

ABSTRACT

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In adults, research has consistently associated the personality disorder of psychopathy with a particularly aggressive and violent form of criminal offending. Preliminary studies have shown a similar link in adolescence. Yet, much more knowledge is needed about the disorder in youth to determine whether it is a useful construct for early identification of potentially severe offenders. The present study investigated psychopathy in a sample of 149 adolescents involved with the juvenile justice system. The research aims were to: (1) assess the fit of several proposed conceptualizations of psychopathy; (2) test the stability of psychopathy and its dimensions in adolescents over time; and (3) examine the predictive validity of psychopathy for aggression in court-referred adolescents. Results indicated that models of psychopathy that did not include social deviance criteria evidenced the best fit to the data. As predicted, a three-factor model of psychopathy was the best-fitting model when compared to a two-factor model. The affective dimension of psychopathy demonstrated greater structural stability over a year's time than the narcissistic or behavioral dimensions, though other indicators of absolute and relative stability did not support the stability of the affective factor. Lastly, results indicated that psychopathy significantly predicts later aggression, after controlling for concurrent aggression and other variables previously found to be related to aggression and violence (i.e., social anomie, association with delinquent peers, and lack of parental supervision).