

Study finds that psychopaths remain just as bad, or worse, as they age

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Anyone waiting for a sociopath to grow up or calm down should give up; they will not change, a new study has revealed.

The research, published in the *International Journal of Offender*

Therapy and Comparative Criminology, surveyed more than 1,200 partners, [family members](#) and friends of psychopaths—93% reported they were just as bad, or worse, as they got older.

Co-author Professor Martin Sellbom, of the University of Otago's Department of Psychology, says the research focused on people with antisocial personality disorder/psychopathy who were aged over 50.

"There is a general idea that offenders burn out and change their antisocial ways. But this study shows that those with psychopathic traits very much remain the same past age 50, and some even become worse as they get older with respect to manipulation, deceit, and abuse," he says.

The study took a unique victim-centered approach.

"This research gives a voice to the victims of psychopathy, providing a general indication of the degree to which victims are affected. Most of the time we focus on the individuals with such traits, and their biased perspectives."

According to those surveyed, 935 individuals showed levels of disordered traits considered indicative of ASPD/psychopathy. Respondents said 99% were manipulative, 94% engaged in antisocial behavior, 93% were emotionally abusive, 89% were psychologically abusive, 58% were financially abusive, and 47% were violent.

Many [respondents](#) provided narrative descriptions of what they witnessed and experienced. One woman wrote about her ex-husband: "The older he got, the more abusive he became. He lied, cheated, used, and stole. As he aged, he seemed to care less about hiding his behavior, and he seemed to openly enjoy being cruel."

Another respondent wrote about her mother: "Nothing ever changed. She

exploits, lies, throws tantrums, rages, abandons, pouts, defames, threatens, and would still be physically violent if she had the physical strength."

"There are many ways people can be victimized and many are unaware of the warning signs of psychopathy before it is too late. These individuals can be very charming and say all the right things to hook someone, but then the manipulation begins," Professor Sellbom says.

Survey respondents reported significant harm caused by these over-50 individuals: 68% lost money, 45% incurred debt, 26% were physically abused or injured, and 27% had their lives threatened.

Psychological harm was even more widespread: 88% of [survey respondents](#) said they became anxious or depressed, 76% said the stress of the involvement made them ill, 70% said they suffered post-[traumatic stress disorder](#) and 31% considered or attempted suicide.

Lead author Donna Andersen, founder of non-profit Lovefraud Education and Recovery, says the research shows people with [antisocial personality disorder](#) or [psychopathy](#) never stop their manipulative and deceptive behavior.

"Anyone who is waiting for a senior sociopath to grow up or calm down—whether this person is a [romantic partner](#), family member, work colleague or friend—should stop wasting their life and escape. He or she will not change."

More information: Donna M. Andersen et al, Surviving Senior Psychopathy: Informant Reports of Deceit and Antisocial Behavior in Multiple Types of Relationships, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/0306624X211067089](#)

Provided by University of Otago

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