

A psychopath lacks empathy just like a person with frontal head injury

January 25 2011

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[Psychopathy](#) is a personality disorder that finds expression in extreme anti-social behavior and intentional harm to others, including a lack of compassion and empathy. An existing explanation for such behavior suggests inability to comprehend the existence of emotions in others. However, the fact that many psychopaths act with sophistication and deceit with intention to harm others, indicates that they actually have a good grasp of the mental capacity of others - and are even capable of using that knowledge in order to cause them harm.

Earlier research by Dr. Shamay-Tsoory has examined individuals with

frontal head injury, i.e., damage to parts of the brain that are responsible for [emotional](#) functioning. She has shown that people suffering this type of brain damage have difficulty showing empathy. Having observed similar emotional deficiency in psychopathic behavior, she set out to see if there is in fact a similarity between the two cases.

The current study assessed 17 people who had been diagnosed by [psychiatrists](#) as psychotic – and not suffering from any known brain damage; and another 25 individuals suffering frontal lobe injury. Each of the participants underwent a computerized test examining cognitive ability to recognize feelings in another and the ability to demonstrate empathy for another's emotions. They were also tested to gauge their capacity to understand another's thoughts. The results of these tests showed that both groups demonstrated a similar difficulty in showing empathy, while two control groups of individuals with no known mental disorders or brain damage and individuals with non-frontal brain damage both showed different results with positive empathy capabilities.

"Seeing as psychopathic behavior is similar to that of a person with brain damage, it could be that it could benefit from similar forms of treatment," Dr. Shamay-Tsoory noted.

Provided by University of Haifa

Citation: A psychopath lacks empathy just like a person with frontal head injury (2011, January 25) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-01-psychopath-lacks-empathy-person-frontal.html>

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