

## The Psychopath as Pimp

Spidel, A.\*

The University of British Columbia

Greaves, C.

Simon Fraser University

Cooper, B. S.

Forensic Psychiatric Services Commission

The Ekman Group-Training Division (TEG-TD)

Hervé, H.

Forensic Psychiatric Hospital

The Ekman Group-Training Division (TEG-TD)

Hare, R. D.

The University of British Columbia

Yuille, J. C.

The University of British Columbia

### ABSTRACT

Although the study of psychopathy has become a significant area for research in recent years, relatively little attention has been paid to examining the role of psychopathy in offenders who live off the avails of prostitution (i.e., "pimps"). It may be argued that this dearth in the literature is surprising given that psychopathy is defined by a unique set of interpersonal and affective characteristics that theoretically should facilitate the business of pimping. As such, the present investigation attempted to profile characteristics of perpetrators who engage in pimping. As expected, psychopathy was an important feature of these perpetrators: over one-third of the 22 perpetrators examined met the diagnostic cut-off of 30 on the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised. To expand our understanding of pimps and their actions, other important perpetrator characteristics were also examined. The implications of these findings are discussed in relation to criminal justice factors.

*\*Comments concerning this article may be addressed to: Alicia Spidel, Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, 2136 West Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, V6T 1Z4 (email : [aspidel@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:aspidel@interchange.ubc.ca)).*

The relative lack of empirical attention paid to examining offenders who live off the avails of prostitution (i.e., "pimps") is surprising given the high estimates of pimp-controlled prostitution and its consequences both for society and for the prostitutes themselves (Kennedy, Klein, Bristowe, Cooper, & Yuille, in press). Certainly, it may be argued that recent information regarding this issue warrants research in the area. For example, estimates of pimp-controlled prostitution range from just under 40% to as high as 95% (Barry, 1995; Dalla, 2002) and research suggests that most prostitutes either start in the sex trade under the control of a pimp or end up being controlled by a pimp at some point in their lives (Giobbe, 1993). In addition, contrary to lay beliefs, pimps mostly have a negative impact on the prostitutes under their control (Kennedy et al., in press).

Not only have pimps received little empirical attention, most of the research that has been conducted has failed to consider the role of psychopathy. This is intriguing, as there are many reasons to expect that pimps have a significant number of psychopathic qualities. Indeed, the little research that has been conducted suggests an association between pimping and psychopathy. Moreover, as described throughout this article, psychopathic offenders possess a unique set of interpersonal, affective, and lifestyle characteristics (e.g., superficial charm, shallow affect, lack of empathy, manipulativeness, parasitic) (Hare, 1991, 2003) that indicate they are especially well suited to engage in pimp activity.

Given the above, the present investigation aimed to profile the psychological characteristics (e.g., personality, substance abuse history, criminal history, etc.) of offenders who, at some point, have lived off the avails of prostitution, with special attention given to the construct of psychopathy. In the following sections, the act of pimping is described, as are the qualities of the perpetrators who engage in such activity. Connections between pimps and the characteristics of psychopathy are discussed.

## SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PIMPS AND PSYCHOPATHS

Information regarding pimps primarily stems from qualitative studies on female prostitutes (as most prostitutes are female and most pimps are male, they will be referred to as such for the purposes of this article). Armstrong (1983) demonstrated that pimping often involves feigning friendship and/or love with the prostitute in order to manipulate her into selling herself. Likewise, Bracey (1983) reported that pimps' most frequently employed method of coercion is not kidnapping or drugs, but providing a facsimile of love and attention that the woman is not used to. The pimp will often tell her that prostitution is a short-term strategy to relieve financial difficulties, or to help them achieve a long-term business venture.

It appears that a variety of factors (e.g., emotional, financial) facilitate a woman's involvement with a pimp and the pimps, in turn, appear to be adept at assessing and then taking advantage of a woman's needs and vulnerabilities (Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). According to Williamson & Cluse-Tolar (2002, p. 1082), in the first phases of the relationship, the pimp "runs his game". That is, he uses his smooth-talking abilities and charismatic manner to con the woman into working for him through persuasive conversation tactics. Control over the prostitute throughout their relationship seems to be less often gained via forcible means (e.g., kidnapping, drugs), but more often through subtle, emotional methods of coercion (Bracey, 1983), at least initially (Kennedy et al., in press). However, he often becomes progressively more domineering and controlling. He requires a specified amount of money to be earned per night, the vast majority of which he will retain.

Although the ability to smooth-talk and charisma often are used to con women into the sex trade, they eventually are controlled through violence and the threat of violence (Kennedy et al., in press). This is particularly the case with pimp-controlled street-level prostitution (Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). Indeed, pimp-controlled prostitutes have reported suffering brutal violence at the hands of their pimps (Bracey, 1983; Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff, & Ursel, 2002; Silbert & Pines, 1983). For example, Silbert and Pines (1983) found that 66% of the prostitutes in their sample had been physically abused by their pimp and over half were beaten regularly. Reasons for the beatings included disrespect, breaking prostitution 'rules', keeping the prostitute in line, not making enough money, and some reported being beaten for no apparent reason. It has been suggested that some pimps are able to 'turn off' their emotions to engage in emotional cruelty and physical assaults towards the women

under their control (Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002).

Given the above findings, it may be argued that, not only do pimps and psychopaths share many features, but that there are also many reasons to expect psychopaths to be particularly drawn to pimping activities. Behaviourally, psychopaths are irresponsible, criminally versatile, and parasitic (Hare, 1991, 2003). The latter characteristic is relatively synonymous with living off the avails of prostitution. Interpersonally, psychopaths are manipulative, deceitful, glib, and display superficial charm. These characteristics are used by many pimps in the recruitment of prostitutes (Kennedy et al., in press). Psychopaths' interpersonal and behavioural characteristics are associated with characteristic affective features, including a lack of empathy and shallow affect (e.g., Abbott, 2001; Hare, 2003; Hare & Neumann, 2005; Hervé, 2002, 2007a, 2007b; Neumann, Vitacco, Hare, & Wupperman, 2005). That is, the psychopathic personality facilitates their involvement in the callous manipulation of vulnerable individuals for personal gain, including pimping. No research, however, has examined the prevalence of psychopathy among those who live off the avails of prostitution. Despite a paucity of research in this area, theoretical parallels can be drawn between what is known about the interpersonal tactics of pimps, and the interpersonal, affective, and behavioural characteristics of psychopaths.

A review of the extant literature on the actions and tactics employed by pimps towards their prostitutes, clearly indicates that there are a number of similarities with the interpersonal and behavioural characteristics of psychopaths. Psychopaths often possess charisma and charm to lure and victimize targets. Pimps are able to smooth-talk women into prostituting themselves and forfeiting their earnings for little in return. Psychopaths are prone to callous, violent acts of brutality with little or no regard for the victim in the way of empathy, guilt or remorse. Pimps frequently assault prostitutes both physically and sexually as methods of control and coercion with little to no regard for their well-being. Indeed, compared to most other offenders, psychopaths are more likely to use intimidation tactics and violence towards the end of domination and control (Hare & McPherson, 1984; Williamson, Hare, & Wong, 1987). Further, a recent study (Hervé, Mitchell, Cooper, Spidel, & Hare, 2004) found a high rate of psychopathy in a sample of hostage-takers – a crime which, by nature, involves domination and control of the victim.

The dearth of information surrounding those who engage in the act of living off the avails of prostitution formed the impetus for the present investigation. Offender characteristics, including demographic profiles,

psychopathy and violence history related to pimps and pimping were examined. It was anticipated that most of the pimps in the study would have a considerable number of psychopathic characteristics. In addition, other features were also investigated in the hopes of generating both clinical and research-related insight into the neglected area of pimping.

## METHOD

### Participants

The sample was derived from an archival database of approximately 1,200 adult male inmates who had participated in research conducted in three Correctional Service of Canada prisons in British Columbia from the late 1960s to 1998. To be included in the present sample, participants had to have been charged, convicted, and/or admitted to living off the avails of prostitution (i.e., pimping). For those offenders whose records contained more than one pimping offence, the most recent offence was defined as the index episode. In addition, participants had to have a Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) (Hare, 1991) score on file. This resulted in a sample of 22 offenders that did not differ significantly from the archival sample in age, race, and/or mean PCL-R scores ( $ps > .05$  in each case).

### Psychopathy Ratings

Participants were assessed with the PCL-R (Hare, 1991) by trained raters using a semi-structured interview and file information. The PCL-R consists of 20 items, scored on a 3-point scale (i.e., 0, 1, and 2) that measures the interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and behavioural features of psychopathy. Individual items are summed to yield a total score that can range from 0 to 40, representing the degree to which an individual resembles the prototypical psychopath (Hare, 2003). In cases in which more than one PCL-R rating was available for a given offender, averaged scores were calculated.

Recent confirmatory factor analyses of very large data sets (Hare, 2003; Hare & Neumann, 2005; Neumann et al., 2005; Neumann, Hare, & Newman, in press) clearly indicate that the PCL-R items describes a superordinate factor underpinned by four correlated factors: *Interpersonal* (Glibness/superficial charm, Grandiose sense of self worth, Pathological deception, Conning/manipulative); *Affective* (Lack of remorse or guilt, Shallow affect, Callous/lack of empathy, Failure to accept responsibility for actions); *Lifestyle* (Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom, Parasitic lifestyle, Lack of realistic long-term goals, Impulsivity, Irresponsibility); and *Antisocial* (Poor behavioral controls, Early behaviour problems, Juvenile delinquency, Revocation of conditional release, Criminal

versatility). Two other items (Promiscuous sexual behaviour and Many short-term relationships) do not load on any factor but contribute to the total PCL-R score. The pattern of correlations among the four factors, as well as confirmatory factor analyses (Hare, 2003; Hare & Neumann, 2005; Neumann, Kosson, & Salekin, 2007) also indicate the presence of two broad factors, one identical with the original Factor 1 (Interpersonal/Affective) and the other the same as the original Factor 2 (Lifestyle/Antisocial), but with the addition of one item (Criminal versatility). For convenience, we refer to the components of these broad factors as facets.

### Offender Characteristics

All variables were coded from the file information used to score the PCL-R. If available, the following perpetrator-related variables were coded: age at the index episode of living off the avails; education (i.e., last grade completed prior to incarceration); history of substance abuse (i.e., no history, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or poly-substance abuse); psychiatric diagnosis (i.e., no history, anxiety disorder, mood disorder, psychosis, paraphilia, or other); personality disorder diagnoses (i.e., no history, or history); previous convictions for violent offences (i.e., no history, family violence, other violence); and number of previous charges/convictions for living off the avails. History of substance abuse, psychiatric and diagnoses were taken from documented psychological evaluations or risk assessments (i.e., raters did not assign diagnoses as they were not trained in this regard).

### Procedure

A trained research assistant (RA) scored relevant variables from file information. This RA had experience in reviewing and coding files and was blind to the PCL-R assessments. The files contained the following information: criminal records, risk assessments, psychological evaluations, institutional reports, court transcripts, parole reports, and witness impact statements. The choice of variables was determined by their relevance to acts of living off the avails of prostitution (e.g., PCL-R; education). In addition, only variables that could be coded in an objective manner were selected (i.e., no subjective interpretation was required; e.g., diagnoses were taken from files rather than coded by the RA).

## RESULTS

The Spearman-Brown intraclass correlation coefficient of reliability for a single rating and for the average of two independent ratings was 0.97 and 0.98, respectively. The sample was divided into High (H;  $n = 8$ ), Medium (M;  $n = 10$ ), and Low (L;  $n = 4$ ) groups, using the recommended cut-score of 30 for the High group and 20 for the

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Low group (see Hare, 1991, 2003). The kappa coefficient for consistency in group assignments across raters was 1.00. One-way analyses of variance indicated there were no group differences in offender age or education ( $p > .05$ ) across PCL-R groups.

## Base Rate of Psychopathy

The distribution of PCL-R total scores was negatively skewed (Skewness = -1.31 [0.25]; Kurtosis = 1.81 [0.50]). The mean PCL-R Total, Factor, and Facet scores for the sample of 22 offenders are presented in Table 1. For comparison purposes, the PCL-R scores for the large sample of North American adult male correctional inmates assessed with the standard procedure (i.e., file review and interview; Hare, 2003) are also presented in Table 1. The PCL-R Total, Factor 1 scores, as well as the Interpersonal and Affective facet scores, for the sample of pimps were significantly higher than those found in the comparison sample (in each case,  $p < .005$ ). There were no group differences in the Lifestyle and Antisocial facet scores. The mean PCL-R total score for the present sample was at the 72nd percentile relative to the comparison sample. Thirty-six (36%) of the pimps, but only 20% of the comparison sample had a PCL-R score of at least 30 ( $\pi_2(1) = 46.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 1: PCL-R Total, Factor, and Facet Scores for a Sample of Pimps and for the Normative Sample (Hare, 2003) of North American Adult Male Correctional Inmates Assessed From Interview Plus File Information (Standard Procedure)**

PCL Scores	Pimps (N = 22)		Comparison Sample (N = 5,408)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Total	27.23	5.50	22.1	7.9
Factor 1	12.05	1.43	8.5	3.8
Factor 2	11.73	4.19	11.6	4.7
Facet				
Interpersonal	5.91	.75	3.6	2.2
Affective	6.14	.89	4.8	2.1
Lifestyle	5.86	1.83	5.8	2.6
Antisocial	5.86	2.46	5.7	2.8

## Offender Characteristics

As presented in Table 2, the average age of the pimps when they committed their most recent act of living off the avails ranged from 19 to 45 years ( $M = 28.3$ ,  $SD = 6.7$ ). Most participants (72.7%) were Caucasian, 13.6% were Aboriginal, and 13.7% were from other ethnic groups. Their mean level of education was 9.3 years ( $SD = 2.5$ ). Half of the individuals (50%) had completed high school or their GED, 40.9% had only completed elementary

school, 4.5% had completed college and 4.5% had completed university. Most (95.5%) of the sample had a history of drug or alcohol abuse. Previous psychiatric diagnoses (40.9%) and personality disorders (31.8%) were common. Less than half (40.9%) of the offenders had at least one previous conviction for violence. A violent offence against strangers was relatively common (36.4%). Most (90.9%) had a previous charge/conviction for an act of living off the avails.

**Table 2: Offender and Offence Characteristics for the Sample of Pimps**

	Sample Size (N)	Mean	Percentage
<b>A. Offender Characteristics</b>			
A. Age at Index Act of Pimping	22	28.3 (6.7)	
B. Education	22	9.3 (2.5)	
C. Drugs & Alcohol Abuse	22		95.5% ( $n = 21$ )
i. Polysubstance		95.5% ( $n = 21$ )	
ii. Drugs Only			
iii. Alcohol Only			
<b>D. Psychiatric History</b>			
i. Psychiatric Disorder	22		40.9% ( $n = 9$ )
ii. Personality Disorder	22		31.8% ( $n = 7$ )
1. APD		9.1% ( $n = 2$ )	
2. Unknown		4.5% ( $n = 1$ )	
3. Other		18.2% ( $n = 4$ )	
E. Previous History of Violence (Convictions)	22		40.9% ( $n = 9$ )
i. Stranger Violence Present		36.4% ( $n = 8$ )	
ii. Unknown		4.5% ( $n = 1$ )	
F. Previous History of Pimping	22		90.9% ( $n = 20$ )

## DISCUSSION

There has been little study of the act of pimping in general, and no known empirical work concerning pimps specifically. The examination of offender characteristics of pimps is a necessary start for a better understanding of those involved in such criminal activity. The PCL-R scores of the offenders who engaged in acts of pimping were substantially higher than those found in a more representative (i.e., the comparison) sample of offenders described in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of the PCL-R Manual (Hare, 2003). Employing a cut score of 30 to indicate the presence of psychopathy (Hare, 2003), 36% of the sample qualified for a diagnosis, a percentage significantly greater than the 20% found in the comparison.

In addition to the above, approximately three quarters of the sample received PCL-R scores of at least 22.1, the mean for the comparison sample (Hare, 2003). These findings suggest that offenders who engage in acts of pimping exhibit many psychopathic traits. The results are in line with Hervé et al.'s (2004) findings in which psychopaths were disproportionately represented in a

sample of offenders convicted of unlawful confinement. It appears psychopaths are particularly drawn to crimes that involve the feeling of being in control of others. In this respect, it is interesting that the differences between the pimps and other offenders were confined to the interpersonal and affective (e.g., conning, manipulative, callous, unemotional) features reflected in Factor 1.

Given the association between psychopathy, predatory violence and manipulation (Cornell et al., 1996; Woodworth & Porter, 2002), these present findings have implications for both criminal justice and mental health professionals. For example, investigators should be cognizant of the high rate of psychopathy amongst perpetrators of living off the avails. In addition, due to the association of high PCL-R scores and risk for violence and recidivism (Hare, 2003; Hemphill, 2007) correctional psychologists conducting risk assessments should take this into account when working with offenders convicted of living off the avails.

The present findings should be viewed as cause for concern for those under the control of pimps. Given the high rate of psychopathy among pimps, it seems very likely that a prostitute will come into contact with a psychopathic pimp. Prostitutes who become involved with psychopathic pimps are likely to suffer a great deal, both physically and emotionally. Furthermore, should these pimps feign emotional attachments with those under their control (see Dalla, 2002), this emotional tie is likely to be a major barrier to the prostitute leaving the sex-trade. In addition, severe physical retaliation by the pimp has also challenged prostitutes' desire and ability to quit their prostitution activities (Nixon et al., 2002).

In addition to having a heavy dose of psychopathic features, the pimps shared many other characteristics. The current sample mainly consisted of Caucasian offenders with a high school education, and almost the entire sample had a history of substance abuse. Previous psychiatric diagnoses were common, as were personality disorder diagnoses. With regards to general offending behaviour, almost the entire current sample had at least one prior conviction on record. Further, a substantial proportion of these offenders had been previously convicted of a violent offence. This is not surprising as the theory backing investigative psychology holds as a premise that current criminal behavior builds upon past behaviors (West, 2000).

The present findings have important implications for the understanding of the characteristics and interpersonal styles of these pimps. Despite the limitations posed by the small sample size and a file-based information source, this investigation indicates that psychopathy is an important construct to be aware of when dealing with

pimps. Offenders are likely to minimize their offenses, especially with regards to the impact of their offense on the prostitutes. They are also likely to deny the sexual nature of their offense, and transfer responsibility to their prostitutes. Psychopathic pimps may verbalize the belief that they are providing a service to those involved, but the reality is that the prostitute is little more than property to them. Most importantly, their connection with the prostitutes under their control is manipulative, callous, coercive, and predatory.

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- ALICIA SPIDEL** received her B.Sc and MA from the University of British Columbia. She is a Ph.D. student at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in the department of Forensic psychology interested in the assessment and treatment of mentally ill offenders. Ms. Spidel's research interests include violence, mental illness, psychopathy, and domestic violence. She has published several articles and presented research on these topics at conferences both nationally and internationally. She currently holds grants from the Canadian Institute of Health Research, the Vancouver Foundation for Health Research, the Norma Calder Foundation for Health Research, Riverview Hospital and the American Psychology and Law Society. She is funded by a Michael Smith Doctoral Award and a University Government Scholarship. She currently works in the schizophrenia division of UBC's department of psychiatry, as well as the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital.
- CAROLINE GREAVES** received her B.A. from the University of British Columbia, her M.A. from Simon Fraser University (SFU), and is currently a Ph.D. student in the Forensic Psychology and Law program at SFU. Ms. Greaves is currently supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada - Canada Graduate Scholarship, and has previously been awarded research scholarships/support from the Vancouver Foundation for Health Research, the American Psychology and Law Society, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the British Columbia Medical Services Foundation, and the SFU fellowship fund. She is currently employed as a research co-ordinator in the schizophrenia division of UBC's department of psychiatry. Ms. Greaves' primary research interests include violent offenders, psychopathy, and memory and mental health variables as related to violent/traumatic events.
- HUGUES HERVÉ** is a registered psychologist in British Columbia, Canada. He graduated from the University of British Columbia, where he studied Clinical and Forensic Psychology. He has worked for the Correctional Service of Canada, conducting assessments on all types of offenders, serving as a member of the Regional Research Committee, and providing consulting services. He currently holds a position at the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in British Columbia, conducting assessments on remand cases (pre-trial), assessing and treating persons who have been found unfit to stand trial and/or not criminally responsible for their actions, consulting on new initiatives, and training staff. His private practice focuses on conducting assessments and providing consulting services within the forensic and medico-legal arenas and on offering training to various professional groups on mental illness, personality and their association to antisocial behavior. As a con-

sultant for The Ekman Group-Training Division (TEG-TD), he is also involved in developing and providing training programs on evaluating truthfulness and interviewing. Finally, he remains active in the research community by engaging in collaborative investigations on applied topics within the areas of credibility, eyewitness memory, and criminal conduct, with special emphasis placed on the mediating/moderating roles of mental illness and personality (particularly psychopathy).

**BARRY S. COOPER** received his doctorate in Forensic Psychology from the University of British Columbia where he is currently a Research Associate in Dr. John Yuille's Forensic Psychology Research Laboratory. He performed the duties of an Institutional Psychologist and a Community Corrections Psychologist for six years in various contexts governed by the Correctional Service of Canada, most recently as a Senior Psychologist at Matsqui Institution. Dr. Cooper was also the Clinical Supervisor for the Critical Incident Stress Management Team, a member of the Employee Assistance Program, and the chair of the Mental Health Team. His research and clinical-forensic expertise includes investigative interviewing, credibility assessment, forensic assessment, psychopathy, deviant sexual fantasies/behaviours, and variables associated with eyewitness memory in victims and offenders of crime and trauma. He is currently employed as a Licensed Psychologist for the Forensic Psychiatric Services Commission in British Columbia. He is also a trainer in evaluating truthfulness for The Ekman Group-Training Division (TEG-TD). He is in the process of developing a private practice specializing on areas related to his research and clinical-forensic expertise.

**ROBERT HARE** is Emeritus Professor of Psychology, University of British Columbia, where he taught and conducted research for some 35 years, and President of Darkstone Research Group Ltd., a forensic research and consulting firm. He has published a large number of scientific articles on psychopathy, is the author of *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us*, co-author of *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go To Work*, and developer of the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R). He consults with law enforcement, including the FBI and the RCMP, sits on the Research Advisory Board of the FBI Child Abduction and Serial Murder Investigative Resources Center, and is an Affiliate Member of the International Criminal Investigative Analysis Fellowship. He lectures widely on psychopathy and on the use and misuse of the PCL-R in the mental health and criminal justice systems.

**JOHN YUILLE** received his university education at McGill University and the University of Western Ontario. He is currently a Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia. Dr. Yuille's area of specialization is forensic psychology, with particular interests in the memory of victims, witnesses and suspects, and on interviewing techniques. His work has focused on child abuse, trauma and memory, and on the assessment of the witness' credibility. For more than twenty-five years he has collaborated with psychologists, social workers, prosecutors and police in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany to develop standardized procedures for investigative interviews and for credibility assessment. He conducts workshops on these techniques for police, social workers, psychologists, prosecutors and judges, and regularly serves as a consultant to police, law enforcement, prosecutors and defence attorneys in cases of child abuse, sexual assault and murder. He has provided expert evidence in scores of trials in criminal, civil and family court in both Canada and the United States. An active research career for over 35 years has produced an extensive body of published articles and chapters. He is a co-founder and the director of The Ekman Group – Training Division (TEG-TD).