



Aspects of psychopathic personality relate to lower subjective and objective professional success

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ABSTRACT

Which aspects of psychopathic personality, if any, contribute to professional success? Previous research suggests that fearless dominance does so. Yet, it also suggests that self-centered impulsivity impairs professional success. Here, we address this differential pattern in a preregistered, multi-wave study involving a large, nationally representative sample ($N = 2969$ New Zealanders). We test the (a) replicability of prior findings using a new objective measure of professional success, and (b) stability of our findings across two annual assessments from 2011 and 2012. Fearless dominance is positively associated, but self-centered impulsivity is negatively associated, with subjective professional success. Controlling for age, gender, education level, and time in the current job does not alter these associations. Further, self-centered impulsivity and coldheartedness are negatively related with objective professional success. However, only the effect of coldheartedness remains after considering demographic variables. These relations hold for predicting subjective and objective professional success one year later. Together, aspects of psychopathic personality are linked *negatively* to objective professional success, a finding that challenges popular beliefs about the functional benefits of psychopathy in the workplace.

1. Introduction

The functional benefits of psychopathy have been the subject of ongoing debate (Blickle and Genau, 2019; O'Boyle et al., 2012; Smith and Lilienfeld, 2013). Specifically, do psychopathic personality characteristics promote professional success? Previous literature has relied on aspects of psychopathic personality, drawn from small samples, and reported divergent results. Here, we approach this debate by drawing from a large, nationally representative sample and examining stability of responses over time.

Psychopathic personality entails superficial charm, unreliability, dishonesty, lack of remorse, and loss of insight or presence of unresponsiveness during interpersonal interactions (Cleckley, 1941). The Psychopathic Personality Inventory (PPI; Lilienfeld and Widows, 2005) draws on a model characterizing these manifestations by two main aspects. The first aspect, *fearless dominance*, is characterized as fearless, socially dominant, bold, and low on empathy and emotion. This aspect is linked to the primary psychopathy concept (Levenson et al., 1995;

Sellbom and Drislane, 2020) despite some debate of its role within psychopathic personality (Lilienfeld, Patrick, et al., 2012; Miller and Lynam, 2012; Sellbom and Drislane, 2020). The second aspect, *self-centered impulsivity*, is characterized as self-centered, impulsive, antisocial, and disinhibited, linked to the secondary psychopathy concept (Levenson et al., 1995; Seibert et al., 2011; Sellbom and Drislane, 2020). A third aspect that is covered by this model but not featured as a factor is *coldheartedness*, characterized by lack of empathy and guilt (Berg et al., 2015; Lilienfeld and Widows, 2005).

Despite these unfavorable characterizations and commonly reported harmful outcomes of psychopathic personality in social or professional settings (Boddy, 2015; Boddy and Taplin, 2017; Landay et al., 2019; Testori et al., 2019), there is some empirical support for psychopathic aspects contributing to one's success (i.e., attaining positive outcomes and avoiding negative ones). For example, the performance of U.S. presidents, measured by historians' evaluations of leadership, persuasiveness, and crisis management, is associated positively with fearless dominance. This reflects an ability to obtain political support by skills of

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persuasion and conveying a strong and reassuring leadership, but it is unassociated with self-centered impulsivity (Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012). The moderated-expression model (Hall and Benning, 2006; Lilienfeld et al., 2015; Steinert et al., 2017) could explain this pattern, as it posits that aspects of psychopathic personality can be linked with success due to protective factors (e.g., high intelligence, positive parenting), which buffer negative outcomes (e.g., antisocial behavior). Based on recent findings, however, different variants of psychopathy might be conducive to positive or negative outcomes (Sellbom et al., 2021), a pattern that is accounted for by the differential-configuration model (Lilienfeld et al., 2015). Given that prior results point to differential associations of fearless dominance and self-centered impulsivity with professional success, the differential-configuration-model seems more applicable.

Professional success can be conceptualized as subjective (e.g., personal satisfaction with one's career) or objective (e.g., income or number of field sales; Spurk et al., 2019). When professional success is measured subjectively, it manifests mainly negative (Paleczek et al., 2018; Spurk et al., 2016), but also null (Jonason et al., 2015), correlations with summary scores for psychopathic personality. However, these studies typically use a psychopathy summary score, so differentiating among aspects of psychopathic personality may account for their inconsistency in the results of these studies. For example, fearless dominance is associated positively (Blickle and Genau, 2019; Eisenbarth et al., 2018), but self-centered impulsivity negatively (Eisenbarth et al., 2018), with subjective professional success.

When professional success is measured objectively, its relationship to psychopathic personality becomes more complex. Specifically, fearless dominance and attributes related to self-centered impulsivity are negatively associated with social wealth and status when operationalized by income, social class, home characteristics, and number of employees supervising in the job (Ullrich et al., 2008). Moreover, although fearless dominance is positively associated with income, this association only holds for individuals with higher educational levels, and reverses for those with lower educational levels (Blickle and Genau, 2019). Additionally, field sales increase among those moderate on fearless dominance, but decrease among those low and very high on it (Titze et al., 2017). Similarly, fearless dominance and attributes related to self-centered impulsivity are negatively associated with academic success (i. e., course grades; Hassall et al., 2015). Attainment of power and leadership positions paints yet another controversial picture: a meta-analysis found a positive association between psychopathic personality with leadership emergence, but a negative association with leadership effectiveness, and transformational leadership (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Coldheartedness, a third aspect of psychopathic personality (Psychopathic Personality Inventory; Lilienfeld and Widows, 2005; Neumann et al., 2008) has not been investigated regarding its relationship with either form of professional success, despite reflecting low empathic concern (Sorman et al., 2016) and low agreeableness and openness (Berg et al., 2015), which are relevant to workplace behavior (Smith et al., 2014).

In this preregistered study (<https://bit.ly/39cwEGx>), we systematically investigate the relationship between subjective and objective professional success on the one hand, and the three aspects of psychopathic personality—fearless dominance, self-centered impulsivity, coldheartedness—on the other using national-scale longitudinal data from the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS). We implement a proxy measure of the PPI-R factors model to operationalize primary and secondary variants of psychopathic personality (Sellbom and Drislane, 2020), and to be able to compare the results with previous findings (Eisenbarth et al., 2018). We operationalize subjective professional success as job satisfaction, and objective professional success as occupational prestige (the latter differs from the suggested method in the preregistration, as we re-evaluated the usefulness of the variables available in the NZAVS). Furthermore, we adjust for age, gender, job tenure, and education levels—variables that can confound the

relationship between psychopathic personality and professional success (Blickle and Genau, 2019; Ng et al., 2005). Finally, we assess the impact of subjective and objective professional success one year later by aspects of psychopathic personality at the first time point, again adjusting for gender, education levels, age, and job tenure.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

We used Times 3 (2011) and 4 (2012) of the NZAVS, an annual, longitudinal panel study of New Zealanders (for sampling and retention details, see Sibley, 2020). Participants who had responded to all relevant study variables¹ and reported being currently employed at Time 3 constituted the final sample. The Time 3 (to which we refer as T0) wave included responses from 2367 participants (1429 women, 938 men), ranging in age from 20 to 82 years ($M = 50.11$, $SD = 11.18$). The mean education level was 5.29 ($SD = 2.73$) on a scale from 1 to 10, which represented a Diploma level based on New Zealand's Qualifications Framework—Qualification Level (Stats NZ, 2020). Participants' average job tenure was 10.32 years ($SD = 9.67$, $Range = 0-60$ years). Of participants, 74.94% identified predominantly as European/Pākehā, 9.13% as Māori, 1.73% as Pasifika, 1.65% as Asian, and 12.55% as other ethnicity.

The Time 4 (to which we refer as T1) wave included responses from 2021 participants (1211 women, 810 men), ranging in age from 21 to 83 years ($M = 51.26$, $SD = 10.77$). We included those participants because they had remained in the same job during that year. The NZAVS was approved by The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Psychopathic personality

We based assessment of the three aspects of psychopathic personality—fearless dominance, self-centered impulsivity, coldheartedness—on the structure of the Psychopathic Personality Inventory Revised (PPI-R; Lilienfeld and Widows, 2005). To derive a PPI-R - equivalent measure relying on items included in the NZAVS, we conducted two validation studies (Supplementary material: Table A1 for items, Section B for the two studies).

2.2.2. Subjective professional success

We operationalized subjective professional success as job satisfaction. We used two NZAVS items: "How satisfied are you with your current job?" (1 = *not at all*, 10 = *very much*), "How secure do you feel in your current job?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Prior research found a positive association between job security and job satisfaction (Aletraris, 2010), matching the conceptualization of subjective professional success as subjective experience of the job (Spurk et al., 2019). See Table 1 for descriptive statistics of all variables.

2.2.3. Occupational prestige

To measure objective professional success, we used the New Zealand Socioeconomic Index (NZSEI; Milne et al., 2013), which involves participants' occupation to calculate their socioeconomic status by assigning a score ranging from 10 (*lowest*) to 90 (*highest*). The NZSEI implicates weights derived from census data, rendering it an objective measure of occupational prestige. Participants responded to the open-ended

¹ To test for differences due to missing data, we used multiple imputation (with 20 iterations) on the complete dataset, and tested the regression models on those imputed data. Results in terms of direction and strength of effects matched those from the non-imputed dataset. Therefore, we report the results for the existing dataset only.

Table 1
Descriptive measures of all variables.

	M	SD
NZVAS PPI SUM	3.14	0.50
NZAVS FD	4.15	0.93
NZAVS SCI	2.55	0.83
NZAVS CO	2.72	0.83
Job satisfaction T0	5.19	1.45
Job security T0	5.29	1.64
Job tenure T0	10.32	9.67
Occupational prestige T0	57.34	16.56
Job satisfaction T1	5.19	1.48
Job security T1	5.24	1.61
Job tenure T1	11.33	9.72
Occupational prestige T1	56.97	16.61
Education level T1	5.29	2.73

Note: $N = 2367$; FD = fearless dominance, SCI = self-centered impulsivity, CO = coldheartedness.

question, “What is your current occupation?”. We categorized their responses according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations. We then converted these categories to an NZSEI score (Milne et al., 2013). Examples of occupations in the 10-20 range include *Food Preparation Assistants, Cleaners and Laundry Workers, and Packers and Product Assemblers*, whereas examples in the 70-90 range included *Business and Systems Analysts and Programmers, Legal Professionals, and Medical Practitioners*. This specific measure has been used in research to control for occupational status (Yogeeswaran et al., 2018). Similar census-derived scales are frequently employed to assess socioeconomic status and occupational prestige (Fernandez et al., 2015; Ganzeboom et al., 1992).

2.3. Data analysis

For the cross-sectional analysis, we computed zero-order correlations among all variables of interest. Next, we used linear regression, predicting a summary variable for subjective professional success (job satisfaction, job security) and objective professional success (occupational prestige). We calculated two relevant comparison regression models, adding as predictors age, gender, job tenure, and education levels. We did not run a cross-validation analysis (as suggested in the pre-registration) due to the external validation Study 2 (Supplementary material). We conducted all analyses in R (R Core Team, 2018). Syntax for the reported models and Supplementary material are available at OSF (<https://bit.ly/39cwEGx>).

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations

We report (a) means and standard deviations in Table 1, (b) zero-

Table 2
Regression model results predicting subjective professional success (T0).

Predictors	Subjective professional success T0			Subjective professional success T0		
	Estimates	95% CI	<i>p</i>	Estimates	95% CI	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	9.53	8.84–10.22	<.001	9.12	8.17–10.06	<.001
SCI	-0.36	-0.49 to -0.23	<.001	-0.35	-0.48 to -0.21	<.001
FD	0.50	0.39–0.62	<.001	0.50	0.39–0.62	<.001
CO	-0.08	-0.21–0.05	.224	-0.07	-0.21–0.07	.310
Gender				-0.26	-0.74–0.21	.278
Education T1				-0.00	-0.04–0.04	.958
Age T0				0.00	-0.01–0.01	.595
Job tenure T0				0.23	0.10–0.36	.001
AIC/BIC	11,203/11232			11,196/11248		

Note: $N = 2367$; FD = fearless dominance, SCI = self-centered impulsivity, CO = coldheartedness; participant gender was coded as 1 for females and 0 for males; unstandardized coefficients.

order correlations between T0 personality scores and T0 outcomes in Supplementary material Table A2, and (c) zero-order correlations between T0 personality scores and T1 outcomes in Supplementary material Table A3.

3.2. Cross-sectional models predicting subjective professional success

A linear regression model predicting subjective professional success by psychopathic personality showed a positive contribution of fearless dominance ($b = 0.50, p < .001$) and a negative contribution of self-centered impulsivity ($b = -0.36, p < .001$), but no significant contribution of coldheartedness ($b = -0.08, p = .224, AIC = 11,203, BIC = 11,232$; Table 2). A comparison model including gender, education, age, and job tenure partially improved fit ($AIC = 11,196, BIC = 11,248; F[4, 2359] = 3.911, p = .004$), with a positive predictive contribution of job tenure ($b = 0.23, p = .001$), whereas contributions of the psychopathic personality aspects were unchanged (FD: $b = 0.50, p < .001, SCI: b = -0.35, p < .001, CO: b = -0.07, p = .310$; Table 2).

3.3. Cross-sectional models predicting occupational prestige

A linear regression model predicting occupational prestige by psychopathic personality was significant, with no significant contribution of fearless dominance ($b = -0.57, p = .124$), and a negative contribution of both self-centered impulsivity ($b = -1.93, p < .001$) and coldheartedness ($b = -2.80, p < .001; AIC = 19,926, BIC = 19,955$; Table 3). A comparison model including gender, education, age, and job tenure improved model fit ($AIC = 19,023, BIC = 19,075, F[4, 2359] = 276.790, p < .001$), with a negative predictive contribution of gender ($b = -7.30, p < .001$), and a positive contribution of education level ($b = 3.42, p < .001$) and tenure ($b = 1.77, p < .001$). Of the psychopathic personality traits, only coldheartedness remained a significant predictor ($b = -1.57, p = .021$; Table 3).

3.4. Zero-order and partial correlations predicting outcomes one year later

The correlation coefficients between 2011 psychopathic personality scores and 2012 outcomes were stable (Supplementary material Table A3). Correlations of psychopathic personality at T0 with subjective and objective professional success at T1 (2012), controlling for success variables at T0 (2011), were not significant, matching the high correlations between 2011 and 2012 outcome variables with $r = 0.63 (p < .001)$ for subjective professional success and $r = 0.77 (p < .001)$ for objective professional success (Fig. 1).

3.5. Models predicting subjective professional success one year later

A linear regression model predicting the sum variable for subjective professional success by psychopathic personality yielded a positive

Table 3
Regression models results predicting occupational prestige cross-sectional (T0).

Predictors	Occupational prestige T0			Occupational prestige T0		
	Estimates	95% CI	<i>p</i>	Estimates	95% CI	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	72.25	67.91–76.59	<.001	42.57	37.63–47.52	<.001
SCI	-1.93	-2.78 to -1.09	<.001	-0.61	-1.32–0.10	.092
FD	-0.57	-1.29–0.16	.124	-0.09	-0.69–0.52	.782
CO	-2.80	-3.64 to -1.97	<.001	-0.85	-1.57 to -0.13	.021
Gender				-7.30	-9.77 to -4.83	<.001
Education T1				3.42	3.21–3.62	<.001
Age T0				0.09	0.04–0.15	.001
Job tenure T0				1.77	1.08–2.47	<.001
AIC/BIC	19,926/19955			19,023/19075		

Note: *N* = 2367; FD = fearless dominance, SCI = self-centered impulsivity, CO = coldheartedness; participant gender was coded as 1 for females and 0 for males; unstandardized coefficients.

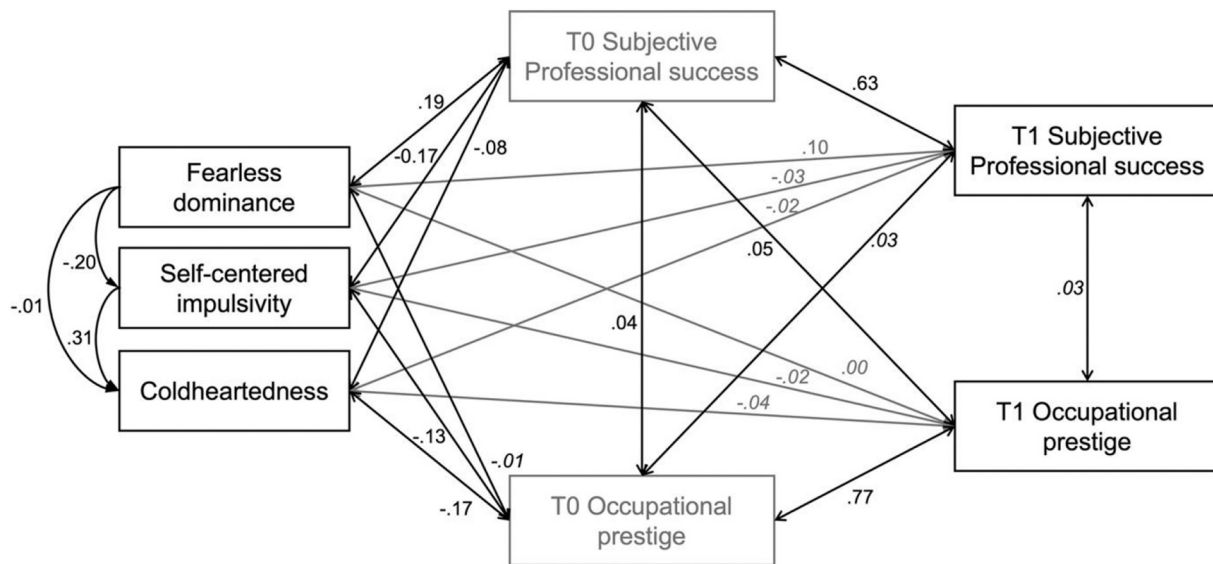


Fig. 1. Zero-order and partial correlations between psychopathy factors, subjective professional success, and occupational prestige at T0 and T1 (grey lines and coefficients for T1 controlled for T0); all correlations are significant at *p* < .01 level, unless italicized.

contribution of fearless dominance (*b* = 0.51, *p* < .001), a negative contribution of self-centered impulsivity (*b* = -0.27, *p* < .001), and no significant contribution of coldheartedness (*b* = -0.08, *p* = .274), matching the model for the cross-sectional analysis (AIC = 9494, BIC = 9522; Table 4). A comparison model including gender, education, age, and job tenure partially improved model fit (AIC = 9488, BIC = 9539, *F* [4, 2005] = 3.312, *p* = .010), with a positive predictive contribution of job tenure (*b* = 0.20, *p* = .017), and similar significant contributions of psychopathic personality factors (FD: *b* = 0.51, *p* < .001, SCI: *b* = -0.25,

p = .001, CO: *b* = -0.07, *p* = .369; Table 4).

3.6. Models predicting objective professional success one year later

A linear regression model predicting objective professional success by psychopathic personality produced no significant contribution of fearless dominance, and a negative contribution of both self-centered impulsivity (*b* = -1.49, *p* = .002) and coldheartedness (*b* = -2.74, *p* < .001), matching the equivalent cross-sectional model (AIC = 17,044,

Table 4
Regression models results predicting subjective professional success longitudinal (T1).

Predictors	Subjective professional success T1			Subjective professional success T1		
	Estimates	CI	<i>p</i>	Estimates	CI	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	9.30	8.56–10.03	<.001	8.31	7.27–9.34	<.001
SCI	-0.27	-0.42 to -0.13	<.001	-0.25	-0.39 to -0.10	.001
FD	0.51	0.39–0.63	<.001	0.51	0.39–0.63	<.001
CO	-0.08	-0.22–0.06	.274	-0.07	-0.22–0.08	.369
Gender				-0.15	-0.66–0.36	.570
Education T1				0.02	-0.02–0.06	.300
Age T1				0.01	-0.00–0.02	.113
Job tenure T1				0.20	0.04–0.36	.017
AIC/BIC	9494/9522			9488/9539		

Note: *N* = 2013; FD = fearless dominance, SCI = self-centered impulsivity, CO = coldheartedness; participant gender was coded as 1 for males and 0 for females; unstandardized coefficients.

BIC = 17,073). A comparison model including gender, education, age, and job tenure improved model fit (AIC = 16,225, BIC = 16,276, $F[4, 2010] = 254.560, p < .001$), with a negative predictive contribution of gender ($b = -7.48, p < .001$), as well as a positive contribution of education level ($b = 3.50, p < .001$), and job tenure ($b = 1.97, p < .001$). In comparison to the cross-sectional model, coldheartedness was no longer a significant predictor ($b = -0.77, p = .055$; Table 5).

4. Discussion

Here, for the first time, we investigated the association between different aspects of psychopathic personality and subjective as well as objective measures of professional success in a preregistered and multi-wave study. Replicating earlier findings from a much smaller convenience sample (Eisenbarth et al., 2018), we obtained a positive association between subjective professional success (indicated by job satisfaction and job security) and fearless dominance, but a negative association between subjective professional success and self-centered impulsivity. Additionally, we obtained negative associations between objective professional success (occupational prestige) and both self-centered impulsivity and coldheartedness. Also replicating previous findings, gender, education, age, and job tenure explained significant variation, but only reduced the predictive value of psychopathic personality aspects for occupational prestige, not for subjective professional success.

Furthermore, for the first time, we investigated the stability of those associations over one year across model populations and found stability in key features of the cross-sectional models. Regarding subjective professional success, we replicated previous results (Eisenbarth et al., 2018; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012) and studies using different measures for aspects of psychopathic personality (Blickle and Genau, 2019; Titze et al., 2017). Specifically, we obtained a positive relationship between fearless dominance—the aspect of psychopathy reflecting low empathy, reduced sensitivity to fear, and dominance in interpersonal interactions—and subjective professional success. Also, we obtained a negative relationship between subjective professional success and self-centered impulsivity, the aspect of psychopathy reflecting egocentrism and impulsivity. This finding aligns with prior research illustrating a negative link between self-centered impulsivity and effective bargaining (Berg et al., 2013). Coldheartedness was unassociated with subjective professional success. These findings are consistent with the differential-configuration model of successful psychopathy (Lilienfeld et al., 2015), which posits that a constellation of high fearlessness, high coldheartedness, and low self-centered impulsivity is related to a reduced likelihood of antisocial behavior.

The inclusion of gender, education, age, and job tenure in the models did not change the relevance of aspects of psychopathic personality in accounting for subjective professional success, despite job tenure adding a significant contribution to the model, a pattern that aligns with previous findings (Eisenbarth et al., 2018; Ng et al., 2005). This pattern

further suggests that subjective professional success is explained by high fearless dominance and low self-centered impulsivity as well as the time individuals have been in their job. Those findings were stable for subjective professional success one year later. Prior research has shown that psychopathic personality is associated with lower neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, as well as higher extraversion (Seibert et al., 2011). Indeed, conscientiousness (Barrick & Mount, 1991)—in particular, the dependability facet of conscientiousness (Dudley et al., 2006)—is one of the most robust personality-level predictors of generic job performance. In regard to the debate about the centrality of fearless dominance for psychopathy (Lilienfeld, Patrick, et al., 2012; Miller and Lynam, 2012; Vize et al., 2016), our findings point to a differential contribution of fearless dominance in comparison to self-centered impulsivity, and potentially reflect the primary and secondary variants (Sellbom and Drislane, 2020). On the other hand, self-centered impulsivity might reduce the ability to do well in the context of self-defeating behavior (Vazire and Funder, 2006). Additionally, gender, education levels, or age played no significant role for subjective professional success, suggesting the potential independence of these demographical characteristics.

Finally, and again for the first time, we operationalized professional success as occupational prestige (i.e., socio-economic success based on a standardized classification scheme). As such, occupational prestige is both a balanced measure of material success and the product of a validated independent assessment (Milne et al., 2013). The relationship of objective professional success with aspects of psychopathic personality depends on variables in the models. A model including only aspects of psychopathic personality indicated no relationship with fearless dominance, and negative relationships between self-centered impulsivity and coldheartedness on the one hand and objective professional success on the other. However, subsequent inclusion of gender, education levels, age, and job tenure diminished these relationships, resulting in only coldheartedness still contributing significantly, but all additional variables explaining occupational prestige significantly. Thus, regardless of the variables we included, objective professional success (based on occupational prestige) was either negatively associated or unassociated with different aspects of psychopathic personality, and these patterns remained stable over a one-year period. As previous research documented the role of education as a moderator (Blickle and Genau, 2019) and other demographic variables are highly predictive of salary (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2019), our findings fit with the strong prediction of those personal characteristics. Nevertheless, future studies might take situational characteristics into account, given that, on the basis of the Trait Activation Theory and its predictions of performance (Tett and Burnett, 2003), personality traits interact with the work environment to predict job performance (Wihler et al., 2017).

Taken together, aspects of psychopathic personality conduced to lower subjective and objective professional success. Thus, psychopathic personality appears to be problematic for success no matter if defined subjectively or objectively. The findings supply a more definitive answer

Table 5
Regression models results predicting occupational prestige longitudinal (T1).

Predictors	Occupational prestige T1			Occupational prestige T1		
	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p
(Intercept)	70.74	65.99–75.50	<.001	44.84	39.38–50.29	<.001
SCI	-1.49	-2.42 to -0.55	.002	-0.20	-0.97–0.58	.621
FD	-0.55	-1.35–0.24	.170	0.10	-0.55–0.75	.772
CO	-2.74	-3.66 to -1.83	<.001	-0.77	-1.55–0.02	.055
Gender				-7.48	-10.16 to -4.80	<.001
Education T1				3.50	3.28–3.72	<.001
Age T1				-0.02	-0.08–0.05	.625
Job tenure T1				1.97	1.11–2.82	<.001
AIC/BIC	17,044/17073			16,225/16276		

Note: N = 2018; FD = fearless dominance, SCI = self-centered impulsivity, CO = coldheartedness; participant gender was coded as 1 for males and 0 for females; unstandardized coefficients.

to the debate of whether psychopathic personality contributes to success, countering claims of benefits (or denials of the inevitability of liabilities) conferred by psychopathic personality—claims made both in textbooks (Dutton, 2012) and online media (McGreal, 2014; Santos, 2014).

Our research has certain strengths. The size and characteristics of our large, stratified community sample, and the ability to follow-up outcomes over a year, allowed us to replicate results that were based on much smaller samples. Also, the occupational prestige measure allowed us to control for income linked to a profession. Furthermore, we established a proxy-measure for aspects of psychopathic personality based on personality questions in the database. Replicating earlier findings with our proxy-measure in this study and in validation Study 2 (Supplementary material) adds confidence in our findings, given the substantial overlap of the psychopathic personality scales derived from the NZAVS dataset with the scores using the PPI-R. Yet, our research also has limitations. Despite the high correlations between NZAVS items used to derive scores for psychopathic personality with the original NZAVS-R factors in our validation studies, the NZAVS derived scores for psychopathic personality had low reliability, which may be due to the small number of items per factor. As such, these factors represent a proxy measure of psychopathic traits and need further validation. In addition, future work based on full self-report measures of psychopathic personality traits could examine facet level associations as well as test other models of psychopathy related to the bold characteristics of fearless dominance (Miller et al., 2020).

To conclude, we addressed, in a large sample drawn from a nationally representative dataset, the debate on whether psychopathic personality conduces to professional success. We obtained no indication that psychopathic personality does so, except for a weak contribution of fearless dominance. Instead, psychopathic personality obstructed professional success. The findings challenge both textbook claims and popular beliefs regarding benefits of psychopathy in the workplace. Lastly, the findings highlight that the nuanced relevance of personality characteristics in the workplace, calling for a consideration of subtypes and different outcomes.

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ORCID iD authorship contribution statement

Hedwig Eisenbarth: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. **Claire M. Hart:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. **Elena Zubielevitch:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing. **Tristan Keilor:** Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Marc Wilson:** Writing – review & editing. **Joseph Bulbulia:** Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Chris G. Sibley:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **Constantine Sedikides:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Supplementary Materials (Appendix A and B)

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.111340>.

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