

# Age of Onset of Psychopathic Traits in Adolescent Offenders

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# Psychopathic Traits in Youth

- Robust association with negative outcomes
  - Violence & criminal recidivism
- Controversy
  - Appropriateness of downward extension of adult construct
- Move towards a developmental approach
  - Etiology, onset, presentation, course

# Age Onset

- Conduct disorder
  - Early onset associated with:
    - More frequent, serious, and persistent antisocial behavior
    - Distinct etiological mechanisms / developmental pathways
- Psychopathy
  - Roots of disorder in childhood
  - Early behavioral problems
    - PCL-R and PCL:YV Item 12
  - Associated with earlier onset of arrest/conviction, drug/alcohol use, school behavior problems in youth
- Onset of psychopathic traits unknown

## The Current Study

- Can we reliably assess the onset of psychopathic traits?
- What are the ages and patterns of onset of the interpersonal, affective, and behavioral traits of psychopathy?

# Participants

- N = 115 male young offenders
- Age
  - $M = 16.3$  years ( $SD = 1.4$ , Range: 13 to 20)
- Ethnicity
  - 50% Caucasian, 41% Aboriginal, 9% Other
- Custody setting:
  - 62% secure custody, 38% open custody
- Legal status
  - 65% Sentenced, 35% Remand

# Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version

(Forth, Kosson & Hare, 2003)

|                          | Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) | <i>ICC</i> <sub>1</sub> ( <i>n</i> = 34) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------|
| PCL:YV Total             | 26.8 (6.3)         | .94                                      |
| Factor 1 (Interpersonal) | 4.3 (1.9)          | .80                                      |
| Factor 2 (Affective)     | 4.3 (1.6)          | .70                                      |
| Factor 3 (Behavioral)    | 7.6 (1.9)          | .73                                      |

## Assessing Age of Onset

- Multiple indicators for each trait, e.g.,
  - Parasitic Orientation
    - Cheating at school, supporting self through crime, getting peers to do work at home or school, using others for food or housing
  - Callous/Lacks Empathy
    - Hurting animals, stealing from family, verbal abuse, bullying
    - Stupid people deserve what they get, have a hard time understanding how other people feel
- Age onset queries
  - Age at which behaviors, attitudes or feelings began

## Rating Age of Onset

- Judgments based on interview and file information
- Minimum age of onset = 5 years
- Age onset rated for a score of 1 (maybe / possibly present) and score of 2 (definitely present)

|        | Score | Age Onset<br>Score of 1 | Age Onset<br>Score of 2 |
|--------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Item A | 0     | -----                   | -----                   |
| Item B | 1     | age                     | -----                   |
| Item C | 2     | age                     | age                     |

## Interrater Reliability of Age of Onset Ratings ( $ICC_1$ , $n = 34$ )

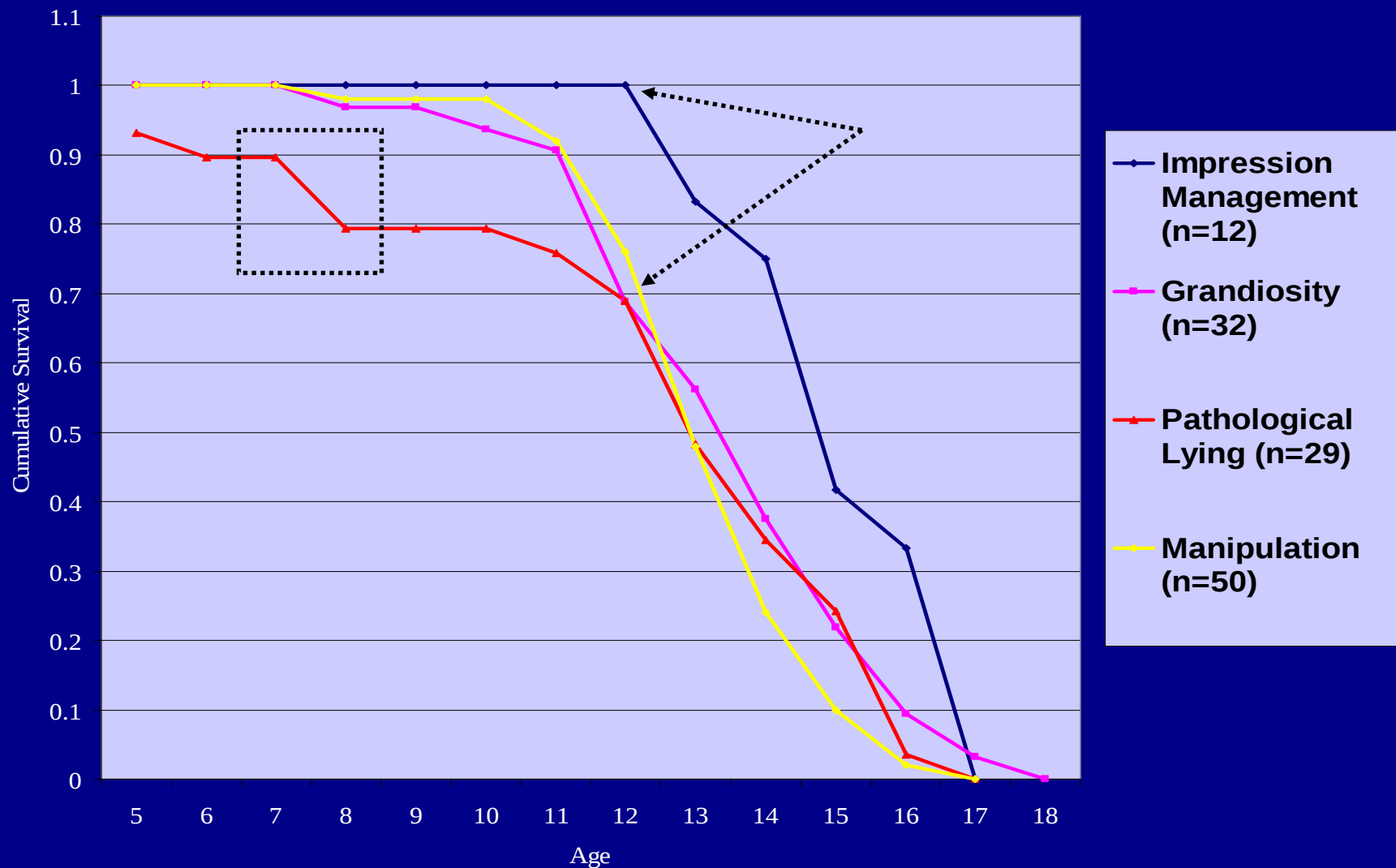
|                                  | Score of 1 | Score of 2 |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Impression Management            | .54        | .73        |
| Grandiose                        | .67        | .51        |
| Stimulation Seeking              | .82        | .64        |
| Pathological Lying               | .58        | .60        |
| Manipulative                     | .64        | .64        |
| Lacks Remorse                    | .81        | .57        |
| Shallow Affect                   | .73        | -----      |
| Callous/Lacks Empathy            | .74        | .56        |
| Parasitic Orientation            | .76        | .55        |
| Lacks Goals                      | .17        | .31        |
| Impulsivity                      | .72        | .47        |
| Irresponsibility                 | .62        | .53        |
| Failure to Accept Responsibility | .85        | .37        |

# Age of Onset: Interpersonal Traits (Factor 1)

Median Age Onset (95% CI)

|                       | Score of 1 | Score of 2 |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|
| Impression Management | 14 (13-15) | 15 (14-16) |
| Grandiosity           | 11 (10-12) | 14 (13-15) |
| Pathological Lying    | 9 (8-10)   | 13 (12-14) |
| Manipulation          | 12 (11-13) | 13 (12-14) |

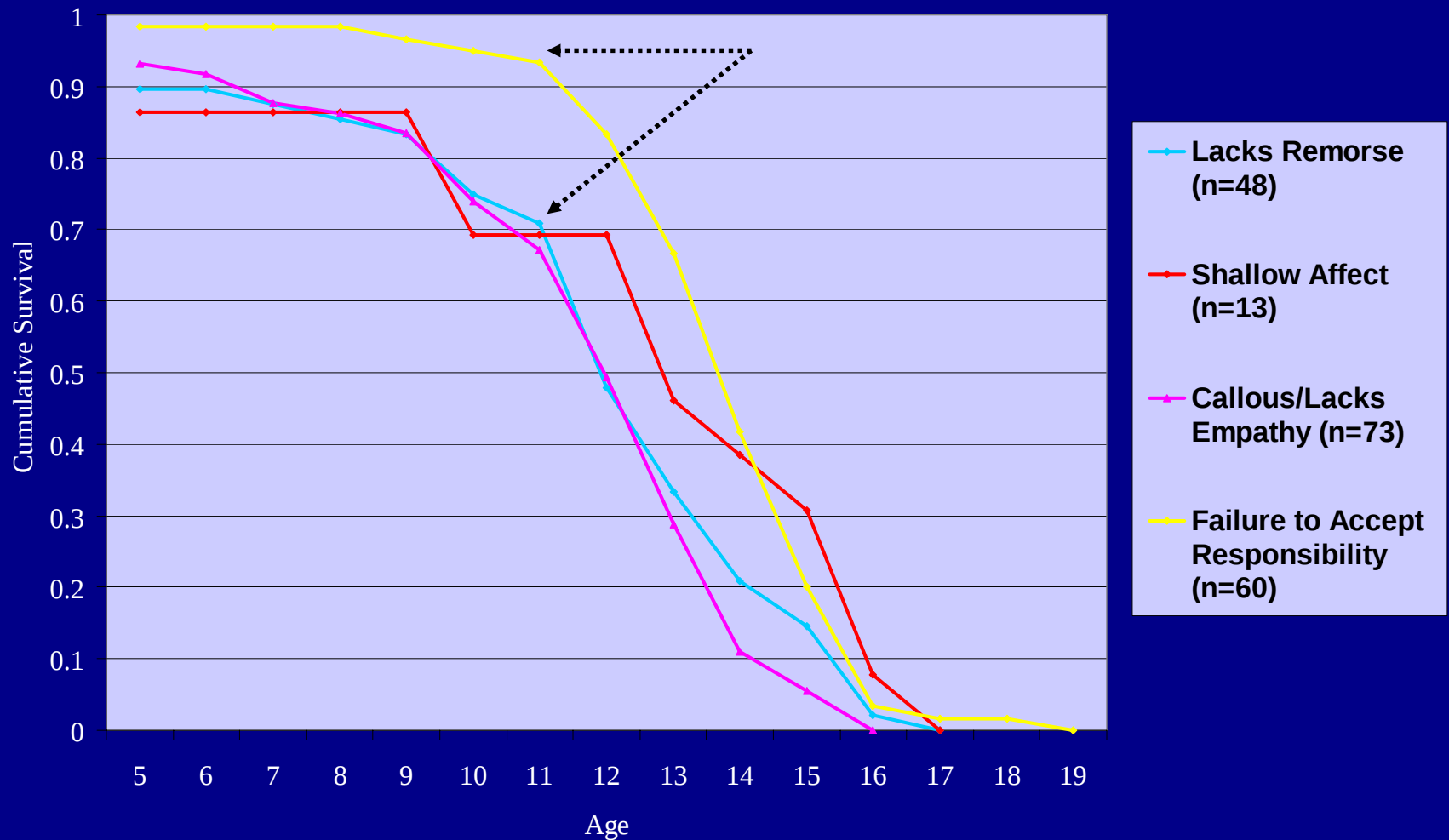
# Cumulative Survival: Interpersonal Traits (Factor 1)



## Age of Onset: Affective Traits (Factor 2)

|                                  | Score of 1 | Score of 2 |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Lacks Remorse                    | 8 (7-9)    | 12 (11-13) |
| Shallow Affect                   | 11 (10-12) | 13 (9-17)  |
| Callous/Lacks Empathy            | 8 (7-9)    | 12 (11-13) |
| Failure to Accept Responsibility | 11 (10-12) | 14         |

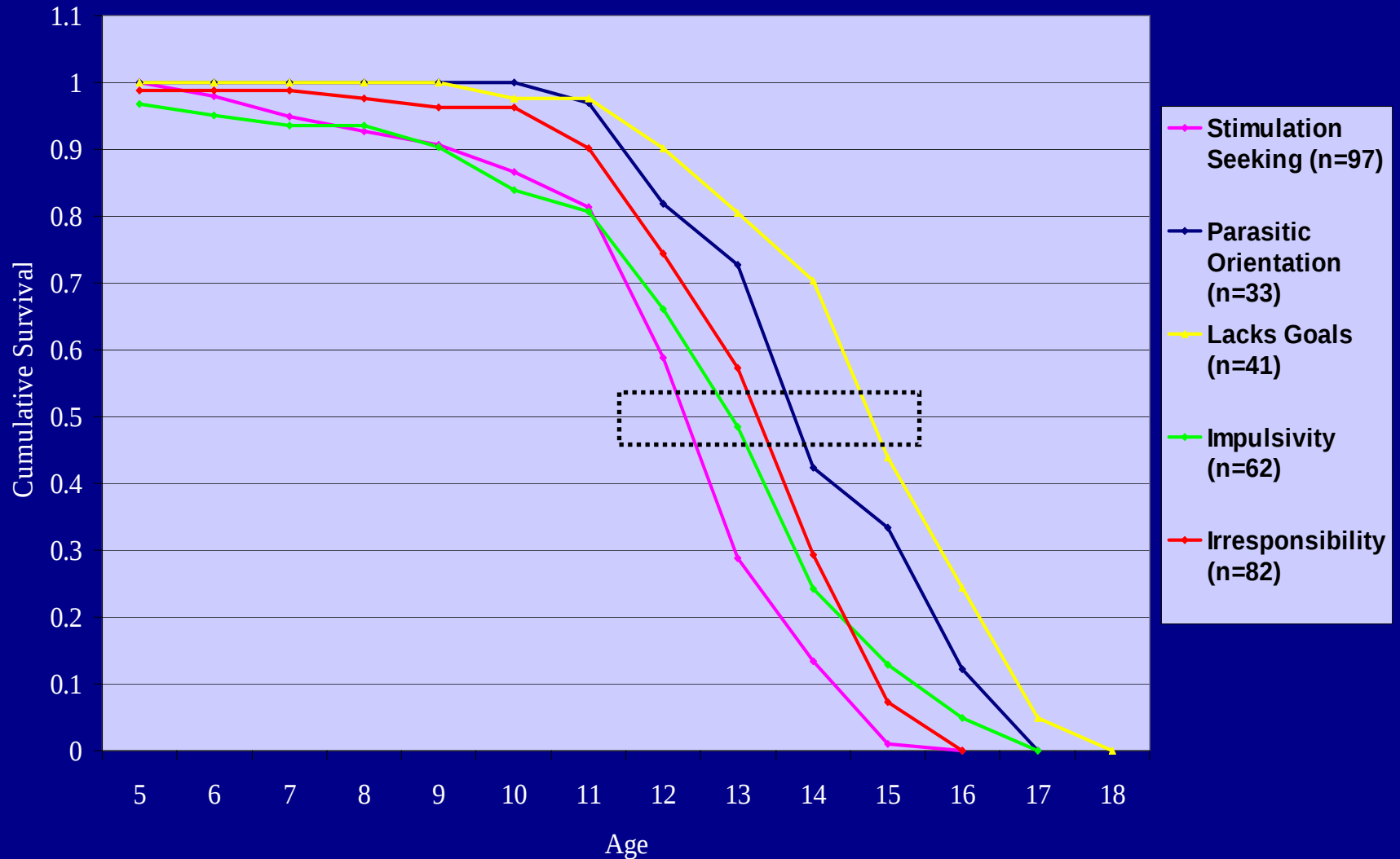
# Cumulative Survival: Affective Traits (Factor 2)



## Age of Onset: Behavioral Traits (Factor 3)

|                       | Score of 1 | Score of 2 |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|
| Stimulation Seeking   | 9 (8-10)   | 13         |
| Parasitic Orientation | 12         | 14 (13-15) |
| Lacks Goals           | 13         | 15 (14-16) |
| Impulsivity           | 10 (9-11)  | 13 (12-14) |
| Irresponsibility      | 10 (9-11)  | 14         |

# Cumulative Survival: Behavioral Traits (Factor 3)



## Summary

- Affective traits appearing first
  - Lacks Remorse & Callous/Lacks Empathy
  - Core features under genetic influence?
- Traits appearing later in development
  - Impression Management & Lacks Goals
  - Later manifestation or measurement issue?

# Implications & Future Directions

- Measurement
  - Need for developmentally informed assessment of psychopathic traits in youth
- Etiology and development of psychopathy
  - Genetic and environmental influences
  - Trait manifestation across developmental periods
- Treatment
  - Timeliness of intervention strategies

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