



## Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2009

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### I15 Juvenile Psychopathy and Development

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The goal of this presentation is to explain psychopathy, explore the validity and utility of this concept in the juvenile population, and examine developmental concerns that arise from application of the concept to youths.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by helping forensic evaluators better predict violent recidivism and general recidivism in juvenile offenders.

Psychopathy is a construct with which forensic psychiatrists are quite familiar. The presence of this “disorder” in adults is one of the best predictors of general and violent recidivism and, to some extent, amenability to treatment. Recently, the concept of juvenile psychopathy has been proposed.

For a variety of reasons, the designation of a juvenile as a psychopath may be problematic. Transient, normative developmental phenomenon, and behaviors may be mistaken for fixed, maladaptive, malignant personality patterns. Since “amenability to treatment” is an important consideration in both the juvenile justice system (and to some extent, the adult criminal justice system), this may lead to lengthy, perhaps unnecessary periods of incarceration for juveniles erroneously identified as psychopaths.

Recent research is attempting to determine whether psychopathy is a valid construct in juveniles and whether its component traits are stable over time. However, this research is in its infancy and has not yet confirmed or disconfirmed the validity or predictive utility of juvenile psychopathy. Hopefully, time will allow the development and employment of instruments that more accurately predict which juveniles are likely to continue offending as adults (particularly violently offending). This should lead to more just legal outcomes for minors, help protect the general public and preserve the dignity and integrity of the legal process.

#### **Psychopathy, Juvenile, Conduct Disorder**