



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 Kunder Sullivan (*left, 2002-2010*), Kirsten Raisanen Marcks (*third from left, 2004-2010*) and Scott Herweg (*right, 2006-2010*).

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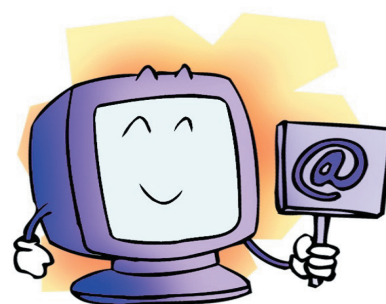
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## Final Glance at Data Collection

as of March 2010



- ✓ 1,354 participants
- ✓ Over 25,000 interviews completed to date (subject, collateral and release interviews)
- ✓ All subjects have passed through their opportunity to complete the 84-month interview
- ✓ 48 subjects have died since the baseline (3.5%)
- ✓ 43 subjects have dropped out of the study since the baseline (3.1%)
- ✓ Subject retention rates for each time point (6-84 months) average 90%
- ✓ As of the 60-month interview, 84% of the subjects have completed 9 or 10 of their ten possible interviews
- ✓ Yearly collateral reports are present for about 89% of subjects at baseline and about 90% for annual follow-ups during the first three years



### Introducing the Pathways Study Website!

We have developed an informational website that documents some pertinent study background information and the study design

We invite you to take a look when the site goes live on April 20, 2010!

[www.pathwaysstudy.pitt.edu](http://www.pathwaysstudy.pitt.edu)



### Thank You Donna and Brooke!

Donna Tozer (*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!



VOLUME 15

Research  
on Pathways  
to Desistance

## Juvenile Psychopathy: An Underdeveloped Construct?

"Psychopath" is a powerful term. It has generally been associated with the worst type of criminals.... individuals who may appear "normal" and quite likeable on the surface, but with another person behind this façade who lacks the ability to empathize and who lives according to his/her own rules. Robert Hare (1995, author of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist, or PCL, which is widely used to assess this construct) indicates that psychopaths are "lacking in conscience and empathy, they take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without guilt or remorse"<sup>1</sup>.

Distinguishing a psychopath from other offenders is not easy. Assessment instruments are prone to low inter-rater reliability (two people rating the same person don't reach the same score;<sup>2,3</sup> and characteristics of the offender (e.g. age, gender) may influence how the "disorder" manifests itself. Researchers, however, have stuck with the task of trying to develop reliable and valid indicators of psychopathy because of research findings which show that measures of psychopathy are strong predictors of recidivism<sup>4</sup> and that psychopaths are among the most

versatile, prolific, and violent offenders<sup>5</sup>.

Because of the rise in juvenile crime over the past few decades, many individuals have been particularly interested in

identifying adolescent psychopaths at the beginning of what can be expected to be a long criminal career. This extension of the construct of psychopathy to adolescence has spawned the development of a variety of instruments designed to assess *juvenile* psychopathy, with the goal of identifying those youth who are most likely to recidivate. It is not entirely clear, however, whether the application of this construct to juvenile

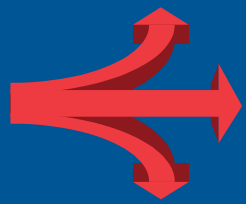


offenders is appropriate or if it identifies juvenile offenders with high rates of subsequent offending.

Pathways study investigators attempted to provide some empirical evidence to inform this area. Juvenile psychopathy was measured at multiple points during the follow-up period, using several different assessment instruments. Initial analyses compared the conclusions produced by the various assessment tools (i.e. how differently was one youth rated across the

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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-respected and relatively recent assessment tools.

▼ The *Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL:YV, <sup>6</sup>)* 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 adults. The PCL-R is the “gold standard” against which alternative assessment approaches are compared and has been found to be highly predictive of future



violent behavior among adults <sup>7,8</sup>. The PCL-YV is a modified version of this older instrument, tailored for use with adolescents. The PCL:YV involved an extensive set of semi-structured interview questions with the study participant and with their collateral reporter (usually a parent).

▼ The *Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI; <sup>9</sup>)* was administered at each follow-up interview. This is a 50-item self-report measure based on a three-factor model of psychopathy, assessing how much an individual reports the following personality characteristics: grandiose/manipulative, callous/unemotional, and impulsive/irresponsible. The scale was developed to identify youths (age 12 and above) who engage in frequent and serious antisocial behavior into adulthood.

▼ The *Psychopathy Resemblance Index (PRI, <sup>10</sup>)* is a method for assessing psychopathy that is derived from the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised <sup>11</sup>, a personality assessment instrument. Pathways study participants completed the NEO at the 24-month 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 analysis to see how these assessment tools compared in identifying a “psychopath”. The short answer to this question: not that well. The investigators found only a modest overlap between the three measures and youth 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, history of offending and days in confinement, the PCL:YV and the YPI were not associated with *self-reported* aggressive offending or income offending over the next three years. Only the NEO-PRI was associated with aggressive and income offending in this time period.

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*, only the YPI was significantly correlated with official-record offending at 6-months and all three scales had a significant (but weak) associated 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 on the other.*

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

The inconsistencies that were found between the various tools that we used to assess juvenile psychopathy could simply indicate that these three assessment tools are not measuring a common set of characteristics. This observation leads one to wonder if anyone really knows what *juvenile 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 the data collection phase - our last interview was completed in March, 2010. We now have over 25,000 interviews - seven years in the lives of our 1,354 study participants. The amount and quality of the study data are impressive but, even more so, is the level of support and cooperation from the individuals in the courts, facilities, and agencies that made this all possible. Equally remarkable is the level of dedication, time and effort from the research coordinators and interviews (some of whom we introduce to you in this issue). Finally, and most importantly, we gratefully acknowledge the 1,354 youth who informed us about how their lives unfolded over a seven-year period. We hope that their willingness to talk with us leads to better understanding and more informed practice in the juvenile justice system.*



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 attempt to evaluate what is purported to be a stable 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 seemingly psychopathic at one point, become less so as they grow more psychosocially mature and exhibit less antisocial behavior.

Whatever the case may be, there seems to be reason to exercise tremendous caution 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 summary see:*

*Cauffman, E., Kimonis, E.R., Dmitrieva, J., Monahan, K.C. (2009). A multimethod assessment of juvenile psychopathy: Comparing the predictive utility of the PCL: YV, YPI and NEO PRI. Psychological Assessment 21(4), 528-542.*

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