaths is significantly higher than non-psychopaths (Hare et al., 1988). Research also showed that sex offenders with high PCL-YV scores are most likely to reoffend while those with low scores are least likely to do so. Offenders who scored higher on PCL-YV displayed a more extensive criminal history and versatile criminal profiles (Campbell et al., 2004). Latest research indicated that the characteristics of “lack of remorse” and “manipulative” are closely related to criminal versatility; scores in Factor 1 in PCL-R also positively connect to more types of crime (McCuish, Bouchard, & Beauregard, 2021).

Criminal Behavior Analysis of Psychopathic Offender

Motivation

From the perspective of motivation for crimes, instrumentality is more frequently presented in crimes committed by psychopaths. By investigating 125 Canadian offenders, results suggested that psychopaths' motives for homicides are more likely pure instrumental (36%) and primarily instrumental (25%) (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). It was also pointed out material gain and sexual gratification are major motives for psychopaths while strong emotional arousal and sexual gratification are major motives for non-psychopaths (Williamson, Hare, & Wong, 1987). Psychopathic traits closely relate to instrumental violent crimes (Murrie et al., 2004). By assessing 82 male incarcerated individuals, results showed that generally those who commit predatory offense have higher level of psychopathic traits. Those who commit predatory offense are more likely scored higher on interpersonal facet in PCL-R, and lower on the antisocial facet (Declercq, Willemsen, Audenaert, & Verhaeghe, 2012). Therefore, the predatory offenses could be effectively predicated by psychopathic personality traits. To sum up, both instrumental and reactive crimes could be committed by psychopaths but they manifest a preference for instrumental crimes. During the crimes, psychopaths experienced less emotional arousal just to obtain material goals like money, sex, drugs.

Crime Scene Analysis

The psychopathic characteristics of offender could be projected in crime scene; analyzing and recognizing features in the crime scene is part of criminal profiling and conducive to narrow down range of suspects. So far the academic research that analyzes and summarizes the crime scene of psychopaths is few. But from psychopathic traits, their criminal behaviors still have clues in there. The personalities traits in PCL-R of impulsive, sensation-seek, conning and manipulative, superficially charming and glib could be reflected in some aspects of crime scene analysis.

Impulsivity means the perpetrators will not carefully think the outcome of their criminal behavior (Woodworth & Porter, 2002) and it will make crime scene seem to be disorganized, chaos, and happened accidentally. Psychopathic offenders with impulsivity will rely on the situations, circumstances, and victims to satisfy the thrill and excitement. But on the other hand, it will make the offender encounter high-risk situation like been seen, victim fight, or even arrested. These high-risk factors reversely reflected in crime scene with great variation like the change of M.O., victim preference, or weapon. Impulsivity and high-risk behaviors manifested in crime scenes are two factors helpful for case linkage to observe if these crimes are committed by one serial killer.

“Proneness to boredom” is an item in PCL-R, which suggests that psychopaths have chronic and excessive need for novel and exciting stimulation. This “sensation-seeking” could be manifested into criminal behaviors in crime scenes beyond what is necessary to complete crimes (Porter et al., 2003). Like overkill, typical act accompanied by multiple-stab, mutilation, excessive damage of the body could be driven by thrill-seeking. And sadistic behavior also could associate with thrill-seeking; psychopaths enjoy pleasure by torturing victims to satisfy their need of thrill. This characteristic also could be translated to high-risk behaviors (Porter & Woodworth, 2006) like break in and rape, kidnap victims from crowded street. Psychopaths do not regard them as risk factors but a thrilling and challenging situation to fulfill their need to thrill while neglecting the potential outcomes the behaviors could cause.

Psychopaths have characteristics of superficially charming, glib, conning, and manipulative that could lie in their interaction with victims and method of accessing them, which could be classified into four types: con, ruse, surprise, and blitz attack. Con and ruse approach require offender to create a situation to lure his victims, like a date, meal, or pretend a vulnerable role who needs help. Con and ruse methods could reflect offenders’ psychopathic traits by utilizing their attractive or harmless appearance, convincing or humorous verbal skills to manipulate others. Conversely, those who rely more on violence instead of verbal ability to lure victims showed a features of less intelligent (Porter et al., 2003).

Psychopaths and Violent Crimes

The relationship between psychopaths and violent crimes has been proved by plenty of studies, but the more specific association is complex. Psychopaths commit twice as many violent crimes as non-psychopaths (Hare & Jutai, 1983). Adolescents who manifest more sever psychopathic traits are more likely than other offenders to commit more violent and sever crimes (Murrie et al., 2004). Psychopaths’ features of high aggression, violence, and attaching will be manifested in crimes. This article focuses on three main forms of violent crimes: homicides, sexual offenses, and sexual homicides with sadistic features.

Homicide is a severe form of violence, but only 11-32% murderers (exclude sexual murderers) could meet the diagnosis of psychopathy. Studies showed psychopathic murderers are least likely to commit pure reactive

homicides since the less emotional arousal they experienced. Most of them committed predatory homicides for specific external goals. A study researched the behaviors after committing homicides; results indicated that psychopaths were more likely to leave the crime scene without informing others and refuse to take responsibility for this homicide that they should take (Häkkinen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009). Psychopathic murderers are tend to use verbal skills to defend themselves as involuntary homicide as well as to try to overstate their emotional reaction during crimes; thus they have higher rate of release (Porter, ten Brinke, & Wilson, 2009). It was also found that Factor 1 (interpersonal-affective) in PCL-R is associated with instrumental homicide; psychopathic murderers always score higher on Factor 1 (Porter, Birt, & Boer, 2001); thus Factor 1 is more suitable to explain homicides committed by psychopaths.

Promiscuous sexual behavior is an item to assess psychopathy in PCL-R, indicated specific view and pattern related to deviant sexual behaviors of psychopaths. Almost all the sexual offenses are predatory or planned in advance (Declercq et al., 2012), in which instrumentality is noticeably manifested in crimes. A study showed that psychopaths generally relate to sexual offenses, consistent with past findings, but especially associate with molesters, rapists, or mixed type (Porter et al., 2009; Olver & Wong, 2006). Psychopathic rapists were found more likely to live a unlawful lifestyle and thus have more extensive criminal records. By assessment of 156 sex offenders, results showed sexual deviance could more effectively predict sexual recidivism; the outcome of interaction of psychopathy and sexual deviance would more likely amplify the risks for sexual recidivism (Olver & Wong, 2006). For adolescent sexual offenders, those with high psychopathic traits are more likely to escape from custody and violate the conditions of probation as well as reoffend. With the age of adolescent offenders growing older, the combination of PCL scores and deviant sexual arousal is more predictive of sexual offending (Gretton et al., 2001).

Sexual homicide occurs less frequently than other crimes, only accounting for 1% of all homicides in US (Meloy, 2000), referred to sexual behaviors before, during, or after the murder. Substantial researches found most of sexual murderers meet the diagnosis of psychopathy (Meloy, 2000). A study on adolescent sexual murderers suggested that most of them have conducted problems with high PCL-R scores ($M = 25.5$) (Myers & Blashfield, 1997). 70% reported that they felt no or little remorse for the crime and 67% reported that they had violent sexual fantasies before the crime. Sexual murders also connect to sadism that positively relates to features of "callous or lack of remorse" (Holt & Strack, 1999). Psychopathic sexual murderers showed a significantly high level of gratuitous and sadistic features during their murdering. There are also evidence to prove the relation between psychopathy and sadistic sexual arousal (Porter et al., 2003). To sum up, psychopaths are not only associated with sexual homicides; when committing that, they showed a more severe degree of sadistic violence during their crimes, possibly motivated by deviant sexual arousal.

Victimology of Crimes Committed by Psychopathic Offenders

Psychopaths would be more likely to choose strangers or those who had less direct relation with them as victims in murder crimes while non-psychopaths would be more likely to choose family members, friends, and acquaintances who had more direct connection with them (Williamson et al., 1987). This result has been proved by existing researches, but the gender of the victim is varied in terms of types of crime. For general crimes, victims are more likely male strangers (Williamson et al., 1987), while for sexual homicides victims are more likely female strangers (Porter et al., 2003). There is also research pointing out that in serial crimes psychopathic offenders are more likely to choose victims in a varied age from child to adult than non-psychopathic offenders

(Porter et al., 2000). So far the victimology analysis in crimes committed by psychopaths showed diversified results: There is a great variation in choosing their victims. Some scholars argued that it could be explained by the psychopathic characteristics of offenders: impulsivity and thrill-seeking, which make selection of victims diverse in age, gender, race, appearance, risk level, or even the way of treating victims.

Conclusion

Psychopathy not only affects life and social interaction of individuals but also brings a great menace that severely threatens the public security, which presents a huge challenge to law enforcement. High recidivism, severity and versatility of crimes committed by psychopaths suggested that psychopathy is a core element for reduction and prevention of crimes. So far, debate on psychopaths in criminal justice still remains. In most countries, psychopathy could not be the excuse for no guilty; conversely they tend to get longer sentences while some countries regard psychopathy as a mental illness that need special hospitalization. Some scientists advise to use standard brain structure and function database to assess validity of brain imaging in legal settings. For future research, focus should be paid on neurophysiological features of psychopaths; it could provide potential evidence for adjustment of criminal justice system as well as new treatment of them.

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