



Psychopathy as a Predictor of Incarceration Length for Juvenile Offenders



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Introduction

Previous Research

- Psychopathy defined by Dr. Robert Hare “is a personality disorder, defined by distinctive traits, most of which society views as pejorative” (Without a Conscience, Dr. Robert Hare, 1998).
- Such traits include shallow affect and lack of empathy. (see Figure 1)
- Studies have analyzed psychopathy among individuals within the construct of longitudinal studies reveal characteristics of psychopathy remain stable across time (Iacono, Loney, & Taylor, 2007).
- The research regarding psychopathy and its relationship with incarceration length has been limited.

Goals

- The purpose of this investigation attempted to measure the relationship between psychopathy and length of incarceration.
- Based on characteristics of psychopathy, it is hypothesized that those that endorse greater characteristics (e.g., are impulsive, irresponsible, and lack remorse) will have a greater length of incarceration.
- To show that those with low levels of psychopathy characteristics will have an earlier departure time.

Methods

Participants

- Male juvenile offenders incarcerated in Alabama Department of Youth Services detention center participated.
- Youth from throughout the state of Alabama were housed within this correctional facility.
- The average number of days of incarceration was 438.76 days (SD = 196.03; range 136 – 1745 days)
- N=302

Demographics

- The sample consisted of 172 (56.8%) Caucasians, 121 (40.2%) African Americans, while Hispanics-Americans represent 1 (0.3%) of the data and the remainder of the individuals specified “Other” 8 (2.7%)
- Average age at time of incarceration = 15.66 (SD = 18.21 months)

Hare Psychopathy Scoring Items

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| • Impression Management | • Impersonal Sexual Behavior |
| • Impulsivity | • Early Behavior Problems |
| • Stimulation Seeking | • Lack of Realistic, Long-Term Goal |
| • Pathological Lying | • Unstable Interpersonal Relationships |
| • Manipulation for Personal Gain | • Irresponsibility |
| • Lack of Remorse | • Failure to Accept Responsibility |
| • Shallow Affect | • Poor Anger Control |
| • Callous or Lacking Empathy | • Parasitic Orientation |

Figure 1

Instrument

- Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-YV).
- The Hare Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL:YV) attempts to identify youth with psychopathic traits.
- Using both a semi-structured interview format as well as collateral file information, youths are rated on several items measuring psychopathic traits.
- Youth are scored 0-2 on each item 0 being the lowest, 2 the highest psychopathy level.
- Based on ratings from the items, a total score measuring psychopathy is determined.

Results

- The Hare total score was a significant predictor of length of stay, $F(1, 292) = 11.95, p < .001$.
- The regression of length of stay on total Hare score resulted in the following regression equation, $LOS = 361.737 + (4.796 * HARE Total)$.

Discussion

- Psychopathy as measured by the PCL:YV accounts for 4% of total variance in the length of incarceration.
- The number accounts for approximately 1/3 of all variance explained when all measures are entered into a regression equation predicting length of stay.
- There are many variables other than psychopathy, since it only represents 4% of the variance.
- There is a disconnect between length of stay and those that have psychopathy characteristics.

Future Directions:

- Further research is needed to determine if psychopathy is a factor for incarceration length without treatment.
- Also a measure of incarceration length compared to recidivism rate can be used to determine the effects of treatment.
- Additional measures should be used to further investigate the relationship of psychopathy and length of stay.
- Instead of combining factor 1 and factor 2 Hare scores, only use factor 2, which may be more atypical of a juvenile’s characteristics.
- Further comparison of those with psychopathy traits and measures of conduct other than length of stay needs to be addressed.

Contact James C. McCutcheon with any questions at mccutjc@auburn.edu or visit the research team’s webpage to view additional projects at www.auburn.edu/~burkhbr.

Total Hare Score Frequency Distribution

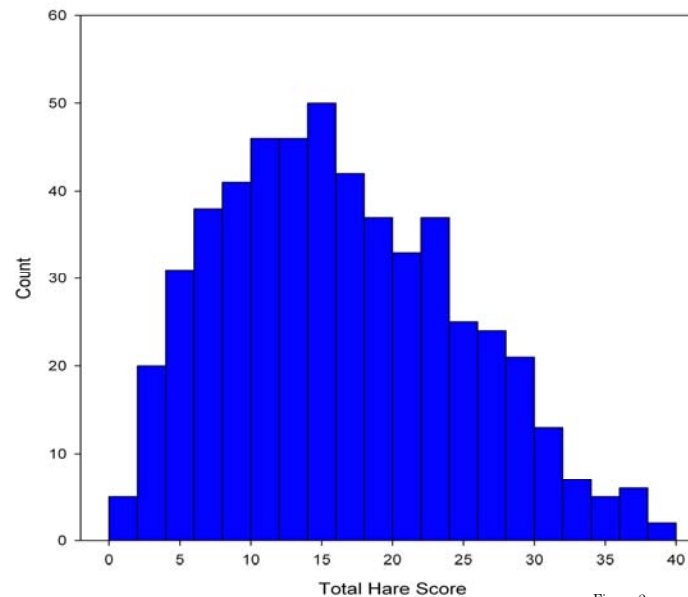


Figure 2