



I6 Assessing the Risk of Violence for Psychopaths: What Is the Right Method?

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the relationship between psychopathy and violence and assessing the level of risk within this population.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by helping identify the issues when assessing psychopathy.

Psychopathy is a common diagnosis made when assessing violent offenders. The Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) is the gold standard tool to assess the presence of this diagnosis. Newer tools have been developed, such as Psychopathy Personality Inventory, but this is not commonly applied to the forensic context at this time. However, assessing psychopathy does not equal assessing risk, and psychopathy needs to be assessed by trained clinicians. The development of the assessment tools has evolved to identify the criteria that accurately define this pathological construct.

Why is psychopathy so often associated with the risk of inappropriate behavior? Most of the research has been conducted in forensic settings. Moreover, some studies focused on the criminal behavior rather than the personality disorder. According to some research, the antisocial item of the PCL-R, which is associated with violent behavior, misidentifies the antisocial behavior of some individuals with psychopathy. Some suggest that we should differentiate between psychopathy and PCL-R-diagnosed psychopathy, although at this time, PCL-R is considered the only reliable tool. The other issues that are identified when assessing the risk of violence is related to the fact that high scores on the PCL-R are not associated with high risk. Therefore, using other risk assessment tools is necessary to accurately identify the risks; some of them have an item directly related to the PCL-R, but include many more aspects that allow a broader assessment.

Some clinicians continue to use psychopathy as the sole method to identify risk without appreciating the difference between diagnosis and behavior. Besides identifying the key aspects of psychopathy and risk of violence, this presentation will be an opportunity to present the legislation of the Dangerous Offenders in Canada. Under some specific circumstances, an individual may be qualified a Dangerous Offender and be sentenced to jail time for life. An alternative may be to be qualified as a Long-term Offender which will impose 10 years of probation after being released from custody.

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