

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PSYCHOPATHIC BRAIN

ESSI VIDING

Presentation Tuesday 8.30

Psychopathy is an adult diagnosis comprised of both callous-unemotional personality traits (lack of empathy and guilt) and overt antisocial behaviour. One can also find children who exhibit callous-unemotional subtype of antisocial behaviour and who are at an increased risk for developing psychopathy.

Research from our lab and others has documented that callous-unemotional traits are heritable. More interestingly, when we study subgroups of antisocial children with/without callous-unemotional traits, we find strong genetic influence on antisocial behaviour in the former group, but not in the latter. Our finding supports the view that children at risk for psychopathy form a distinct subgroup with a genetic vulnerability to antisocial behaviour and I will present some preliminary genome-wide association data relating to this group of children.

Genetic vulnerability may underlie neurocognitive “abnormalities” associated with psychopathic traits. I will provide a brief overview of data from our and other labs investigating neurocognitive correlates of psychopathy/psychopathic traits. Our ongoing research combines behaviour genetic and brain imaging methodologies and these efforts will be discussed at the end of the talk.



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Essi Viding is a Finnish psychologist, who did her PhD (with Francesca Happé) and post-doc at the MRC Social Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Centre at the Institute of Psychiatry, working with, among others, Robert Plomin. She is now at the faculty of Psychology at University College of London.

Essi Viding's research combines cognitive experimental measures, twin model-fitting, brain imaging, and genotyping to study different developmental pathways (environmental and genetic) to persistent antisocial behaviour.

Essi is a young researcher, but she has been very productive. In addition to her research papers, she recently edited a major book: Hodgins, S., Viding, E., & Plodowski, A. (eds.) (2009) The Neurobiological Basis of Violence: Science and Rehabilitation. Oxford University Press.