

The characteristics and issues of psychopaths psychology essay



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There are characters in the society whose habits and moral behaviors are something out of the ordinary. These individuals exist in each and every society. They have the propensity to engage in certain inhuman activities without being empathetic in any way. The cruel acts they commit do not seem at all cruel to them and most of the time, they like shifting the blame from them as the perpetrators of inhuman activities to the victim who has suffered. These characters are called psychopaths and they are in each society. The essay that follows intends to give detailed information regarding the issue of psychopaths. Psychopaths are there in the society and there is no denying, the best thing that can be done is to identify them at an early stage before they engage in committing hideous crimes such as brutal manslaughter.

A psychopath is an individual who has the tendency of manipulating people and using violence in addition to intimidation in order to gain control over others so as to find satisfaction in their own needs. These individuals may be intelligent and at the same time portray high levels of charisma but one thing that distinguishes them is that they have a chronic inability to register feelings of guilt within them, neither are they remorseful or anxious about the actions that they have committed. To them it seems almost normal to do commit acts. Psychopathy is the disorder where an individual has a personality disorder that is associated with selfishness and ruthlessness and to top it all of the individuals lack the ability to feel guilty of acts committed and neither are they empathetic (Hart and Hare 1997).

In the societal sense, psychopaths are more of predators who use charm and manipulation to achieve ruthless and devious acts. It is in their character to

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lack a sense of conscience. These individuals are usually self-centered and in order to achieve their own selfish gains they abuse innocent people.

Psychopaths should not be confused with psychotic people since it might prove difficult to differentiate the two disorders. While psychotics are usually crazy individuals, psychopaths are usually conscious about what they are doing and the possible consequences that would result from their actions. Before they embark on a certain action, they make resolutions and consider them rationally before exercising liberated choices (Hare, Cooke, and Hart 1999). The psychopaths do not have bouts of hallucinations and neither do they go through feelings of anxiety the same way that psychotics do. It is a bit difficult in distinguishing the difference between psychopathy and the normal antisocial personality disorder. As for the antisocial disorder, it formed due to a combination of several unsociable, immoral, and scandalous behaviors. However, as for the psychopathic disorder, it is a problem that arises due to the personality traits of an individual and the behaviors registered by these individuals does not necessarily have to be criminal behavior. Usually, psychopaths hang at the border of being criminals but this can never come to realization because there are people with psychopathic characters and they are have never engaged in criminal activities. In fact, some of them enter into respected careers such as doctors. Nevertheless, it is true that most criminals who are serving jail sentences are psychopaths in one way or another.

Making a distinction between an individual who is psychopathic or not is difficult and most people cannot reach this conclusion. Some of the subtypes of psychopathy are:” abrasive, covetous, disingenuous, explosive,

malevolent, malignant, risk-taking, spineless, tyrannical and unprincipled". Though these are just some of the major subtypes of psychopathy, they all result to the formation of varying traits in different individuals and therefore, it becomes difficult to determine what kind of psychopath a person really is. Some people might try to link these subtypes with people they know but this is not right because as much as an individual might have some psychopathic traits, it does not necessarily mean that they are psychopaths. In fact, scores of individuals usually possess psychopathic traits that may range from an individual having one or two psychopathic traits.

Understanding the different types of psychopaths may help in identifying psychopaths in the society and understand that psychopathic traits differ with the different personalities that different people have. The first kind of psychopath is the unprincipled psychopath. This type of psychopath usually has a self-absorbed character and do not care about the needs and wants of other people. They take pleasure in preying on the weak people in the society and are delighted to see these weak people angry. These people do not fear harm that may be aimed at them while gratifying their own needs; as a result, they are not afraid of threats of punishment that may be aimed at them. Other types of psychopaths are the disingenuous, those that are histrionic and always want attention. They usually result to manipulation once their strong desire for attention diminishes. They are deceitful and calculating. Another dangerous kind of psychopath is the covetous types who think that the world owes them something. This makes them to be always envious of other people's possessions and this is accompanied by feelings of retribution. Other kinds of psychopaths are the malevolent and the tyrannical

who prove to be the most dangerous kind. The malevolent are vindictive and have a tendency to believe that any display of good will by individuals is a plot aimed at deceiving them. Most cases of murder are committed by these types of psychopaths since they tend to be fearless and they also have a tendency to lack the feelings of guilt after committing an offense. Serial killers also fall under this category of individuals. The tyrannical psychopaths tend to be frightening because the weaknesses of others trigger them into becoming intimidators and this offers them a chance of attacking the weak. They take pleasure in seeing the agony that people go through as a result of the pain that the psychopaths have inflicted on them. These types are driven into these violent acts because of the fear that they have that other individuals will identify the inner insecurities they have and at the same time, they usually have serious cases of low self-esteem.

There are varying etiologies of psychology that researchers of the disorder have come up with. It is common knowledge that psychopathic traits are as a result of a mental disorder. However, sociobiologists have attributed the chances of an individual being psychopathic to genetics. This means that genes passed down from one generation to the other are a contributive factor to the fact that psychopathy might be something that is in a family. Genetic factors that determine the varying personalities that different individuals have contribute greatly to psychopathic traits in individuals. It is therefore agreed that psychopathic behaviors are not necessarily caused by mental disorders but by genetics that determine the personality traits of different individuals.

Another cause of psychopathy is attributed to brain dysfunction. This means that for some people the slow developing rate of the brain can lead to psychopathic characters. Psychopathy may in this case be attributed to delaying that might occur during brain development. Biologists attribute psychopathic traits individuals as situations that are caused due to brain dysfunction or damage that resulted to the development of these traits (Sturup 1952).

Another view that most people agree with is the early adversary, which posits that that psychopathic traits in some individuals is caused by the poor relationships and upbringing that an individual had during the early stages of life, which is childhood and adolescence. This leads to psychological traumas that are caused while a person is still growing. This is accredited to lack of proper parenting skills, which are coupled with conflicts that occur in the house and the fact that such homes lack the warmth that families should provide to growing children. The child might not have personality disorders but exposure to this kind of environment creates an opportunity for a child to develop psychopathic traits. This disorders that begin while a child is still young and in adolescence stage if not dealt with while the child is young may cause the child to grow into an adult with the same personality disorders that were created due to a hostile environment at home. Once these personality disorders are dragged up to adulthood, psychopathic disorders might already been developed in an individual.

Psychopathic behaviors can also be attributed to a problem that individuals might have due to weak inhibitions that make them have little or no

resistance in committing a crime and this contributes greatly to an individual
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being a psychopath due to the impulsive behavior that is caused by the weak inhibition system. Another problem that is associated with psychopathological traits is the difficulty in cognition abilities that some psychopaths have. They fail to make clear judgments on things that are spoken aloud and reading actions. This causes them to have confusions while trying to assess the emotional attributes that people associate with particular events (Richards 1999).

The discoveries that have been made regarding the origin of psychopaths can give people in depth knowledge in trying to understand where the psychopathic individuals come from and what triggers them to engage in activities that cause people to refer to as psychopathic actions. The fact that some genetics is a contributive factor in the formation of psychopathological traits is something that can be used in ensuring that the psychopathic traits do not manifest themselves fully such that individuals result to being violent people who are capable of being serial killers. Personality traits that are passed down from one generation to the next contribute towards the presence of psychopathic traits in individuals. It is therefore a guarantee that most human beings have one or two personality traits that are associated to psychopathy. However, what makes some individuals develop the psychopathic nature while others might have the personality traits but they do not become psychopaths (Hare 1999).

This comes down to the family exposure and the kind of environment that an individual grows up in. once an individual has personality traits that can result to psychopathic traits, and at the same time they are brought up in an abusive family where the members are always in a conflict or have negative

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attitudes towards each other. Psychopathic traits can be triggered and they develop slowly due to exposure in an environment that nurtures the development of the psychopathic traits. Parents should therefore be careful with what they do and the way they bring their children up because the occurrences that occur in a household have great psychological impact to the growth of a child. A good family background can inhibit any form of psychopathic traits that may have been created in a child had the child been raised in an abusive household. This gives psychologists greater insight at discovering the root cause of psychopathic traits in individuals and early detecting of these characters can help in establishing a counseling method that can be used to solve any personality disorders before they result to the formation of psychopathological traits (Maxmen and Ward 1995).

There are theories that have been created in order to understand whether psychopaths are born as psychopaths or are they created due to the environment around them. In a study that was conducted in order to determine this, after research was carried out in New Zealand among 1000 young boys, it was determined that for every human being there is a gene that is linked to antisocial behavior and this gene has high likelihood of generating to criminality. This is made highly possible if a person is brought up in an environment where conflict is present and parents are abusive. This clearly shows that nature and the system of nurturing has direct contribution to the personality traits of a human being that leads to the development of psychopathic traits. Research carried out provides evidence that nature or genetics account for the presence of psychopathic traits in an individual by

50% while the environment determines the rest that the individual is brought up in (Hart and Hare 1997).

There is enough reliable evidence that shows a direct correlation between psychopathy and neurological issues that are genetically passed down from parents to their children. Studies that have been conducted related to psychopathy provide the following information about the nature of psychopaths. It has been discovered that psychopaths do not have the normal physiological reactions that the average human being has in the case of fear, which normally provides constraints towards certain human behaviors. Such people do not experience things like increased heartbeats, muscle tension and the like and neither do they have emotional connections to things such as love and death (Cox 1998). This implies that their method of interpreting emotional stimuli is different from the way normal people process such things. To prove that psychopathic traits are hereditary, a study conducted proves that if twins are identical and one of them has psychopathic traits, then the other is likely to have stronger psychopathic traits than the standard psychopaths are. Another evidence of psychopathic traits being hereditary is that if a child is adopted into a decent family where there are no conflicts, the child might have psychopathic traits that they acquired from their biological parents. In addition to this research carried out in brains show that the numbers of brain chemicals in psychopaths varies from that of people who are not psychopaths. These studies are clear evidences that nature plays an important role in the likelihood that an individual will have psychopathic traits. Heredity sure does play a role in the psychopathic traits found in human beings. It might be said that some

people are born with personality traits that are sure indicators of psychopathy (Paris 1998).

Nurturing also plays a significant role in the life of an individual and determining whether the individual will be a psychopath or not. Existing practice already shows that a kid who was brought up in an abusive and traumatizing environment has high chances of also being abusive. Being the nature of psychopaths that they usually know how to manipulate people, it has not been left out by them to gain sympathy from other people after they have committed crimes that this was caused due to the unstable life they had while growing up. However, it is not always true that psychopaths have to come from an abusive background because a good number of them also comes from loving homes where there was enough nurturing provided for by the parents. In addition, many abused children do not necessarily end up being psychopaths when they grow up (Hare 1991).

It is true that abuse has high chances of making psychopathic traits in an individual worse but this does not mean that abuse can cause an individual to be psychopathic. Nevertheless, the kind of environment that a person is brought up in can help in determining the nature, which the psychopathic traits will be manifested. An individual who has psychopathic traits and is raised in an environment where there is no abuse and love is in plenty, they are likely to become romantic users, untrustworthy businesspersons or criminals who are not violent. On the other hand, those people with psychopathic traits that are brought up in abusive and neglectful homes tend to commit hideous crimes such as being serial killers and violent criminals.

Social forces are another theory that has been used by criminologists to explain psychopathy. The social forces do not consider the abuse that an individual receives at home alone but some support generated shows that some cultures are prone to have a higher number of psychopaths than others. It is true that some individuals are born with the innate quality of having psychopathic traits but the societies in which they live determine whether this traits will be suppressed or not. For example, the degree to which psychopathic traits are expressed in America vary from those in Japan in which America leads by 4% while Japan has about 0.03-0.14% (Black 1999).

Robert Hare came up with an instrument that would be used to determine whether the entire male inmates in jail had psychopathic characters. It was already clear that not all the prisoners were psychopathic but it would be good to determine the percentage of prisoners who were psychopathic. The instrument took time to come up with because they needed to devise one that was psychopathic and the other one who was not. Robert finally came up with the device and once it was put to practice, it proved to be a clearly usable device and it was called PCL-R. It proved to be reliable in determining whether a character was psychopathic or not. This was once it was tested on the male inmates. Due to its reliability and effectiveness with the male inmates, they decided to make another instrument that would detect psychopathological traits in females. After this, another one needed to be devised to find out the psychopathological traits in children so as to determine preventive measures that would prevent them from being psychopaths in future. The same instrument that is used for the male

inmates was the same, which was used for the female. Another one was devised for children, which is called PVL: YV (youth version). The instrument is just as reliable as the one, which was devised for the adults. The instruments are reliable to check the incidences of psychopathological traits in males, females and the version that was created for the children. Both instruments have yielded consistent results and have proved to be highly effective.

Various strategies are used for the treatment of psychopaths such as the use of group therapy, physiotherapy and other insight-oriented programs. Most psychopaths are treated depending on the type of psychopath traits they have. These therapies are aimed at slowly transforming psychopaths from their personality disorders that cause them to be psychopaths. The same method cannot be used in the treatment of two different subtypes of psychopathological traits because the personality disorders that cause one is completely differ from the other (Cooke, Forth, and Robert, 1995).

Though therapy has been going for some time, it is not effective enough. This is due to the fact that most psychopaths are hard to change and even when a psychopath seeks help; it is usually with the aim of manipulating others so that they can find their own personal gratifications. They might look for treatment when they know that they want to be on parole or to be allowed a period of probation. It therefore highly unlikely to determine when a psychopathy has changed and has had effective treatment. One negative thing about treating a psychopath is that they gain information that they continue to use so that they can continue manipulating their victims once the "treatment" is over. These therapies open the minds of these

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psychopathic offenders such that they gain more knowledge regarding the human mind, which gives them greater opportunities of devising more cunning schemes of manipulating human beings. The information they gain during therapy most of the time they do not use to help in their personal treatment but instead they use it enhance human manipulation. Due to the uncertainty associated with psychopaths and their trust worth regarding treatment, it has proven to be a difficult exercise to carry out since psychiatrist are not themselves sure whether the psychopaths are lying or are taking the treatment seriously (Benjamin1993).

In the past periods treatments, the procedures that were adopted for treatment were not fully assessed and this caused the treatment to be less defined. This coupled with the fact that follow ups made after the psychopaths have received treatment have not been done adequately in addition to the fact that there were no control groups that had been formulated, this factors show that truly the certainty with which the past methods and their effectiveness cannot be reached at. Recent integrations show that there are more constructive approaches that are being employed. These approaches are being applied in the treatment of psychopaths. Most psychopaths have the tendency of being self-absorbed and almost everything revolves around them, the treatment of psychopaths thus involves giving them lessons on rules of how human beings should live with each other (Hare, Cooke, and Hart, 1999).

Treating psychopaths involves transference and vice versa. Treatment involves treating psychopaths to become aware of emotions surrounding them and other people and how to respond to these emotions for normalcy.

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This is because most psychopaths are not related to emotions and this proves to be the core point where most psychopaths have personality disorders. Treatment for the psychopaths is slow though it is of importance to make a critical examination of differences in their own effectiveness. The modern methods of treatment prove to be more effective than the old methods.

Psychopaths are dangerous people if left to be just like that in the society. In every society, there has to be psychopaths because it has been proven that there are certain personality traits that are transmitted in genes from parent to offspring. Almost all human beings have one or two psychopathic traits but they are not necessarily psychopaths. The chances that a person will become a violent criminal and a psychopath is sometimes determined by the kind of family they had when they were still growing. If an individual with psychopathic traits was brought up in an unstable and abusive home, then chances are high that the person will be a violent criminal. Therefore, it is best for parents to provide good peaceful homes for their children to prevent the high chances of psychopathy.