

## Psychopathic Tendencies in Youth: Lack of Empathy and Remorse (A Review)

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### ABSTRACT

Psychopath is a personality disorder defined by a specific set of behaviour and personality trait. A psychopath usually shows a multiple set of behaviours. Does not follow through on promises or obligations and are willing to deceive and break trust of others. Psychopathic traits often have long histories of antisocial behaviour that often extend well into childhood. The child usually learns to imitate antisocial acts of elders and in turn gets conflicting upbringing. With each passing year, the child shifts towards the antisocial paradigm and cannot find an exit in the later years. Treatment of psychopathic behaviour requires multiple treatment plans. However, it cannot be cured but it can be managed to some extent.

**Keywords:** *Psychopath, Antisocial, ICD 10 (International Classification of Diseases), DSM (Diagnostic Statistical Manual), Callous, Manipulative, Criminality, Remorse, Empathy, Cognitive impairment, Charming, Impairment, Intervention, Juveniles, Rehabilitation*

Psychopath is a personality disorder defined by a specific set of behaviour and personality traits evaluated as negative and socially harmful. It is also termed as antisocial personality disorder. The normal – abnormal distinction is particularly fuzzy when applied to this category. Such persons do not play by the usual rules of the society. They behave as if a specific set of rules, or no rules at all, should apply to them. They show great skill in short-term interaction with an uncanny knack for saying just the things other people want to hear. However, their behaviour is inconsistent with their words. They do not follow through on promises or obligations; they are perfectly willing to deceive and defraud other people. Only small portions of youth with psychopathic tendencies show the affective, interpersonal and behavioural features. However, people with these traits exhibit more severe violent and chronic pattern of antisocial behaviour. They often have neurological, cognitive and emotional characteristics that are distinct causal factors leading to their antisocial behaviour. Research has shown that adults with psychopathic traits often have long histories of antisocial behaviour that often extend well into childhood.

The reasons for the development of antisocial personality patterns are elusive. Some psychologists suspect a biological defect that makes ordinary rewards and punishment ineffective in these children's upbringing. Others tend to blame two kinds of parents, or

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paternal models. The first is the parent who is cold and distant with the child. The child learns to imitate this pattern, becoming, in turn cold and distant in relationships with others. The second kind of parent applies rewards and punishment inconsistently. Because the child is punished frequently, he or she learns the trick of escaping and avoiding punishment. Because the rewards are sparse and inconsistent, the child never learns an appropriate social rule. Another reason that is Poverty, Statistically, as of 2019, most of the world's population lives in poverty. According to World Bank group in 2020, more than 40% of the poor live in conflict-affected countries. Even when countries experience economic development, the poorest citizens of middle-income countries frequently do not gain an adequate share of their countries increased wealth to leave property. Poverty causes create a *poverty cycle* operating across multiple levels, individuals, local, national and global.

Criteria for diagnosing personality disorders are listed in the fifth chapter of the "International Classification of Diseases (ICD) maintained by the World Health Organization (WHO) and in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The DSM and ICD subsequently introduced the diagnoses of antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) and dis-social personality disorder (DPD) respectively, stating that these diagnoses have been referred to as Psychopathic or Sociopathic. The creation of ASPD and DPD was driven by the fact that many of the classic traits of Psychopath were impossible to measure objectively. Although, no Psychiatric or Psychological organization has sanctioned a diagnosis titled *Psychopathy*, assessments of Psychopathic characteristics are widely used in criminal justice settings in some nations.

### *Signs and symptoms*

Core traits given by **Cooke and Michie** (2001)

- Extensive callous and manipulative self-serving behavior
- Arrogant and deceitful inter personal style
- Deficient affective experience
- Impulsive and irresponsible lifestyle

Low anxiety and fearlessness, conduct disorder, criminality/violence, sexual offending, childhood and adolescent precursors, traumatic brain injury, amorality are some of the signs of Psychopathic behavior. With each passing year, Psychopathy blocks a child towards anti-social paradigm and he cannot exit to a normal life. His environment grows less forgiving. By teenage or youth years he may not be lost cause but he can surely be one scary person. Psychopathic traits have an un-emotional component and that is lack of remorse (guilt) and empathy. There has been a lot of research in understanding the neurobiology of psychopathic traits. Indeed, partly because of neurobiological studies- a form of callous unemotional specifier (termed 'limited pro-social emotions') has been introduced to the conduct disorder diagnosis in DSM-5. To qualify for this specifier, an individual must have displayed two of four characteristics in the previous 12 months in multiple settings. These characteristics are:

- Lack of remorse or guilt
- Lack of empathy
- Lack of concern about performance (at school or college)
- Shallow or deficient affect (lack of expression of feelings for others).

Youth with psychopathic tendencies/traits show two main cognitive impairments. This first is specific form of empathic dysfunction. Indeed the clinical literature has long associated

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Psychopathy with empathy impairment (aspects of decision-making). A marked lack of empathy is one of the hallmarks of Psychopathy. Psychopaths do not have a feeling of remorse or guilt because they cannot empathize with seeing a fellow being suffered or in distress. **Bryan Loney**, an assistant professor of psychology at Florida State University states, *“We know problems are easier to treat the earlier we spot them.”* His study focuses in trying to identify psychopathic tendencies at an earlier age, opening the door for preventive treatment. The study published in the Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology involved 65 boys in a diversion program for delinquent behaviour. The adolescents were assessed for various conduct problems as well as callous and unemotional traits, such as lack of concern about the feelings of guilt and misuse of others for personal gain. The teens in the study were given a word recognition task in which they were presented with a series of letter strings and were asked to identify whether the letters strings included non-words and words with either positive, negative or neutral connotations. Loney found that the teens who measured high on a scale of callous – unemotional traits had slower reaction times to negative words, such as “mad”, “pain” or “gun”.

The result of this and similar studies suggest that antisocial youths who show callous and unemotional traits differ from those who do not on many important characteristics, especially in regulation of emotions (**Loney**).

People with this disorder may be charming and liked by others but often show criminal tendencies. Psychologist’s best hope is to identify psychopathic tendencies early and begin intervention efforts. Another psychologist, Paul Frick claims that even two-year old children with impaired empathy may begin to show signs of their impairment through their behaviour. Empathy problems seen in the youth with psychopathic tendencies might show other disruptive behaviours also such as hostility or anxiety (**de Wied et al. 2010; Pijper et al. 2018**)

### Treatment

Treatment of psychopathic behaviour requires multiple treatment plans. It cannot be cured but can be managed with psychotherapy. In some cases, medication can help improve certain symptoms but healing requires strong knowledgeable support system. Early intervention plays an important role in keeping youth from embarking on a life of crime. The government is taking the following measures to prevent young offenders from re-offending

1. Personalized approach
2. Training and Education Programmes
3. Proper support and guidance

The Juvenile justice system in India is considered direct consequence of reforms and developments in western countries. **The Juvenile Act of 2015** focuses on the protection and welfare of the rights of children. For the same reason chapter IV of JJ Act lays down numerous provisions that have focused their attention on the reformation and rehabilitation of juveniles in every possible circumstance. This act was brought to stop juveniles from becoming a harder criminal, the primary goals of the juvenile justice system is to maintain public safety, skill development, rehabilitation, addressing treatment needs and successful reintegration of youth into the community.

### CONCLUSION

Individuals with the combination of Psychopathy and severe conduct disorder often get in a lot of trouble from their early childhood and can cause great sufferings and problems for

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other people. Risk of violence is highest for 10-27 years old. Some may show psychopathic tendencies and some remain hidden behind personality. **Frick (2002)** argues that Psychopathy assessment in juveniles may be a means of early detection and intervention in a high-risk group. Treating children as they begin to display psychopathic traits could be key to its successful treatment and prevention. Despite promising treatments, however, psychopathic behaviour remains unattended due to decreasing clinical, legal and public apprehension around the term "**Psychopathy**". But to save the society from the clutches of crime and save the youth from falling prey to callous emotions, society needs to confront the issues of juvenile rehabilitation and positive parenting programs.

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#### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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