After 10 years, the Pathways Study has completed the data collection. This has been a long and labor-intensive process and we are very grateful to all of the research interviewers who have so diligently interviewed research participants over the years and to the leadership in each of the data collection sites.

Thank You Sandy, Theresa, Kristen and Scott! Sandy Losoya (second from the left) has done an outstanding job as the site coordinator at Arizona State University. She has been with the study since the very beginning and has led a team of exceptional interviewers. Among those are the following individuals (with years of service) who carried out the final interviews: Theresa Kundinger Sullivan (2002-2010), Kristen Rasemann-Mauke (right, 2004-2010) and Scott Herweg (right, 2006-2010).

Thank You Donna and Brooke! Donna Tuez (left, 2001-2010) and Brooke Jordan (right, 2000-2010) have both been with the study since the beginning of data collection and have each done an extraordinary job in leadership roles at the Temple University site in Philadelphia.

We wish them the best as they move beyond the world of the Pathways study!
three different measures) and how each of these different measures was related to subsequent offending. Rarely has there been an opportunity to examine this topic in such a comprehensive fashion.

**Juvenile psychopathy assessment tools used in the Pathways study**

The Pathways study used three well-received and relatively recent assessment tools.

- The Psychopathy Checklist-Interfor Youth Version (PCL:YV) was administered at the baseline interview. This instrument is modeled on the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R, Hare, 1991), the most extensively studied measure of psychopathy in adulthood. The PCL:YV placed a strong emphasis on the “gold standard” against which alternative assessment approaches are compared and has been found to be highly predictive of future violent behavior.

- The Psychopathy Psychiatric Traitors Inventory (PPI, Hare 1981) was administered at the 12-month follow-up interview. This is a self-report measure based on a three-factor model of psychopathy, assessing how much an individual reports the following personality characteristics: grandiose/impulsive, callous/unemotional, and impulsive/antisocial. The scale was developed to identify youths aged 12 and older who may engage in frequent and serious antisocial behavior into adulthood.

- The Psychopathy Resemblance Index (PRI, Hare 1981) is a method for identifying the degree of resemblance to the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R), a personality assessment instrument. Pathways study participants completed the NEO at the baseline interview. The scores from the NEO measure were assessed to see how closely each person resembled a prototypical psychopath on the basis of their personality.

**How did the scores across these assessment tools compare?**

The study investigators did a series of analyses to see how these assessment tools compared in identifying a “psychopath.” The short answer to this question is: not very well. The investigators found only a modest overlap between the three measure: youths who were identified as psychopathic by one measure were not always identified as such by the other measures.

**How well did the scores on the assessment tools relate to future offending?**

The study investigators also explored the relationship of these scores to offending over the subsequent 36-months. Taking into account the youths’ age, ethnicity, gender, and days in confinement, the PCL:YV and the VPI were not associated with self-reported aggressive offending or income offending over the next three years. Only the NEO-PIR was associated with aggressive and income offending in this time frame. The investigators then looked to see if these measures were associated with offending over a shorter time frame, examining just the subsequent 6-month and 12-month periods. They found that all three measures correlated with self-reported offending during these time periods, but the magnitude of the association got smaller over time. In other words, the measures were related to offending in the very short term, but the relation to offending got weaker as time passed. In terms of official record reports of arrest, the VPI was significantly correlated with official-record offending at 6-months and all three scales had a significant (but weak) association at the 12-month follow-up. What can we make of this?

There are two messages that emerge from this work:

1. The determination of whether an individual adolescent should be considered a psychopath can depend on the assessment tool used; a particular adolescent might score in the psychopathic range on one but not another tool.

2. These scales are related to subsequent offending only in the short term

The inconsistencies that were found between the two tools that we used to assess psychopathy could simply indicate that these three assessment tools are not measuring the same common set of characteristics. This observation leads one to wonder if anyone really knows what psychopathy is. It may be the case that juvenile psychopathy as a construct is problematic and that not even the most respected researchers in the area can agree on what characteristics should be assessed.

**NOTE FROM THE COORDINATING CENTER**

After 10 years, the Pathways Study has completed its data collection phase—our last interview was completed in March 2010. We now have over 20,000 individuals—a solid sample of the lives of our 1,354 study participants. The analysis of the data continues to be impressively extensive and innovative, but even more so, as the level of assessment has expanded from the courts, facilities, and agencies that made this all possible. The inconsistencies that were found between the three different measures (and how each of these different measures was related to official-record offending at 6-months and 12-month periods) is a method for identifying the degree of resemblance to the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R), a personality assessment instrument. Pathways study participants completed the NEO at the baseline interview. The scores from the NEO measure were assessed to see how closely each person resembled a prototypical psychopath on the basis of their personality. It may be the case that juvenile psychopathy as a construct is problematic and that not even the most respected researchers in the area can agree on what characteristics should be assessed.

It also might be the case that the timing of this assessment is wrong. By definition, adolescence is a time during which young people are changing, maturing and forming their identity. This period of development could be the wrong time to evaluate what is important and how to measure personality trait. The fact that these assessment tools are not related to offending in the long term may simply be a reflection of the fact that some youth, who were being identified as psychopathic in adolescence may become less so as they grow more psychosocially mature and clash less antagonistically with society.

Whatever the case may be, there seems to be reason to be concerned about some problems in the application of the term “psychopath” regarding juvenile offenders. In addition, given the inconsistencies in scores obtained across the various assessment tools, it appears that the use of these tools as support for important legal decisions (e.g. transfer to adult court) or clinical treatment decisions is premature at best. The costs of getting it wrong can be dangerously life-altering for the youth involved, and evidence that we can get it right is certainly not compelling.

To read the full article referenced in this excerpt, please visit the Pathways study at:


REFERENCES


