

Psychopathy and Stalking

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Abstract We examined the association between psychopathy, assessed using the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised: Screening Version (Hart et al., Manual for the psychopathy checklist screening version (PCL:SV), 1995), and stalking in 61 men convicted of stalking-related offenses. Psychopathic symptoms were rare, but their presence—especially that of affective deficit symptoms—was associated with victimization of casual acquaintances and with several risk factors from the *Guidelines for Stalking Assessment and Management* (SAM) (Kropp et al., Guidelines for stalking assessment and management, 2008a), including stalking in violation of supervision orders, degree of preoccupation with victims, and targeting of victims with limited access to external resources. The findings suggest that in spite of their rarity, psychopathic traits may be important in the assessment and management of stalking risk.

Keywords Psychopathy · Stalking · Risk assessment · PCL:SV · SAM

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Psychopathy is a form of personality disorder also known as antisocial or dissocial personality disorder. The primary symptoms of psychopathy include an arrogant interpersonal style (e.g., superficiality, manipulativeness, deceitfulness), deficient affective experience (e.g., shallow emotions, callousness, a lack of anxiety and remorse), and an impulsive behavioral style (e.g., sensation-seeking, irresponsibility, and a lack of a sense of purpose), as well as a tendency to engage in antisocial behavior (Hemphill & Hart, 2003).

Research indicates that psychopathy is an important risk factor for violent crime (for recent meta-analyses, see Edens, Campbell, & Weir, 2007; Leistico, Salekin, DeCoster, & Rogers, 2008). Psychopathy is associated with an increased likelihood of perpetrating violence, as well as the nature of the violence that is perpetrated (Hart, 1998; see also Douglas, Vincent, & Edens, 2006; Hart & Hare, 1997; Hemphill & Hart, 2003). For example, psychopathic offenders are more likely than non-psychopathic offenders to victimize strangers, use threats and weapons, and commit violence that is motivated by opportunism, impulsive instrumentality, or a desire to control, demean, or humiliate others (i.e., sadism; Hart, 1998; Hart & Dempster, 1997; Holt, Meloy, & Strack, 1999).

It has been speculated, however, that psychopathy is not associated with some forms of violence, especially those that typically involve close attachment to victims (Hart, 1998; Hart & Hare, 1997; Meloy, 1992). Stalking is one form of violence whose link to psychopathy has been questioned. Stalking, also known as obsessional following or criminal harassment, may be defined as “unwanted and repeated communication, contact, or other conduct that deliberately or recklessly causes people to experience reasonable fear or concern for their safety or the safety of others known to them” (Kropp, Hart, & Lyon, 2008a, p. 1; see also Dressing, Kuehner, & Gass, 2006; Meloy & Gothard, 1995; Mullen et al., 2006).

Epidemiological research in the United States has found that about 1% of adults report having been the victim of stalking in the past year, and about 5% report having been victimized at some time in their lives (Basile, Swahn, Chen, & Saltzman, 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Similar findings have been reported in other countries (Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2005; Dressing, Kuehner, & Gass, 2005; Purcell, Pathé, & Mullen, 2002). Although many forms of violence occur in the context of a close personal relationship between perpetrator and victim, stalking is unique in that the relationship and the violence are inextricably intertwined—indeed, what makes stalking violent is that one person attempts to coerce another to establish or maintain a relationship against his or her will, in a manner that results in physical injury or fear of physical injury (Kropp et al., 2008a).

As psychopathy is characterized by the lack of desire and capacity to form close attachments (Hart, 1998; Meloy, 1988), and stalking by the inordinate desire to form close attachments that are unwanted (Meloy, 2002, 2006a), at first glance it seems unlikely that psychopathy would be associated with increased risk for stalking. Although there have been only a few directly relevant studies, they tend to support this view. For example, research has found that personality disorders are prevalent among stalkers (Sandberg, McNeil, & Binder, 1998), but antisocial personality disorder is noticeably absent (Harmon, Rosner, & Owens, 1995; Meloy & Gothard, 1995; Meloy et al., 2000). In an unpublished study that specifically examined psychopathy, Hart (1998, cited in Kropp, Hart, Lyon, & LePard, 2002) reported that the mean score on the Screening Version of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL:SV; Hart, Cox, & Hare, 1995) for forensic psychiatric inpatients who engaged in stalking was $M = 10.8$ ($SD = 5.2$)—a score far below the mean overall score for forensic psychiatric inpatients ($M = 16.6$) or outpatients ($M = 13.7$) who had not committed acts of stalking.

In a recent study, Reavis, Allen, and Meloy (in press) examined a group of 78 adults attending court-ordered treatment after a conviction for stalking or stalking-related offenses. They examined the prevalence of psychopathy among stalkers, as well as the association between psychopathy and acquaintanceship with victims. Results showed a total mean PCL:SV score of only 11.55 ($SD = 5.40$), a result similar to Hart (1998, cited in Kropp, Hart, Lyon et al., 2002) that once again was well below the mean score for forensic patients reported in the test manual. Only 15% of the sample had total scores ≥ 18 , the standard cutoff for diagnosing psychopathy using the PCL:SV (Hart et al., 1995). Reavis et al. also calculated the mean PCL:SV scores for three types of perpetrator–victim relationships. Offenders who stalked strangers had higher PCL:SV scores ($M = 14.71$, $SD = 7.30$) than did those whose stalked prior sexual intimates ($M = 11.40$, $SD = 5.30$) or other acquaintances ($M = 10.11$, $SD = 3.92$); however, the

differences were not statistically significant. There was also no significant difference between the PCL:SV scores of the female and male stalkers.

The research summarized above suggests that a minority of stalking perpetrators manifest symptoms of psychopathy, and that psychopathy is most likely to be found among perpetrators whose motivation is something other than an attempt to establish an affectional relationship with the victim. Additional support for this view comes from a review of stalking typologies that have been put forward, several of which have one or more categories that could accommodate a psychopathic stalker. For example, Sheridan and Boon (2002) identified a “sadistic stalker” in their law enforcement typology. Although sadistic stalkers accounted for only 13% of their sample, these perpetrators had many characteristics that resembled symptoms of psychopathy. In the typology of Mullen, Pathé, and Purcell (2000), the categories of “resentful stalker” and “predatory stalker” are relevant. The former type aims to incite anxiety and distress in their victim, whereas the latter type of stalker is most often a male with a paraphilia who is planning a sexual offense. In addition, psychopathy may be consistent with the “grudge stalker” discussed by Kropp, Hart, and Lyon (2002). The grudge stalker is described as disgruntled and seeking revenge for a perceived injustice.

What is *not* clear from past research is the more general relevance of psychopathy to stalking risk assessment and management. Drawing inferences from past research on psychopathy, one might speculate it is associated with the severity of stalking, for example, the use of intimidation, threats, and violence. Interestingly, this is consistent with the literature on stalking typologies, which suggests the stalking types that most closely resemble psychopathy are also considered to be those at highest risk for causing serious physical or psychological harm to victims.

In the present study, we attempted to replicate and extend past research on psychopathy and stalking. We addressed three major research questions:

1. *How common are psychopathic traits in stalkers?* To answer this question, we examined the distribution of PCL:SV scores in the sample and the prevalence of PCL:SV diagnoses of psychopathy (i.e., total scores ≥ 18). Consistent with past research, we predicted low levels of psychopathic and a low prevalence of psychopathy diagnoses.
2. *Is psychopathy associated with the acquaintanceship between stalking perpetrators and victims?* To answer this question, we divided stalkers into three groups based on perpetrator–victim relationship and tested the difference between groups with respect to PCL:SV scores. Consistent with past research, we predicted a

negative association between psychopathy and acquaintanceship with victims.

3. *Is psychopathy associated with other risk factors related to stalking behavior?* To answer this question, we examined the association between PCL:SV scores and the presence of factors on the *Guidelines for Stalking Assessment and Management* (SAM; Kropp et al., 2008a). As described below, the SAM is a new structured professional judgment instrument that allows users to rate the presence of 30 stalking-related risk factors, identified by systematic literature review, divided into three content domains reflecting the nature of stalking behavior, perpetrator characteristics, and victim characteristics. We predicted that psychopathic traits would be positively associated with risk factors for stalking, and in particular factors associated with risk for serious physical or psychological harm to victims.

METHOD

Cases

The sample for this study consisted of 61 adult males, all aged 18 or older, convicted of stalking-related offenses under the *Criminal Code* of Canada (R. S. 1985, c. C-46). These offenses included criminal harassment, trespass, loitering, and uttering threats. The sample comprised all cases in which offenders were convicted of stalking-related offenses and were referred to an outpatient forensic psychiatric clinic for assessment or treatment during a 3-year period. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the British Columbia Forensic Psychiatric Services Commission and Simon Fraser University.

Of the 61 cases, in 48 (79%) the primary victim was female. The average age of the female primary victims was 48 years old, and for the males it was 50; the age range for both female and male victims was 30–67 years old. In 12 cases (20%) secondary victims were present. Secondary victims experience stalking behavior but are not the primary target. For example, they might be a family member or the new partner of the primary victim. Half of the secondary victims were female. Of the 61 cases, in 8 (13%) the perpetrator had a history of previous charges or convictions for stalking-related offenses targeted at other victims.

Procedure

Psychopathy

Lifetime presence of traits of psychopathic personality disorder were assessed using the PCL:SV. The PCL:SV is a

12-item ratings scale, with each item reflecting a feature of psychopathy. The items can be separated into four facets that reflect different clusters of psychopathic features: interpersonal, affective, and behavioral symptoms, as well as antisocial behavior (see Table 1). Items are scored on a 3-point scale (0 = *Absent*, 1 = *Possibly or partially present*, and 2 = *Present*). Items can be summed to yield total scores, with scores of 18 or greater on the PCL:SV considered diagnostic of psychopathy (Hart et al., 1995), as well as scores reflecting four facets of psychopathy: interpersonal (i.e., arrogant and deceitful interpersonal style), affective (i.e., deficient affective experience), behavior (i.e., impulsive and irresponsible behavioral style), and antisocial (i.e., delinquency and criminality).

The PCL:SV is widely used in research on psychopathy. A recent summary was provided by Hart and Wilson (2008). Their review indicated that the psychometric properties of the PCL:SV have been well established within the frameworks of classical test theory and modern test theory. The test has high concurrent validity with respect to other ratings scales of psychopathy and moderate predictive validity with respect to serious crime, including violence. It also has proven useful in research on the cognitive and psychophysiological correlates of psychopathy.

In the present study, two trained raters—doctoral-level graduate students in forensic psychology—independently rated each case using PCL:SV based on a review of clinical files. The files contained a range of law enforcement, corrections, and mental health records, including official criminal records, police reports of recent and past offenses, recent and past presentence reports, probation logs, psychiatric and psychological evaluations, and nursing logs. The interrater reliability of PCL:SV total scores, as indexed by intraclass correlation coefficients calculated using a

Table 1 PCL:SV items

PCL:SV items	Facet
1. Superficial	Interpersonal (1)
2. Grandiose	Interpersonal (1)
3. Deceitful	Interpersonal (1)
4. Lacks remorse	Affective (2)
5. Lacks empathy	Affective (2)
6. Doesn't accept responsibility	Affective (2)
7. Impulsive	Behavioral (3)
8. Poor behavior controls	Antisocial (4)
9. Lacks goals	Behavioral (3)
10. Irresponsible	Behavioral (3)
11. Adolescent antisocial behavior	Antisocial (4)
12. Adult antisocial behavior	Antisocial (4)

Note: PCL:SV = *Screening Version of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (Hart et al., 1995)

two-way mixed effects (absolute agreement) model, was $ICC_1 = .69$, indicating moderate agreement. After making independent PCL:SV ratings, the raters discussed each case and made a set of final consensus ratings. All subsequent analyses were based on these consensus PCL:SV ratings. The effective reliability of these consensus ratings was $ICC_2 = .82$.

Acquaintanceship Between Perpetrator and Victim

The two raters collected information regarding the relationship between perpetrators and victims. We then classified the cases into three groups. Close acquaintanceship included cases in which victims were prior sexual intimates or family members of perpetrators. Moderate acquaintanceship included cases in which victims had employment, professional, or casual (i.e., non-intimate and non-familial) social relationships with perpetrators. Low acquaintanceship included cases in which perpetrators were unknown to victims prior to the onset of stalking (i.e., perpetrators were acquainted with victims through media, or delusionally believed they had a relationship with victims). The raters agreed on the classification of 59 cases: 33 cases were classified as close acquaintanceship, 22 cases as moderate acquaintanceship, and 4 cases as low acquaintanceship. In 2 cases, the information was insufficient for reliable categorization.

Stalking-Related Factors

The SAM is a structured professional judgment instrument which includes three domains of factors: Nature of Stalking Behavior, Perpetrator Risk Factors, and Victim Vulnerability Factors. Each of these domains contains 10 individual factors (see Table 2). The presence of each factor, both recently and in the past, is coded on a 3-point scale (*Absent*, *Possibly or partially present*, *Present*).

Evaluators then consider the relevance of these factors with respect to future stalking using scenario planning methods.

The SAM factors were identified by a systematic review of the scientific and professional literature on stalking. It has undergone extensive pilot testing in Canada and Sweden in law enforcement and forensic mental health settings (Kropp et al., 2008a; Kropp, Hart, & Lyon 2008b), but as yet has not been the focus of published validation research.

In the present study, the same two raters who made PCL:SV ratings also coded the lifetime presence of stalking-related factors using the SAM based on clinical records. (The raters also rated the relevance of each risk factor, identified scenarios of stalking, developed risk management plans, and made conclusory judgment, but for the purpose of this research we used the SAM simply as a means of coding factors and so analyzed only ratings of the presence of risk factors.) The Nature of Stalking Behavior and Victim Vulnerability Factors were coded primarily from police and corrections records; the Perpetrator Risk Factors were coded primarily from mental health records. We converted raters' presence codes into numeric scores for individual factors (0 = *Absent*, 1 = *Possibly or partially present*, and 2 = *Present*), and then calculated three domain scores by summing the 10 items within each domain. The interrater reliability for total scores within each domain, as indexed by intraclass correlation coefficients calculated using a two-way mixed effects (absolute agreement) model, was $ICC_1 = .77$ for Nature of Stalking, $ICC_1 = .68$ for Perpetrator Risk Factors, and $ICC_1 = .63$ for Victim Vulnerability Factors, again indicating moderate interrater agreement. After making independent SAM ratings, the raters discussed each case and made a set of final consensus ratings, which were used in all subsequent analyses. The effective reliability of these consensus ratings was $ICC_2 = .87$ for Nature of Stalking, $ICC_2 = .81$ for Perpetrator Risk Factors, and $ICC_1 = .77$ for Victim Vulnerability Factors.

Table 2 SAM domains and factors

Nature of stalking factors	Perpetrator risk factors	Victim vulnerability factors
N1. Communicates about victim	P1. Angry	V1. Inconsistent behavior toward perpetrator
N2. Communicates with victim	P2. Obsessed	V2. Inconsistent attitude toward perpetrator
N3. Approaches victim	P3. Irrational	V3. Inadequate access to resources
N4. Direct contact with victim	P4. Unrepentant	V4. Unsafe living situation
N5. Intimidates victim	P5. Antisocial lifestyle	V5. Problems caring for dependents
N6. Threatens victim	P6. Intimate relationship problems	V6. Intimate relationship problems
N7. Violent toward victim	P7. Non-intimate relationship problems	V7. Non-intimate relationship problems
N8. Stalking is persistent	P8. Distressed	V8. Distressed
N9. Stalking is escalating	P9. Substance use problems	V9. Substance use problems
N10. Stalking involves supervision violations	P10. Employment and financial problems	V10. Employment and financial problems

Note: SAM = *Guidelines for Stalking Assessment and Management* (Kropp et al., 2008a)

RESULTS

How Common are Psychopathic Traits in Stalkers?

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of PCL:SV total scores in the sample. Total scores ranged from 2 to 18, with $M = 8.13$ (95%CI = 9.01–7.25) and $SD = 3.50$. The mean score was substantially lower than that for other forensic psychiatric outpatients reported in the test manual (Hart et al., 1995), and also lower than that reported in past research on stalkers (Hart, 1998; cited in Kropp et al., 2002; Reavis et al., in press). According to the test manual, the distribution of scores observed in the present sample most closely resembled those of civil psychiatric patients. The distribution of facet scores was as follows: Interpersonal, $M = 1.02$, $SD = 1.03$; Affective, $M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.44$; Behavioral, $M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.45$; and Anti-social, $M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.37$.

With respect to the prevalence of diagnoses of psychopathy, only one case exceeded the recommended diagnostic cut-off score of ≥ 18 . This corresponds to a lifetime prevalence rate of about 1.67% (95%CI = 0.04–9.65%).

Is Psychopathy Associated with the Acquaintanceship Between Stalking Perpetrators and Victims?

The distribution of PCL:SV total scores in the three acquaintanceship groups is illustrated in Fig. 2. There was no association between psychopathy and acquaintanceship.

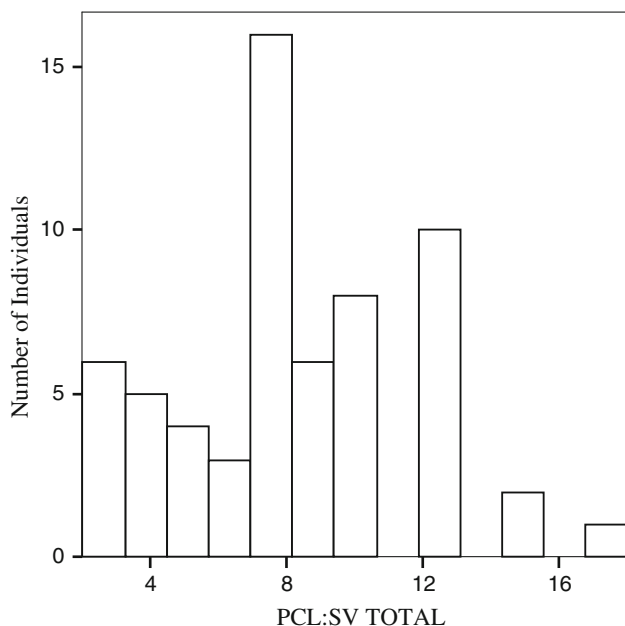


Fig. 1 Distribution of PCL:SV scores

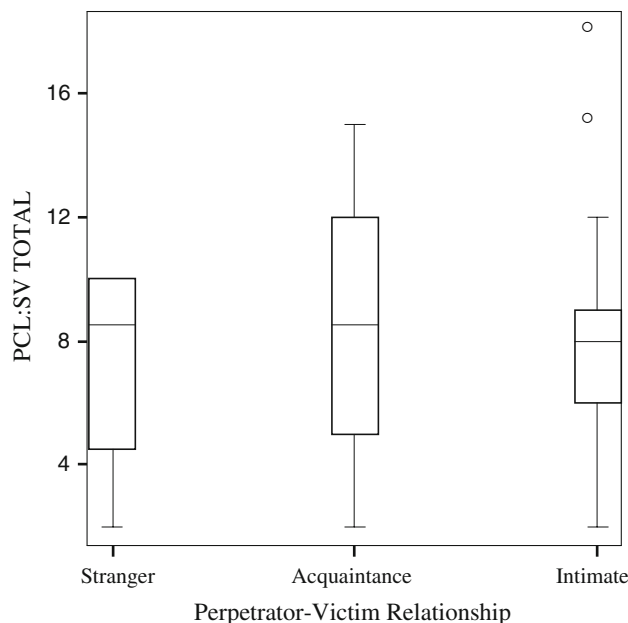


Fig. 2 PCL:SV scores as a function of victim–perpetrator acquaintanceship

Overall, the moderate acquaintanceship group had slightly higher PCL:SV total scores ($M = 8.23$, $SD = 3.88$) than did the high acquaintanceship ($M = 8.00$, $SD = 3.29$) or low acquaintanceship ($M = 7.25$, $SD = 3.78$) groups. We conducted nonparametric analyses to test the difference between the three groups with respect to their median PCL:SV total score; there were no significant differences, $\chi^2(2) = 1.11$, *n.s.*

Next, we examined differences across the acquaintanceship groups with respect to PCL:SV facet scores. Neither visual inspection of the distributions nor nonparametric analyses (median tests) indicated meaningful differences between groups.

Is Psychopathy Associated with Other Stalking-Related Risk Factors?

We examined the association between psychopathy and other stalking-related factors in two different ways. First, we calculated the bivariate correlations between PCL:SV scores and SAM ratings. We were interested primarily in the correlations between PCL:SV total scores and SAM domain scores, but for the sake of completeness we also calculated correlations between the four PCL:SV facets and the individual SAM factors. Second, we conducted follow-up multivariate canonical (i.e., set) correlation analyses between the PCL:SV domain scores and the SAM factors within each domain. These analyses control for redundancy among variables within the two sets, and also permit calculation of the proportion of variance in one set

of variables accounted for by the other set of variables. The purpose of conducting the multivariate analyses was to assist interpretation of the pattern of bivariate correlations.

Bivariate Correlations

The bivariate correlations between the PCL:SV and SAM ratings are presented in Table 3. As the table indicates, PCL:SV total scores were positively and significantly correlated with the ratings for all three domains of the SAM. The highest correlation ($r = .51$) was with the domain of Perpetrator Risk Factors. Looking at the

individual SAM factors, PCL:SV total scores were correlated positively and significantly with 2 of 10 Nature of Stalking Factors, 3 of 10 Perpetrator Risk Factors, and 3 of 10 Victim Vulnerability Factors. There were no significant negative correlations. The number of statistically significant correlations with individual risk factors is noteworthy; 8 were observed, but only 1 or 2 would be expected on the basis of chance.

Looking at the PCL:SV facet scores, all were positively and significantly correlated with ratings in at least one domain of the SAM, and each domain of the SAM was correlated positively and significantly with scores on at

Table 3 Correlation between PCL:SV and SAM ratings

SAM domains and risk factors	PCL:SV total score	PCL:SV facet scores			
		1	2	3	4
Nature of stalking	.29*	.18	.36**	.31*	.15
N1	-.09	.03	.09	.02	-.11
N2	.20	.22	.30*	.19	.04
N3	.13	.14	.19	.09	.14
N4	.12	.03	.34**	.18	.16
N5	-.15	-.09	-.25	-.07	-.00
N6	.14	.05	.02	.11	.08
N7	-.06	-.01	-.04	-.09	-.03
N8	.21	-.01	.42**	.32*	-.05
N9	.34**	.19	.36**	.36**	.04
N10	.41**	.21	.21	.22	.30*
Perpetrator risk	.51**	.29*	.45**	.16	.26*
P1	.15	.14	-.04	-.01	.30*
P2	.32*	.20	.40**	.16	.17
P3	.23	.13	.13	.15	-.03
P4	.38**	.31*	.52**	.05	.25
P5	-.03	-.14	.18	.08	-.13
P6	.13	-.17	.34**	.16	.07
P7	-.03	-.10	-.07	.08	-.08
P8	.12	.18	.06	-.06	.15
P9	.20	.04	.19	.11	.05
P10	.29*	.24	.11	-.00	.24
Victim vulnerability	.29*	.35**	.23	-.08	.49**
V1	.20	.21	.08	.11	.19
V2	.26*	.20	.22	.02	.39**
V3	.44**	.47**	.34**	.16	.38**
V4	.05	.08	-.10	-.05	.17
V5	-.01	-.02	-.08	-.14	.21
V6	.42**	.47**	.38**	.08	.51**
V7	.19	.30*	.29*	-.16	.31*
V8	.22	.30*	.32*	-.07	.25
V9	-	-	-	-	-
V10	.08	.20	.11	-.17	.37**

Note: “-”, no variance in ratings

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 4 Canonical correlation analysis: association between PCL:SV facets and SAM factor domains

	Nature of stalking		Perpetrator risk		Victim vulnerability	
	Loading	Coefficient	Loading	Coefficient	Loading	Coefficient
PCL:SV						
Facet 1	.21	-.25	-.20	-.63	.84	.53
Facet 2	.88	.89	.77	1.02	.80	.53
Facet 3	.63	.45	.34	.21	.18	-.12
Facet 4	.13	-.09	-.09	-.17	.62	.25
SAM						
1	.02	-.09	-.23	-.45	.28	.15
2	.41	.08	.38	.17	.45	-.23
3	.21	.05	.25	-.03	.78	.51
4	.48	.51	.43	.22	.11	.33
5	-.24	-.49	.45	.24	-.00	.16
6	.15	.54	.68	.62	.84	.55
7	-.07	.00	.30	.00	.57	.40
8	.75	.54	-.15	-.02	.58	.18
9	.70	.15	.42	.48	-	-
10	.38	.03	-.07	-.19	.35	-.26

Note: “-”, item omitted due to lack of variance. Values of .40 or greater were considered to be important for the interpretive process

least 2 of 4 PCL:SV facets. With respect to individual SAM risk factors, there were a number of positive and significant correlations with PCL:SV facet scores: 6 of 40 correlations with Nature of Stalking Factors; 6 of 40 with the Perpetrator Risk Factors; and 12 of 40 Victim Vulnerability Factors. For each domain, only two statistically significant correlations would be expected on the basis of chance. Facet 1 (Interpersonal) of the PCL:SV was correlated positively and significantly with 5 SAM risk factors; Facet 2 (Affective), with 11 risk factors; Facet 3 (Behavioral), with 2 risk factors; and Facet 4 (Antisocial), with 7 risk factors. For each facet, only 1 or 2 statistically significant correlations would be expected on the basis of chance. There were no statistically significant negative correlations.

Canonical (Set) Correlations

Interpreting the pattern of bivariate correlations is complicated by the large number of correlations and the redundancy within the sets of PCL:SV items and SAM risk factors. To assist interpretation of the pattern of bivariate correlations, we conducted three canonical correlation analyses to examine the multivariate association between the 4 PCL:SV facet scores and the items within the three domains of the SAM. Due to the relatively small sample size, the canonical correlation analyses should be considered exploratory.

The canonical correlation analyses indicated that PCL:SV facet scores accounted for 10% of the variance in the Nature of Stalking factors, $\chi^2(40) = 56.74$, $p < .05$; 8% of the variance in the Perpetrator Risk factors, $\chi^2(40) = 63.57$, $p < .01$; and 13% of the variance in the victim vulnerability factors, $\chi^2(36) = 52.13$, $p < .04$. In

each analysis, only the first of four canonical correlations was statistically significant, $p < .05$: For Nature of Stalking, $R^c = .70$; for Perpetrator Risk, $R^c = .71$; and for Victim Vulnerability, $R^c = .71$. The corresponding standardized loadings and coefficients, which are used to interpret the relative importance of individual variables, are presented in Table 4. Focusing on the loadings and coefficients for the PCL:SV facets, Facet 2 (Affective) was most strongly and consistently associated with the three domains of factors in the SAM.

DISCUSSION

This study found that psychopathy was not prevalent in a sample of adult male stalkers attending a forensic psychiatric outpatient clinic. Indeed, the mean level of psychopathic traits and the prevalence of psychopathy were substantially lower than typically observed in non-stalking forensic psychiatric patients, including those from the same outpatient clinic. In general terms, this finding is consistent with that of the few studies conducted to date, notably Reavis et al. (in press).

Contrary to Reavis et al. (in press), we did not observe an association between psychopathy and perpetrator–victim acquaintanceship. It may be that there are other factors that must be controlled before the nature and magnitude of the association between psychopathy and perpetrator–victim acquaintanceship becomes clear. One important factor to consider is the presence of erotomanic delusions, which in our experience tends to be associated with lower levels of psychopathic traits but also low perpetrator–victim

acquaintanceship; if this is true, then the relative frequency of erotomanic delusions in a given sample may substantially influence the observed bivariate association between psychopathy and perpetrator–victim acquaintanceship. Another factor to consider is the motivation for stalking. It may be that the association between psychopathy and perpetrator–victim acquaintanceship is most clear when focusing on stalking that is motivated by anger over a perceived slight or injustice. Based on our experience, it appears that psychopathic stalkers are most likely to target victims of low-to-moderate acquaintanceship when angry, whereas non-psychopathic stalkers are more likely to target victims of high acquaintanceship (e.g., family members, former intimates) or, if they suffer from erotomanic delusions, very low acquaintanceship victims (e.g., strangers or public figures; see Meloy, Sheridan, & Hoffmann, 2008).

Finally, we found that psychopathic traits (as measured by the PCL:SV) were associated with a wide range of stalking risk factors (as measured by the SAM). For example, people with psychopathic traits tended to show escalation in the frequency, severity and/or diversity of their stalking, they were noticeably unrepentant regarding their actions, and they selected victims with financial or employment problems—factors often associated with the severity of future stalking, according to some research (Meloy et al., 2008). The psychopathic traits most strongly associated with stalking risk factors were those associated with deficient affective experience, as measured by Facet 2 of the PCL:SV.

Overall, the results of our research suggest that the presence of psychopathic traits was associated with what could be summarized as “boldness and coldness” in stalkers. Psychopathic stalkers were highly preoccupied with their victims, escalated their stalking behavior, and targeted highly vulnerable victims. They were unlikely to be “love-sick” (i.e., due to unrequited love) or romantically inept, and were not motivated by strong emotional attachment to their victims. Their stalking did not reflect efforts to establish or maintain close, positive relationships with victims; nor did it reflect separation protest or intense personal distress over the dissolution of a close relationship. It may be that psychopathic stalkers were motivated by status, using stalking as a means of (re-) establishing a sense of agency or interpersonal dominance and control, in many cases following a narcissistic injury, perceived as solely caused by the victim.¹ In essence, psychopathic

stalkers may have used stalking as a form of bullying to enhance their sense of self (Hart, 1998; more generally, see Baumeister, 1997) and also to gratify sadistic desires (Meloy, 1988; Meloy & Meloy, 2002). This is consistent with the view that psychopaths are more likely to engage in violence that is predatory (instrumental) rather than affective (emotional) in nature (Meloy, 1988, 2006b). The etymology of “stalking”—originally used in relationship to hunting, predating by centuries its contemporary use to describe a crime among humans—suggests the term may be especially apt when describing the relatively unemotional, predatory pursuit behavior of the psychopathic stalker.²

Taken together with the findings of Reavis et al. (in press), the current findings have some important implications for mental health, law enforcement, and corrections professionals involved in the violence risk assessment (also known as threat assessment or threat management) of stalkers. The presence of prominent psychopathic traits in perpetrators suggests that professionals should pay close attention to the potential for the stalking to escalate to include instrumental violence and serious physical harm, the need for management strategies to address possible status- and ego-enhancing motivations for violence, and the need to deliver services to vulnerable victims. It also suggests that evaluators should be very cautious when considering the likely effectiveness of risk management strategies, as offenders with psychopathy are more likely than others to be noncompliant with or nonresponsive to supervision and intervention programs (Hemphill & Hart, 2002). Also, professionals should be mindful that risk management strategies may be perceived by psychopathic stalkers as provocative and may actually increase risk, so it may be advisable to rely as much as possible on strategies that are unobtrusive or allow the perpetrator to “save face” (Meloy, 2000).

Further research is needed to clarify the association between stalking and psychopathy. In particular, we need more direct research on motivations for stalking associated with psychopathy, and on the stalking victimology associated with psychopathy. The use of larger samples would be helpful, permitting more (and more reliable) multivariate analyses. The use of more diverse samples would allow investigation of the extent to which gender may complicate the role of psychopathy in stalking. It would also be helpful

¹ One of us has consulted on a number of cases in which a psychopathic male has married a wealthy female, and years later, when she attempts to extract herself from the relationship, he becomes quite dangerous. A common theme in these cases was that the psychopathic males stalked their victims to intimidate and control them, as well as retain their wealth, at the same time showing a remarkable lack of affectional bonds (positive or negative) to their former partners or any children of the relationships.

² It is important to emphasize, however, that although psychopathic stalkers may be less likely than other stalkers to experience stormy, negative emotions, this does not imply that they are incapable of experiencing or perceiving emotion. For example, psychopathic stalkers may be quite capable of observing fear in their victims and being gratified by this observation, even if the observation does not lead them to experience a strong empathic response (Book, Quinsey, & Langford, 2007; Meloy, 1988).

if the assessment of psychopathy and stalking risk factors was based on direct interviews with perpetrators or victims, in addition to a review of clinical records. Finally, it would be helpful to conduct prospective studies to examine the role of psychopathic traits in stalking recidivism and any moderating effects of stalking on risk management strategies.

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