

Egyetemi doktori (PhD) értekezés tézisei

Examination of Callous/Unemotional Traits among Adolescent Boys at Schools and Reformatory

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Aim of the thesis and background

Conduct problems in childhood and adolescents mean a huge challenge for parents, teachers and professionals dealing with children. Therefore in the management of conduct problems we often meet new approaches which contain useful elements for practising professionals.

In the last years there are more and more researches about psychopathic traits in childhood and adolescents. Core of the child and adolescents psychopathy are callous unemotional traits. These traits means a unique emotional (lack of guilty, shallow emotions) and interpersonal (proactive aggression, irresponsibility) style which appears at the early years and can be stable during childhood and adolescents.

It seems that we can distinct a group among children and adolescents who show characteristics similar to adult psychopaths (antisocial behavior, reward oriented response style, lack of the avoid learning, lack of behavior inhibition, sensation seeking and at least average intelligence). This group can be defined most precisely with callous unemotional traits, the manifestation of above mentioned psychopathic traits depends on the presence of the callous unemotional traits. Core the child and adolescents psychopathy is the callous unemotional traits.

Callous unemotional traits are observed with reward dependence and with insensitivity for punishment. Presence of callous unemotional traits was positive relationship with the results of scales measured sensation seeking and venturesomeness. Among children characterized with higher callous unemotional traits is more typical below average anxiety level than children characterized with lower callous unemotional traits. Furthermore in case of higher callous unemotional traits we may suppose a deficit regarding emotional empathy but in case of cognitive empathy problems can not be pointed out. Based on more researches consisted with each other we suppose that children and adolescents higher on callous unemotional traits are able to build stable long time relationships and the presence of callous unemotional traits and antisocial behavior are not absolutely typical of their friends.

If callous unemotional traits are present with conduct disorder than the quality of parental caring has less influence on the severity and manifestation form of conduct disorder. This result can be pointed out independently the severity of conduct disorder. Thus callous unemotional traits and the quality of parental caring are considerably independent from each other because supposedly callous unemotional children are more resistant to socialization and training methods. Based on more author higher value of callous unemotional traits deficit can be observed in case of emotional empathy but there is not or less problem regarding perspective taking or mentalization ability in children. Similarly mentalization researches targeting adult psychopath resulted in inconsistent result, more cases could not show out deficits in mentalization ability but in several researches the mentalization deficit appeared. Explanation of inconsistent results may be that mentalization problems appear only at certain emotions. Based on physiology studies we suppose that beside psychopathic traits the emotional stimuli and conditional aversive task trigger lower amygdala activity. Deficits appeared in emotions of sadness and fear primarily. We can report similar results callous unemotional children. In the recognition of negative emotions also may point out a deficit which is connected to the signs of fear and distress. These difficulties are not manifested in case of positive emotions. Difficulties can be observed using emotional contents in pictures, emotional words and emotional tone. Again these difficulties may be connected to decreased amygdala activity.

Finally based on various authors the presence of callous unemotional traits has a positive relationship with the appearance of instrumental aggression.

Aim of our dissertations is the examination of callous unemotional traits in Hungarian schools and in penal institution. We consider the comparison of samples different in many aspects is important because in this way we can study and analyze the manifestation of callous unemotional traits and their effects with or without antisocial behavior and beside different environmental conditions. On the two sample we examine the relationship of callous unemotional traits with psychological constructs which may be important in intervention of conduct problems: emotional recognition, personality traits, empathy and emotional intelligence.

Hypothesis

1. We hypothesized that in case of higher value of callous unemotional traits the person is more unpopular and he or she has fewer friends than lower value of callous unemotional traits.
2. We supposed that there is no relationship between used parental discipline techniques and the value of callous unemotional traits.
3. We hypothesized that participants reach higher score on callous unemotional scale have a weaker performance in the Eyes test regarding total score and pictures of men and women. Furthermore they have difficulties in recognition of emotions which may be important in callous unemotional traits (sadness, angry, anxious, agonized, something sad and nervous) that ones who reach lower score on callous unemotional traits.
4. We hypothesized that in case of higher callous unemotional traits we find elevated risk taking and impulsivity independently the presence of conduct disorder.
5. We hypothesized that in case of higher callous unemotional traits there is lower empathy than lower level of callous unemotional traits.
6. We hypothesized that in case of higher callous unemotional traits the lower emotional intelligence is not more typical than in case of lower callous unemotional traits. This result will be independent from the presence of conduct disorder.

Methods and sample

We used the ICU (Inventory of Callous Unemotional Traits) to measure callous unemotional traits. This questionnaire was made from two other tools which were used to measure child and adolescents psychopathy in general: PCL-YV (Psychopathy Checklist-Youth Version) and APSD (Antisocial Process Screening Device). The standardization of Inventory of Callous Unemotional Traits is under process currently in Vadaskert Child Psychiatry Hospital and Outpatient Clinic and Institution of Psychology at University of Debrecen. Our translated Inventory of Callous Unemotional Traits was delivered from Vadaskert Child Psychiatry Hospital and Outpatient Clinic.

The questionnaire contains 24 items from which 12 are inverse. Participants may answer using a 4 point Likert scale. Three factors were identified in the study of psychometric properties: Uncaring, Callous and Unemotional. People who reach high score of Uncaring factor are not care about other's emotions in interpersonal situations. People who reach high score of Callous factor do not show guilty take responsibility for their actions. People who reach high score of Unemotional factor do not show out their emotions openly and they do not express their emotions (unemotional character) which may cause disturbance in the interpersonal relationships.

Baron-Cohen and his colleagues worked out children version of Eyes test (Eyes-C) in 2001 in which children and adolescents have to identify 28 hard to recognised emotions based on pictures contain pair of eyes. Participants have to choose one from four different emotional answer each pair of eyes which describe the emotional state most accurate in his or her opinion. Thus we measured emotion recognition ability with Eyes-C.

We used the Impulsivity, Venturesomeness, Empathy Questionnaire to measure personality traits. The original version of this test was made by Eysenck, Easting and Pearson in 1983, the questionnaire measure three personality traits: impulsivity, venturesomeness and empathy. The questionnaire was made for age 7-15.

To measure emotional intelligence we used Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Scale which was worked out based on an emotional intelligence model made by Salovey and Mayer in 1991. Items of this questionnaire can be loaded upon three factors (emotional appraisal, emotional utilization and emotional regulation) and a general emotional intelligence factor.

Our demographic questionnaire beyond basic demographic questions (age, age of parents, education of parents, occupation of parents, number of siblings, marital state of parents, criminal record of parents) contains question about frequency of program with parents. The connection between callous unemotional traits and discipline style of parents is important regarding interventions therefore we asked questions about discipline methods of parents.

Study was conducted in 2011/12. Institutional sample was recruited from Debrecen Reformatory (N=78). School sample was recruited from gymnasiums and specialized secondary schools in Barsod Abaúj Zemplén and Szabolcs Szatmár Bereg counties (N=115). In reformatory study was helped by staff psychologist. The context and aim of testing was

discussed with staff psychologist and leader of reformatory previously. Children first fill out Eyes test in small groups. A projector was used to present pictures for participants. After it participants filled out questionnaire. They were helped in the understanding of items by staff psychologist and other members of staff. Sampling in school was similar but psychologist students helped for children and study was conducted during form master lesson. We sent detailed information about our study to parents of participants and they had a possibility to exclude their children from study. School leaders also got information about study and we asked their permission to conduct our research. Anonymity was proved because participants filled out tests using codes and without their names. According to our observations Eyes test was filled about 30 minutes and further questionnaires about 60 minutes by participants.

Results and consequences

In our dissertations we examined the relationship between callous unemotional traits and demographic factors, personality traits and emotion recognition ability in adolescents on normal (school) and special (members of reformatory) samples.

Demographic results support the partly independence of callous unemotional traits from environmental factors. School sample contained 115 boys, mean age 15.72 (14-18 years). A significant part of the sample has one sibling and only several participants have three or more siblings. Their mothers have not the lowest school qualification (primary school) and only two fathers (1.7%) have primary school qualification. According to the marital status the parents of 19 of the participants were divorced (16.5%) and other's parents live together (83.5%).

According to the reformatory sample 50% have three or more siblings and this was only 6.9% in school sample. Lower parental education is a characteristic of this sample (73% of mothers and 64% of fathers have only primary education this was 0% and 1.7% in school sample). 50% of this sample signs that their parents were divorces (39 of the participants). 56% of the parents of this sample were imprisoned (typically fathers or brothers) and this was 0% in school sample.

We did not find significant relationship between callous unemotional traits and criminal record of parents and frequency of programs with parents. In the reformatory sample we found higher number of siblings and lower level of parental education.

First we hypothesized that children higher on callous unemotional traits are less popular and they have fewer friends. In school sample the measure of callous unemotional traits was not related with number of friend but regarding popularity we found an U shaped significant relationship with all three Inventory of Callous Unemotional Traits factors. In reformatory sample there is no relationship between callous unemotional traits and number of friends and popularity. According to these results children with higher level of callous unemotional traits are able to establish stable friendships. The reformatory sample can be characterized with antisocial tendencies and it is not surprising that in this sample the higher level of callous unemotional traits do not result in unpopularity. In school sample the most populars are children with moderate level of callous unemotional traits, they are followed by children with low then children with high level of callous unemotional traits. Results from school sample can be interpreted that even in normal population of children a moderate level of callous and unemotional personality traits need to be someone popular because lower level of callous and unemotional traits may result in unpopularity also.

In our second hypothesis we supposed the independence of callous unemotional traits from discipline methods of parents. In both sample discipline methods using father were primarily related with callous unemotional traits. Positive discipline strategies show relationship with callous unemotional traits only at school sample in such a manner that in case of frequent constructive conflict management and discussion of problems there were lower level of callous unemotional traits. This result can be interpreted that if certain factors of the antisocial reformatory sample –for example higher impulsivity or lower empathy- are not present than positive parenting disciplines had an influence on callous unemotional traits.

According to our third hypothesis participants who have higher level of callous unemotional traits reach lower score in Eyes test regarding total score and score of pictures of women and man separately. Furthermore in case of high callous unemotional traits they have difficulties in recognition of certain negative emotions than others who have lower level of callous unemotional traits. Based on literature we expected difficulties in the recognition of sadness but results do not support this deficit. But participants higher on callous unemotional traits showed difficulties in the recognition of angry, nervous and anxiety emotions. Lack of the

results of sadness can be explained with the instruction of Eyes test which ask to identify emotions based on pair of eyes. Recent research result state that emotion recognition deficits in case of high callous unemotional traits can be decreased if ask the person to focus on eyes primarily because eyea are tme most important information sources when we have to identify other1s emotion states. Because in Eyes test emotions can be identified based on pair of eyes it is understandable that we could not reproduce results from literature but we got significant results the following emotions: antsy, nervous and anxious. Unquestionable that recognising these emotion states of others are very important in interpersonal situations in order to avoid conflict escalation because if we misidentify these emotions then we evaluated more threatening the behavior of others. Our results supported the agression inhibition model.

In our next hypothesis we suppose that higher callous unemotional traits is connected to higher risk taking and impulsivity. In our research risk taking was not significant relationship with callous unemotional traits but impulsivity was connected to Callous and Uncaring factors. Participants who reach higher score on these factors can be characterised with higher impulsivits than participants who reach lower score of these factors. Risk taking is an conscious and easier controlled behavior therefore maybe it is controllable even with higher level of callous unemotional traits. Youth higher level of callous unemotional traits in reformatory and school sample supposedly can controlled their risk taking becouse adoult in their surrounding wand this for them. In case of the hard to controlled and more automatic impulsivity there is higher value if callous unemotional traits are higher level.

In our fifth hypothesis we supposed an inverz relationship between callous unemotional traits and empathy independently the presence of conduct disorders. The mean of the empathy is the higher school group lower on callous unemotional traits. Next higher is the school group higher on callous unemotional traits and reformatory group lower on callous unemotional traits. Finally the lowest the empathy is the reformatory group high on callous unemotional traits. This relationship is with Callous and Uncaring factors and Unemotional is not in significant relationship with empathy. Because we got significant results in school sample therefore we may suppose that callous unemotional traits alone (without conduct problems) is link to lower empathy.

Finally in our last hypothesis we suppose that callous unemotional traits are independent from emotional intelligens with or without conduct problems. Our hypothesis proved to be true bacause we found only a few significant results. According to our results higher callous

unemotional traits resulted only a negligible differences regarding emotional intelligence. The direction of the differences were the same in both sample: higher callous unemotional traits go together with lower emotional intelligence. Again from this differences only a few are significant and group means of emotional intelligence fall within average area in every cases. So higher callous unemotional traits result lower (but at least average) emotional intelligence scores. The used Schutte questionnaire focus on the cognitive aspect of emotional intelligence and cognitive aspects of emotional intelligence are held in case of the presence of psychopathic traits.

Results of our dissertations suggest that callous unemotional traits may be important in the development and understanding of childhood and adolescents conduct problems. First the high level of callous unemotional traits do not or rarely cause problems in relationships with peers and popularity therefore there is not a social press youth to inhibit or regulate their callous unemotional traits. The emotional recognition deficit which pointed out in case of high callous unemotional traits make more difficult the constructive arrangement of conflicts which happen often within children and adolescents. The strong relationship between aggression and callous unemotional traits suppose that conflict are solved in impulsive ways. Finally because callous unemotional traits are partly independent from parental discipline strategies therefore positive parenting may not affect youth high on callous unemotional traits.

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