

Psychopathic Tendencies Related to SES Across Nations

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Abstract

Psychopathic tendencies, including callous affect, lack of empathy, and criminality, have been shown to increase during high stress situations and low stress situations. When compared to socioeconomic statuses (SES), individuals in a lower SES and individuals in a higher SES would show higher psychopathic tendencies than those in moderate SES. Data from the International Sexuality Description Project (ISDP-2) showed that this prediction was true only for the Criminality subscale of psychopathy and only in wealthier nations, like the United States, Canada, and Germany. The remaining subscales of psychopathy and poorer nations only showed high levels of psychopathy in lower SES groups. The current findings represent a first step in examining the relationship between SES and psychopathy across cultures. There may be something inherent to SES, when compared to other stress-related situations, that encourages psychopathic personalities among both the rich and the poor of wealthier nations.

Introduction

- Psychopaths are described using several characteristics: Charming, intelligent, unreliable, irresponsible, self-centered, emotionally shallow, lacking in empathy, and criminality
- There are two factors of psychopathy
 - Factor 1: The emotional aspects (callous affect, self-centeredness, etc.)
 - Highly heritable
 - Factor 2: The criminal or aggressive behavior (criminality, unreliability, etc.)
 - Influenced heavily by the environment
- These characteristics have been known to increase and thrive in high-stress situations, such as low SES, high infant mortality, etc.
- These same characteristics have also been documented in individuals in low stress situations, where they already have abundant resources

Hypothesis 1: Individuals in low SES would report higher levels of psychopathy than individuals in middle-class SES.

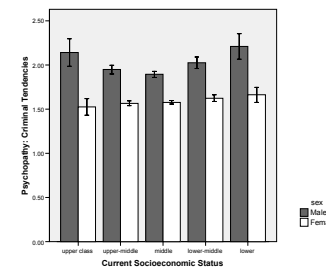
Hypothesis 2: Individuals in high SES would also report higher levels of psychopathy than individuals in middle-class SES.

Methods

- The data was collected with the **International Sexuality Description Project (ISDP-2)**
 - Conducted in 2005
 - Consists of anonymous survey responses from mostly college students, though some responses were from the community or involved Internet samples
 - Completed by approximately 36,000 individuals across 58 nations
- Psychopathy was measured within the ISDP-2 using the **Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (SRP-III)**
 - The SRP-III has 4 subscales: Interpersonal Manipulation, Callous Affect, Criminal Tendencies, Erratic Lifestyle
- SES was measured using a self-report scale
 - Most nations chose from Upper Class, Upper-Middle Class, Middle Class, Lower-Middle Class, or Lower Class

Results

Within high GDP nations, such as the United States, both hypotheses were true, but only with the **Criminality** subscale

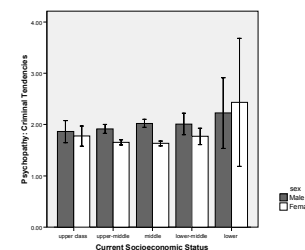


• Men's psychopathy scores generally showed a positive correlation with SES on the other subscales

• Women's psychopathy scores showed little variation across SES

- Though, on the Callous Affect subscale, women in the middle-class SES were marginally higher than both low and high SES

• In nations with low GDP, such as Bangladesh, China, or Nigeria, high psychopathy was generally only correlated with low SES



Discussion

- This represents the first step in examining the relationship between SES and psychopathy. There may be something inherent in SES that causes high psychopathy levels.

Further Research

- Are the predicted trends replicated across foraging or horticultural societies?
- Are the trends seen across different stress factors (familial, neighborhood, social stresses, etc.)? We predict psychopathy will only be associated with higher stress in those situations.

References

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