

Psychopathic Traits in Juvenile Offenders: A Retrospective Investigation of the Onset of the Syndrome



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Psychopathic Traits in Youth

- Association with negative outcomes
 - Violence & criminal recidivism
- Controversy
 - Downward extension of adult construct
 - Developmental and ethical concerns
- A developmental approach
 - Etiology, onset, presentation, course

Onset of Psychopathic Traits

- Roots of psychopathy in childhood
- Early Behavior Problems (PCL-R and PCL:YV Item 12)
- Psychopathic traits associated with earlier onset of crime, substance abuse, and school behavior problems in youth
- Onset of psychopathic traits unknown

The Current Study

- Goal: To examine the onset and developmental pattern of the overall syndrome of psychopathy
 - At what ages are the onset of low, moderate, and high levels of psychopathic traits?
 - What is the developmental pattern of changes in PCL:YV Total scores?

Method

- Participants
 - 115 incarcerated males
 - Age: $M = 16.3$ years ($SD = 1.4$, Range: 13-20)
 - Ethnicity: 50% Caucasian, 41% Aboriginal, 9% Other
 - Custody setting: 62% maximum, 38% minimum
 - Legal status: 65% Sentenced, 35% Remand
- Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version
 - 1 of 3 trained and experienced raters
 - File and interview information
 - PCL:YV Total score $M = 26.4$ ($SD = 6.3$)
 - Excellent interrater reliability for Total score ($ICC_1 = .93$, $n = 32$)

Method: Assessing Age of Onset

- Ratings based on collateral file information and age onset queries in PCL:YV interview (minimum age of onset = 5 years)
- Age onset rated for a score of 1 (maybe / possibly present) and score of 2 (definitely present)
- Age restriction removed for Item 12 (Early Behavior Problems)
- Fair to excellent interrater reliability for age onset ratings ($ICC_1 = .41$ to $.84$)

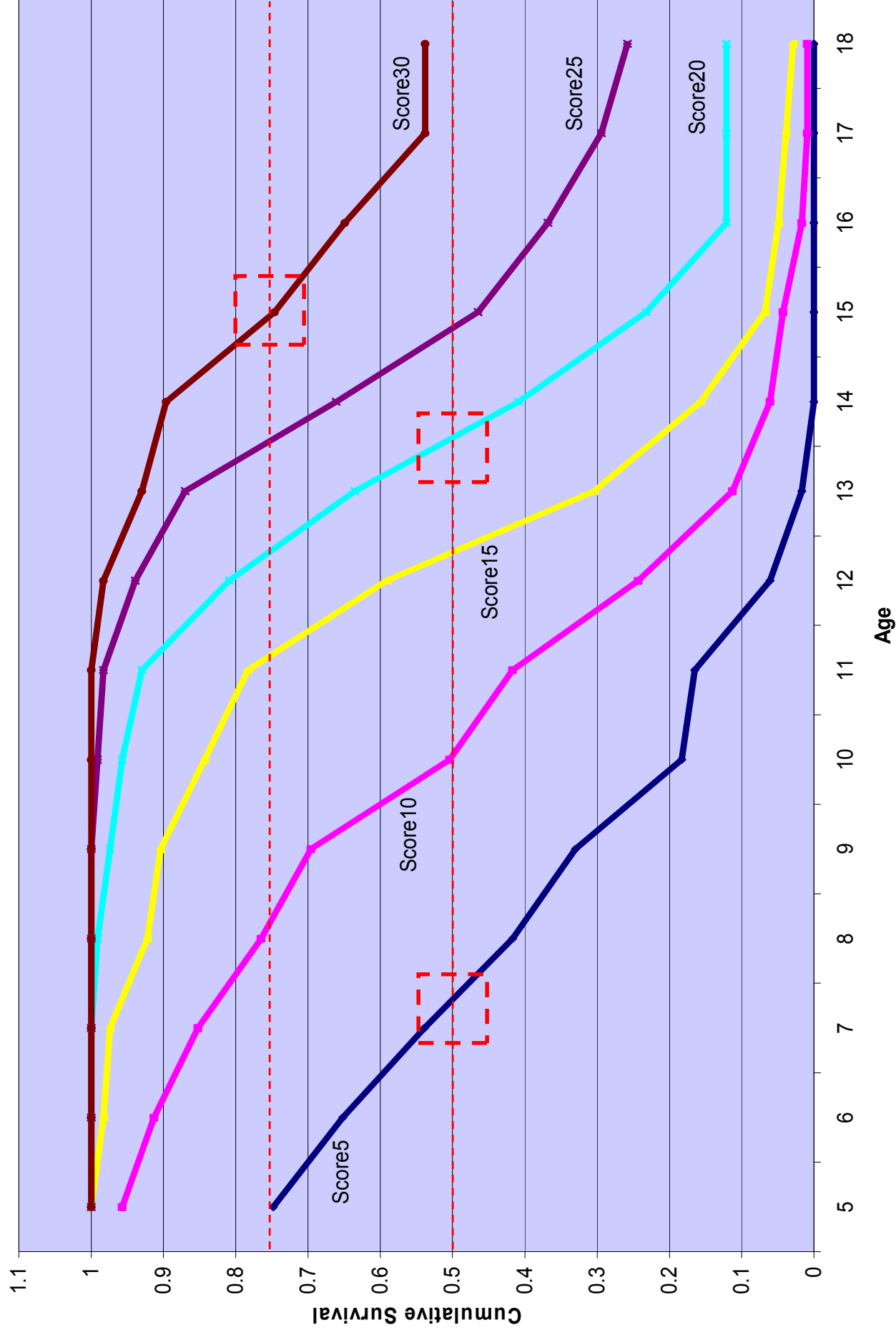
Item	Score	Age Onset Score of 1	Age Onset Score of 2
X	0	-----	-----
Y	1	age	-----
Z	2	age	age

- Calculate PCL:YV Total score at each age
- Calculate change in PCL:YV Total score across age intervals

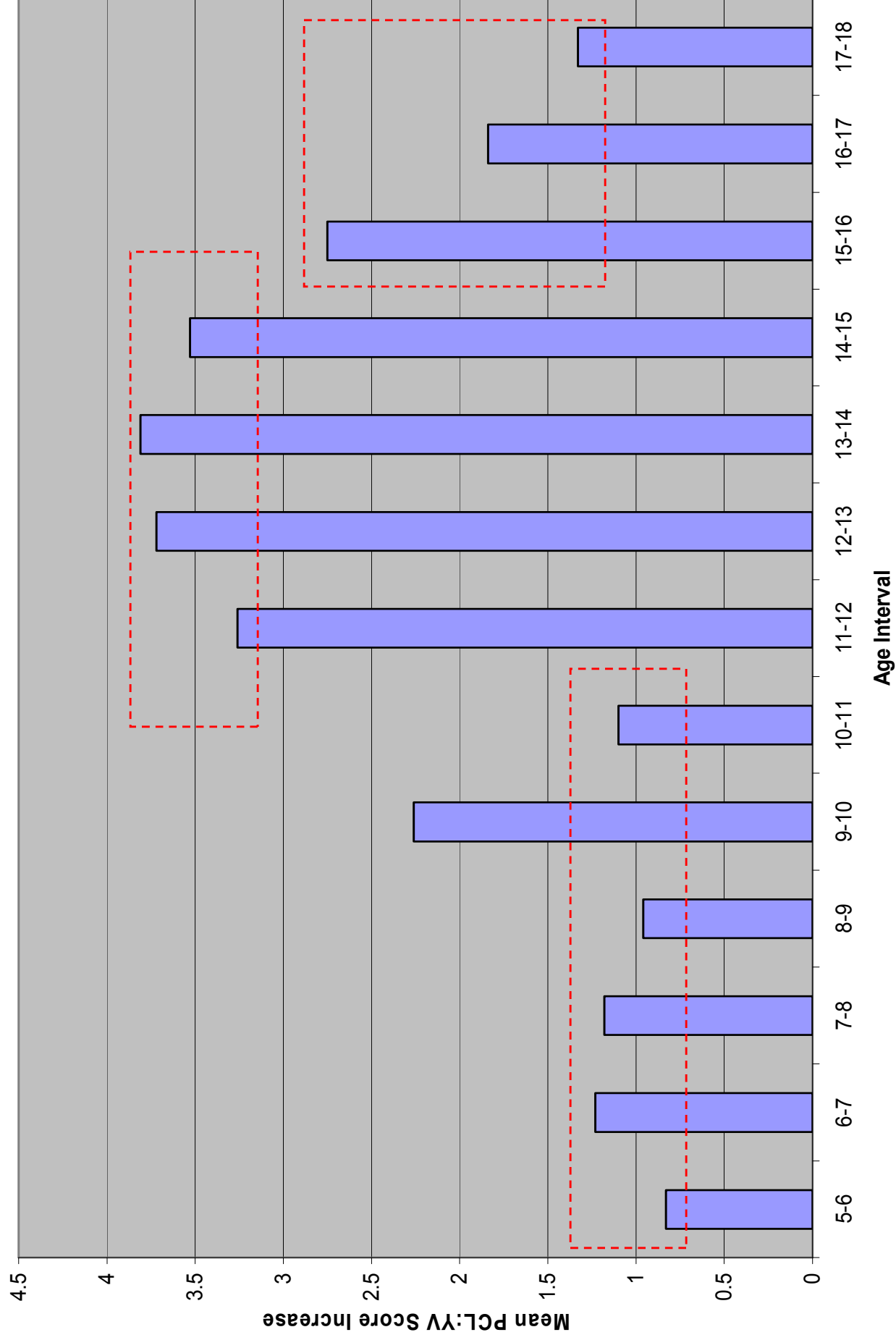
Statistical Analysis

- Survival analysis
- Dependent variable = median age of onset
 - Onset of various levels of PCL:YV Total score
 - Cutoffs of 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30
 - e.g., What is the average age by which 50% of the sample showed a PCL:YV Total score of 20?

Onset and Developmental Pattern of PCL:YV Total Score



Change in PCL:YV Total Score Across Development



Conclusions

- Onset
 - 50% of sample showed moderate levels (≥ 20) of psychopathic traits by age 14
 - 25% of sample showed high levels (≥ 30) of psychopathic traits by age 15
 - Importance of early intervention
- Developmental pattern
 - Largest increases in PCL:YV Total scores were from ages 13 to 15 (~3.5 points/year)
 - Early adolescence as high risk developmental period

Limitations & Future Directions

- Retrospective vs. prospective design
- Other samples, e.g., females, community
- Developmentally informed measurement
- Onset of psychopathy dimensions
- Offset of psychopathic traits
- Influence of bio-psycho-social factors
- Effect of targeted interventions

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