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Child and Adolescent Psychopathy

An Introduction

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The concept of child psychopathy can be traced to the work of Cleckley (1941), Karpman (1949, 1950), and the McCords (1959/1964). These notable scholars were the first to raise important questions, such as whether psychopathy exists in youth, how early in development it can be identified, whether the disorder is biologically or environmentally determined, and to what extent the disorder is considered treatable (see Salekin & Frick, 2005). However, little progress was made toward better understanding the condition following their initial efforts due to confusion over the defining features of the disorder, a lack of systematic assessment tools, and potential concerns about the pejorative nature of the term.[1] A search of PsycINFO cross-referencing psychopathy with several key terms (i.e., *child*, *children*, *adolescent*, *adolescence*, *juvenile*, *youth*, and *fledgling with psychopathy*) illustrates the slow progress in this area after the work of the Cleckley (1941), Karpman (1950), and the McCords (1959/1964); Over a decade after the McCords, between 1978 and 1990, approximately 10 articles per year were published on child and adolescent psychopathy.

Despite meager numbers, some important work occurred during this period, including empirical investigations on psychopathic youth's nonverbal behavior in interpersonal situations (Rimé, Bouvy, Leborgne, & Rouillon, 1978), maternal deprivation and its link to psychopathy in childhood

(Wolkind, 1974), genetic and environmental contributions to psychopathy (Schulsinger, 1972), theoretical work on psychopathy as pathological stimulation seeking (Quay, 1965/1986), and important work on how psychopathic youth respond to aversive cues in school settings (Davies & Maliphant, 1971; Gutiérrez & Eisenman, 1971). While these studies advanced the field, child psychopathy was assessed through widely different and sometimes suspect methodologies (e.g., distinctions between Verbal and Performance IQ scores). In some cases, weak research designs or a lack of sophisticated research technology hampered what studies could offer.

Child and Adolescent Psychopathy Tools Emerge

In the 1990s, the measurement of psychopathy in youth became more systematic. Forth, Hart, and Hare (1990) pioneered research in this area with the first study to evaluate psychopathy in adolescent offenders using an adapted version of the Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 1991/2003). Their groundbreaking study showed that psychopathy could be indexed in adolescents. Notably, individuals with high scores on this adapted version of the PCL-R were likely to have more institutional problems and infractions in a young offender rehabilitation institution. Shortly after Forth and colleagues' (1990) study, Frick and Hare (1994/2001) and Lynam (1997) developed psychopathy indices that provided the field with the necessary framework for measuring the concept in children. Their measures have recently been revamped, and alternative versions allow for use with adolescent samples. The Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI; Andershed, Kerr, Stattin, & Levander, 2002) was also developed to assess psychopathic traits in nonreferred adolescents. Additional measures developed for the assessment of child and adolescent psychopathy have been added to the family of child and psychopathy indices (Murrie & Cornell, 2000; Rogers, Jackson, Sewell, & Johansen, 2004; Salekin, Ziegler, Larrea, Anthony, & Bennett, 2003). These measures have made it possible for the study of child and adolescent psychopathy to move forward more rapidly and in a more systematic fashion.

We are in the midst of an exciting time in the field of child and adolescent psychopathy as research in this area increases substantially. Across the past decade, there has been a sharp increase in interest in applying the construct of psychopathy to children and adolescents. This is evidenced by the number of articles retrieved from our search of PsycINFO from 1994 to 2009. Using the same qualifiers mentioned earlier, we identified 872 relevant articles through the PsycINFO search engine. Over half of these (i.e., 542) have been identified since the beginning of 2003. Figure 1.1 indicates how interest in the topic has grown very steadily over the past 10 years.

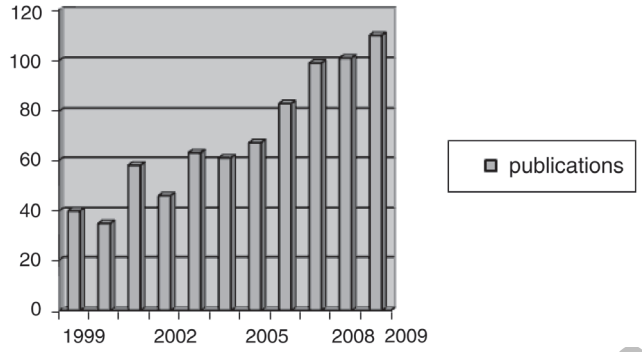

FIGURE 1.1. Publications on child and adolescent psychopathy as a function of publication year.

The interest in child and adolescent psychopathy is also underscored by the special issues dedicated to the topic in *Law and Human Behavior*, *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* (two volumes), *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, Criminal Justice and Behavior*, and most recently *Juvenile Justice and Youth Violence*. In addition to documenting the increasing interest in the topic, Figure 1.1 underscores the rapidly growing empirical base in the literature (e.g., Blair & Coles, 2000; Caldwell, Skeem, Salekin, & Van Rybroek, 2006; Dadds, Fraser, Frost, & Hawes, 2005; Fowles & Kochanska, 2000; Kotler & McMahon, 2005; Loeber, Burke, Pardini, 2009; Lynam, 1996, 1997; Lynam & Gudonis, 2006; Salekin, 2006; Salekin & Debus, 2008; Stickle, Kirkpatrick, & Brush, 2009), with one publication appearing in the inaugural volume of the *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* (i.e., Lynam & Gudonis, 2005).

In addition, mounting attention to the construct can be seen by the development of indices for child psychopathy in studies that did not originally contain psychopathy scales. One area in which this is particularly notable is longitudinal birth cohorts initiated in the 1970s and 1980s. Within such samples, proxies of psychopathy have been created by drawing on items from existing measures/batteries. This effort reflects the importance of the downward extension of the psychopathy construct and what it might mean in terms of predicting life outcomes. The use of such datasets will likely help the field gain a clearer picture of psychopathy across major developmental periods, especially since such cohorts have now reached adulthood (see Lynam, Caspi, Moffitt, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2007; Obradovic, Pardini, Long, & Loeber, 2007; Pardini & Loeber, 2007). In addition to these factors, the consideration of psychopathy for inclusion in

DSM-V's disruptive behavior section also speaks to its rising importance (Frick & Moffitt, 2010).

The surge in research on child and adolescent psychopathy has extended the study and knowledge of psychopathy immensely. Research has now expanded beyond adolescent boys, with more vigorous research attention being shown to underresearched groups, such as preschool children (Hawes & Dadds, 2005) and girls (Hipwell et al., 2007; Schrum & Salekin, 2006). Progress in genetic research has also revived enthusiasm about the potential for family-history data and biological markers to provide clinically relevant prognostic information (Forsman, Lichtenstein, Andershed, & Larsson, 2008; Viding, Blair, Moffitt, & Plomin, 2005). Groundbreaking research on gene–environment interaction effects in predicting childhood psychopathology outcomes has emerged and helped us understand antisocial behavior more generally (e.g., Caspi et al., 2002) and will, we hope, also begin to shape our understanding of psychopathy.

The Controversy

Extension of the psychopathy concept to youth has not been without controversy, and any such book on child psychopathy would be remiss if this controversy were not mentioned. For instance, Seagrave and Grisso (2002) expressed concerns about whether psychopathy could be applied to youth. These authors were concerned about the concept being overrepresented in youth, such that too many youth would meet the symptomatic definition of psychopathy even though they were not truly psychopathic. Hart, Watt, and Vincent (2002; see also Vincent & Hart, 2002) also expressed unease about the construct validity and temporal stability of child and adolescent psychopathy, using an impressionist painting analogy. Specifically, they stated that the child and adolescent psychopathy construct may look fine from a distance, but "the closer you get, the messier it looks" (p. 241). These important criticisms should be carried forward and kept in mind as research advances in this area. However, as noted earlier, many more advances toward the study of child and adolescent psychopathy have occurred since these early debates.

The ever-increasing research on child psychopathy has helped to fill previously existing research gaps. Research has included attempts to understand the correlates of child and adolescent psychopathy (Blair, Perschardt, Budhani, Mitchell, & Pine, 2006; Dadds et al., 2005), to delineate their trajectories through childhood into adulthood (Burke, Loeber, & Lahey, 2007; Frick, Kimonis, Dandreaux, & Farrell, 2003; Lynam et al., 2007; Salekin, 2008; Salekin & Lochman, 2008), and to differentiate psychopathy from other forms of psychopathology (e.g., conduct

disorder) (Kosson, Cyterski, Steuerwald, Neumann, & Walker-Matthews, 2002; Salekin, Leistico, Neumann, DiCicco, & Duros, 2004). These efforts have put us in a better position to answer some of the key questions regarding the potential applicability of psychopathy to child and adolescent populations.

Due to the vast developments in the area of child and adolescent psychopathy, there exists a need for a detailed overview of where the field stands at present, and where it appears to be headed in the future. This handbook on child and adolescent psychopathy was designed to fill this important need. It includes contributions from the world's foremost scientific experts on the topic, and covers chief conceptual and practical issues in the field, providing comprehensive coverage of published empirical work relevant to these key issues. In addition, the handbook offers some guidance as to the practical forensic issues related to risk assessment and the potential changeability of the syndrome.

In editing this handbook, we kept an eye toward providing a comprehensive, integrated overview of existing knowledge in the area. In addition, we wanted to identify priorities for future research in a coordinated way. When examining the etiology of disorders, edited books occasionally run the risk of providing individual views of specific topics that are related to the research priorities of individual contributors, which can lead to narrow opinions about what, in this case, causes psychopathy (Patrick, 2006). To address this issue, we asked authors to be broad in their coverage and where individual chapters focus on somewhat constricted etiological perspectives, we attempted to bring in multiple researchers and perspectives (i.e., additional chapters) to broaden what we know about child and adolescent psychopathy. We did this, in part, knowing that there are still many open questions as to the etiology of child psychopathy, even if significant gains in research have been made in a particular area. We also realize the need for integration across the various perspectives (genetics, temperament, personality, brain functioning, family functioning, parenting practices, etc.) in keeping with the developmental psychopathology macro-paradigm framework (see Kazdin & Kagan, 1994). Much of this research is ongoing in the field, including many strong contributions that attempt to integrate etiological perspectives, all of which will continue to help us better understand psychopathic features in youth.

This handbook on child psychopathy illuminates this exciting and ongoing line of research by addressing what we have learned to date regarding the reliability, construct validity, etiological correlates and mechanisms, and treatment potentiality of child psychopathy. The handbook advances the field of knowledge in many important areas, such as the potential biological paths to psychopathy (Blair, Chapter 7), general personality correlates of child psychopathy (Lynam, Chapter 8), and environmental factors

(Farrington, Ullrich, & Salekin, Chapter 9). In addition, we address how the field might move forward to answer some critical questions that need further exploration, some of which were sparked by the early controversy on this topic and raised primarily by Hart and colleagues (2002), Seagrave and Grisso (2002) and others (e.g., Edens, Skeem, Cruise, & Cauffman, 2001; Farrington, 2005; Rutter, 2005; Salekin, Rosenbaum, Lee, & Lester, 2009). These questions include the following: What is child psychopathy exactly? How does it translate into adult life? Are there successful and less successful transitions from childhood psychopathy to adulthood? This handbook addresses these important questions that continue to require further research with greater precision.

An Overview of This Volume

This handbook is divided into five sections. The first is devoted to chapters that address classification and assessment. In Chapter 2, Christopher J. Patrick provides an overview of the construct of psychopathy and considers a new way to view the construct that includes dimensions of meanness, boldness, and disinhibition. Next, John E. Lochman, in Chapter 3, Nicole P. Powell, Carolyn Boxmeyer, Laura Young, and Rachel Baden provide an overview of the historical conceptions of risk among children by outlining the various ways in which the constructs of disruptive behavior have been divided across the years. In Chapter 4, Julie S. Kotler and Robert J. McMahon review the numerous ways we can now assess psychopathy in youth. They also evaluate the merit of these various assessment tools by highlighting some of the positive and negative aspects of assessment technology for child and adolescent psychopathy, and related issues with respect to classification.

The second section examines the potential etiology of psychopathy in youth. First, Essi Viding and Henrik Larsson (Chapter 5) present an overview of genetic studies related to the development of psychopathy in youth. Their chapter encompasses the latest papers on behavior genetics and psychopathy, and provides a and synthesis of the research in this area. As well, these researchers suggest future directions for research in this area. Second, Stuart F. White and Paul J. Frick (Chapter 6) examine the potential causal mechanisms that underlie psychopathy, putting forth callous–unemotional traits as the main component of psychopathy. Then, R. James R. Blair (Chapter 7) examines potential processes underlying child and adolescent psychopathy. Next, Donald R. Lynam (Chapter 8) provides key information on the connections between personality theory and psychopathy. In particular, Lynam links psychopathy to the Big Five factors of personality. Finally, David P. Farrington, Simone Ullrich, and Randall T. Salekin (Chapter 9)

examine the relation between psychopathy and the environment, particularly the family environment.

The third section addresses the issues of stability, predictive validity, and comorbidity. Specifically, Henrik Andershed provides, in Chapter 10, a thorough review of research on the stability of psychopathy. In Chapter 11, Adelle E. Forth and Angela S. Book address whether psychopathy predicts the negative outcome of general and violent recidivism. Their chapter overviews previous meta-analytic studies on the topic of psychopathy and recidivism, and also generates new effect size summaries to show the magnitude of effect for predicting recidivism and other negative outcomes. Kathrin Sevecke and David S. Kosson (Chapter 12) address the pertinent topic of comorbidity. There is considerable research to show that psychopathy in youth overlaps with other forms of pathology, and their chapter attempts to help the reader better understand this relation and what it may mean for the concept of child psychopathy.

In the fourth section, several topic areas are covered, including special populations, the treatment of psychopathic youth, and clinical forensic issues. Specifically, Edelyn Verona, Naomi Sadeh, and Shabnam Javdani (Chapter 13) address the important issue of whether gender and culture influence child and adolescent psychopathy. This is a highly significant research area because there may be potential gender and ethnic differences that both affect findings in research studies and have implications for clinical practice. In Chapter 14, Randall T. Salekin addresses the issue of psychopathy and treatment in childhood populations. Particularly, Salekin addresses previous concerns regarding researchers' generally skeptical view regarding the potential for treating psychopathy, then attempts to delineate a road map for change with children and adolescents who may have psychopathic features. Salekin shows that there are important reasons to consider broader inclusion criteria and outcome measures for studies on child and adolescent psychopathy.

Next, Michael J. Vitacco, Randall T. Salekin, and Richard Rogers (Chapter 15) examine the potential utility of psychopathy in child and adolescent forensic cases. Their chapter challenges the notion that psychopathy may offer something beyond a conduct disorder diagnosis in terms of predicting violence. However, the authors recognize and note that psychopathy appears to be equally predictive of negative outcomes, and that the comparability of the two for predicting outcomes remains an open question. Importantly, their chapter points out that there may be many more important reasons to consider the psychopathy construct in forensic settings than recidivism alone. Thus, the chapter recognizes the connection between psychopathy and violence, and highlights its clinical utility as an important construct in understanding youth in forensic settings. In the final section, Randall T. Salekin (Chapter 16) briefly reviews the accomplish-

ments thus far of the psychopathy concept and provides guidance regarding directions for research in the field of child and adolescent psychopathy.

To date, there exists no comprehensive handbook on child psychopathy. Because of the surge of research in this area, this volume is unique in its scope, comprehensiveness, and currency of coverage on a topic that is receiving considerable attention for its potential to explain behavior of disruptive youth. Because of its focus on empirical research findings, this handbook will be of particular interest to academics, graduate and undergraduate students in psychology, and researchers in other settings who are interested in youth with disruptive behavior disorders. In addition, it will be of interest to those who do research on juvenile delinquency, violence, crime, and substance abuse. Furthermore, clinical psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and other mental health professionals who work with children and adolescents will likely find the volume helpful. It will serve as a highly valuable resource to forensic child and adolescent psychologists and psychiatrists, and juvenile justice scholars due to the breadth of coverage of issues related to clinical assessment, prediction, specialized populations, and intervention. Finally, the book may be of value to those individuals who work in school settings and find persistently troublesome youth difficult to handle. We believe strongly, however, that the term *psychopathy* should not be used in a damaging way, but rather that the concept be used in a constructive manner to understand better the various types of youth as well as to chart ways to help youth lead more prosocial, productive, and meaningful lives.

In closing, we would like to express our gratitude to Kitty Moore and Alice Broussard at the Guilford Press. Their wise counsel throughout was appreciated. We are especially grateful to our colleagues, the esteemed individuals who contributed meaningfully to the book. Our thanks also go out to Caroline Titcomb, Krystal Hedge, Whitney Lester, and Kim Price for their thoughtful comments. We also express our thanks to our families, who supported us through the editing of this handbook. We hope that this handbook helps to further shed light on the concept of child and adolescent psychopathy, as well as to inspire researchers and promote even greater investigation in this key area of research and practice.

Note

1. Concerns about labeling have abated somewhat: Research shows that the term *child psychopathy* does not differ substantially much from conduct disorder in terms of court personnel perception (see Murrie, Boccaccini, McCoy, & Cornell, 2007). Nonetheless, further research is needed on this topic.

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