

Are psychopaths emotionally intelligent?

Psychopathy is a serious personality disorder, characterized by proneness to low anxiety, egocentricity, failure to form close emotional bonds, superficial charm and dishonesty, that has very negative consequences for society as aggression, delinquency and even crime. Therefore, its control and treatment are of great importance. Psychopathy has been related to important emotional deficits as such as a lack of impulse, low empathy and deficits in moral expressions. These findings have led to a growing interest in exploring if psychopathic traits are associated with emotional intelligence (EI) or to the ability to perceive, use, understand, and regulate emotions in one's self and others. However, the literature exploring this association has revealed conflicting results. The aim of the present study was to provide a reliable estimate of the relationship between psychopathy traits and EI (measured as performance-based ability) through meta-analysis. A quantitative and systematic review of the literature using Scopus, Medline, Pubmed, and PsycINFO and for both Spanish and English studies that included measures of EI and psychopathy, showed a total of 13 studies meeting inclusion criteria with a combined sample of 2401 participants. The meta-analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between both constructs, showing that higher psychopathic trait scores are related to lower EI levels. We propose several future research lines to clarify possible gaps and ambiguities in the current literature and a set of interesting clinical implications for the prevention, evaluation, and treatment of psychopathy by including EI factors in traditional models of psychopathy.

Keywords

Emotional Intelligence, psychopathy, performance-based ability model, Meta-analysis