Gender issues in the assessment of psychopathy

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Presentation outline

• Psychopathy and violence in women
• Preliminary results multicentre study
  – Psychopathy and violence (risk factors)
  – Psychopathy and motives for offenses
Can women actually be violent?

"We're looking for the girl who kicked the prince at the ball last night."
Female violence

• Female violence seems to be on the rise
• Comparable prevalence rate men / women for inpatient violence and intimate partner violence
• Violence by women:
  – Less visible
  – Different expression
  – Different motives
• Intergenerational transfer

Nicholls et al., 2004, 2009; De Vogel et al., 2012
Friese Feeks uit Heerenveen gaat wéér in de fout
Psychopathy and violence risk assessment in women

- Differences men / women in expression of violence, violence risk factors and manifestation of psychopathy
- Most tools developed / validated in male populations
- PCL-R item descriptions focus on ‘male’ (overt antisocial) behavior

Are commonly used tools, like the PCL-R or HCR-20 well enough suited for use in female forensic populations?
Additional guidelines to HCR-20 / HCR-20\textsuperscript{V3} for women:

- Additional guidelines to several Historical factors (e.g., use of lower PCL-R cut-off score 23; 14 for code 1)
- New female specific items
- Additional final risk judgments (Self-destructive behavior, Victimization, Non-violent criminal behavior)

Preliminary results: promising irr & predictive validity for self-destructive behavior and violence to others

De Vogel, De Vries Robbé, Van Kalmthout & Place, 2012
FAM
Gender-specific items

**Historical items**
- Prostitution
- Parenting difficulties
- Pregnancy at young age
- Suicide attempt / self-harm
- Victimization after childhood

**Clinical items**
- Covert / manipulative behavior
- Low self-esteem

**Risk management items**
- Problematic child care responsibility
- Problematic intimate relationship
Psychopathy in women

Summary research results PCL-R

- Lower scores and prevalence rate psychopathy (9-23% ♀ vs 15-30% ♂)
- Interrater reliability: moderate to good
- Predictive validity: equivocal

Logan, 2009; Logan & Weizmann-Henelius, 2012; McKeown, 2010; Nicholls et al., 2005; Vitale et al., 2002

True lower prevalence psychopathy in women, or.... is the PCL-R not optimally fit to assess psychopathy in women?
Does psychopathy manifest itself differently in women?

- More histrionic, manipulative sexual behavior
- Lure others to criminal behavior
- More emotionally unstable, impulsive

Women high on psychopathy

Summary research results

• Compared to women low on psychopathy
  – More instrumental violence / to strangers
  – More chronic offenders, less often murder

• Compared to men high on psychopathy
  – More fraud, deceit
  – More often a score 2 on the items:
    – Conning / manipulative
    – Promiscuous sexual behavior

Roberts & Coid, 2007; Strand & Belfrage, 2005; Warren et al., 2005; Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2010
Psychopathy in women
Overall conclusions literature

• “What drives both psychopathic men and women is: power over others, the expectation of gain and glorification of the self” (Logan & Weizmann-Henelius, 2012)
• Manifestation in women more nuanced and hidden, but still highly destructive to others
• PCL-R has relevance in violence risk assessment in women, but more research and refinement in assessment is necessary
Multicentre study
Characteristics of women in forensic psychiatry

• Four Dutch forensic settings
• N = 297 female forensic psychiatric patients
• Comprehensive questionnaire coded based on file information by trained researchers:
  A. History: demographic, criminal and psychiatric variables, PCL-R, Historical items HCR-20 / FAM
  B. Incidents during treatment
  C. Dynamic factors FAM / HCR-20; HCR-20$^V_3$; HKT-30; SAPROF; START (follow up at least 3 years)
Study 1: Psychopathic women
Characteristics and motives for violent offenses

Procedure
- Criminal history from extensive file information
- PCL-R was used (53% in consensus)
- Taxonomy of motives inspired by Coid (1998)
Study 1: Psychopathic women

Sample characteristics

- N = 221 female patients with tbs-order
- Mean age 35.7 years
- 83% born in the Netherlands
- 74% comorbid pathology
- 67% substance use problems
- Index offenses
  - Homicide 25%
  - Attempted homicide 24%
  - Arson 29%
  - Violent offenses 16%
  - Sexual offenses 4%
PCL-R women (N = 221)

- Mean PCL-R score: 16.4 (SD = 6.6)
- Range 2-33.3
- Only 2.7% ≥ 30 (official cut-off score)
- FAM cut-off scores:

![Pie chart showing distribution of scores]

- 16% Non psychopathic (0-14)
- 37% Possible psychopathy (14-23)
- 47% Serious psychopathy (23-40)
Criminal history

Women high score on PCL-R (≥ 23) compared to PCL-R < 23

• Younger age at first conviction
• More criminal versatility

All $p < .05$
Index offense
Women high score on PCL-R ($\geq 23$) compared to PCL-R $< 23$

More often:
• Strangers as victims
• Intoxicated while offending
• Financial problems at time of offense

Less often:
• Arson
• Lethal violence
• Judged as Not accountable / responsible

All $p < .05$
Violence risk factors

Women high score on PCL-R (≥ 23) compared to PCL-R < 23

Significantly higher on HCR-20 / FAM risk factors:

- Young age at first violent incident
- Employment problems
- Substance use problems
- Problematic behavior during childhood (but no difference: Problematic circumstances during childhood)
- Prior supervision failure
- Prostitution
- Pregnancy at young age

All $p < .05$
Violence risk factors

Women high score on PCL-R (≥ 23) compared to PCL-R < 23

Significantly lower on HCR-20 / FAM risk factors:

- Major mental illness
- Suicide attempt / self-harm

All $p < .05$
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motives for index offense</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mad</strong></td>
<td><strong>Psychotic</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Intoxication</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Compulsive urge to harm/kill</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bad</strong></td>
<td><strong>Expressive aggression</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Power domination and control</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Excitement</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Undercontrolled aggression</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Illicit gain</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sad</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cry for help/attention seeking</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>(Extended) suicide</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Despair</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Influenced by (male) partner</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relational frustration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Revenge</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Jealousy</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Threatened/actual loss</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Displaced aggression</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Victim precipitation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coping</strong></td>
<td><strong>Relief of tension/dysphoria</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Hyperirritability</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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Motive for offense

Differences women PCL-R below or above 23

PCL-R < 23
More ‘Sad’

PCL-R ≥ 23
More ‘Bad’

$p < .05$
Treatment

Women high score on PCL-R (≥ 23) compared to PCL-R < 23

- More treatment dropout in history
- Incidents during most recent treatment
  - More often manipulative behavior
  - Less often self-destructive behavior

All $p < .05$
Conclusions and implications

Psychopathy in women

• Significant differences between women
  PCL-R ≥ 23 versus PCL-R < 23
  – Criminal characteristics
  – Motives for offenses
  – Violence risk factors
  – Incidents during treatment

• Implications for treatment
  – Train staff (e.g., in recognizing manipulative behavior)
  – Responsivity
Future studies
Psychopathy in women

• Comparison with male population
• Dynamic risk factors
• Predictive validity of tools for women
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References


References


