

# Examining the Relationships Between Parental Factors and Juvenile Offenders' Mental Health Outcomes



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## Abstract

- Current study utilized secondary data analysis of the baseline timepoint of the Pathways to Desistance study sample
- Sample consisted of 1,354 current or formerly incarcerated youth ages 14-19
- Statistical analyses were used to examine the relationships between parental factors, demographics, and youth mental health outcomes
- Significant differences were found between gender, ethnicity, and parental warmth/hostility and mental health
- Maternal hostility and paternal substance abuse history were the only significant predictors of poor mental health

## Introduction and Literature Review

- The mental health of juvenile offenders is generally poor
- Juvenile offenders' behavior and development are highly influenced by their parents
- Social learning theory suggests that children learn delinquent behaviors and poor coping skills from their parents
- Coercive family process theory proposes that children's antisocial behavior is developed by negative parent-child interactions
- Studies show that parental incarceration history, substance abuse history, and hostility are generally related to children's poor mental health outcomes and likelihood of offending
- Not many studies have examined how parent's history of psychiatric hospitalization affects children's mental health
- Few studies have examined how these parental factors affect juvenile offenders' mental health in particular

## Research Questions

- What is the relationship between parental psychiatric hospitalization history, incarceration history, substance abuse history, and warmth and hostility levels and juvenile offenders' mental health outcomes?
- What is the relationship between ethnicity, gender, and parental warmth and hostility?

## Methods

### Research Design

- Original data source was the Pathways to Desistance study by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network
- Longitudinal, multi-site study with eleven timepoints

### Sample and Sampling Method

- Public court records from Phoenix and Philadelphia were used to recruit sample
- Youth were eligible if they were between the ages of 14 and 17 when their first offense was committed, and they had to have been found guilty of a felony
- Final sample consisted of 1,354 youth; 86% male, 14% female, 25% white, 44% black, 29% Hispanic, and 2% other race

### Data Collection

- Informed consent/verbal assent with parent/guardian signed consent was obtained
- Data were collected through self-report questionnaires on secure computers during face-to-face interviews

### Measures

- **Demographics:** Age, race/ethnicity, gender, country of birth, and study site location
- **Parental warmth and hostility:** Measured through the means of 9 items for each mother/father

warmth/hostility on a 4-point Likert scale (higher scores means higher warmth/hostility)

- **Parental history of incarceration and hospitalization:** 2 items asked if mother/father has ever been incarcerated and psychiatrically hospitalized. Items were answered with a "yes" or "no"
- **Parental substance abuse history:** Re-coded variables asked if mother/father has ever had a substance abuse issue. Items were answered with a "yes" or "no"
- **Brief Symptoms Inventory (BSI):** self-report inventory consisting of nine subscales to measure symptom frequency. Current study utilized the depression, anxiety, hostility, and global severity index (GSI) scales. Measured on a 5-point Likert scale (higher scores means worse symptoms)

### Statistical Analysis

- **Kruskal-Wallis H-test:** used to measure the relationships between ethnicity, parental warmth/hostility, and mental health outcomes
- **Mann-Whitney U-test:** used to measure the relationships between gender, parental warmth/hostility, and mental health outcomes
- **Multiple linear regression:** used to measure the relationships between parental factors and mental health outcomes

## Results

### Kruskal-Wallis H-test

- Significant relationships were found between ethnicity and mother's warmth and hostility, and father's warmth and hostility
- Significant relationships were found between ethnicity and all mental health outcomes

### Mann-Whitney U-test

- Significant difference found between males and females for mother's hostility; no significance for father's hostility
- Significant differences were found between males and females for all mental health outcomes

### Multiple Linear Regression

- **GSI:** Mother's hostility and father's history of drug use were significant predictors of high GSI scores
- **Hostility:** Mother's hostility, father's hostility, and father's history of drug use were significant predictors
- **Depression:** Mother's hostility was the only significant predictor
- **Anxiety:** Mother's hostility was the only significant predictor

Table 7

Multiple Linear Regression Results for Global Severity Index, Hostility, Depression, and Anxiety

Independent Variables	Global Severity Index			Hostility			Depression			Anxiety		
	b	SE	B	b	SE	B	b	SE	B	b	SE	B
Mother's Incarceration History	.016	.061	.011	.002	.086	.001	-.032	.084	-.016	.047	.074	.027
Father's Incarceration History	.028	.045	.025	.061	.063	.038	.022	.061	.015	.049	.054	.037
Mother's Psychiatric Hospitalization History	-.040	.125	-.013	-.110	.176	-.024	-.046	.171	-.011	.038	.151	.010
Father's Psychiatric Hospitalization History	.170	.158	.042	.266	.223	.046	.188	.216	.035	.124	.191	.026
Mother's Drug Use History	-.013	.053	-.010	.070	.074	.040	-.042	.072	-.026	-.015	.064	-.010
Father's Drug Use History	.091*	.046	.084	.153*	.065	.098	.090	.063	.062	.076	.056	.059
Mother's Warmth	-.014	.037	-.018	.019	.052	.017	.003	.051	.003	-.071	.045	-.077
Father's Warmth	-.010	.030	-.016	-.051	.042	-.056	-.002	.041	-.002	.004	.036	.006
Mother's Hostility	.315***	.057	.256	.421***	.080	.236	.339***	.078	.207	.285***	.069	.195
Father's Hostility	.053	.051	.047	.227**	.071	.139	-.017	.069	-.011	.005	.061	.004
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.101			<b>R<sup>2</sup></b> .144			<b>R<sup>2</sup></b> .048			<b>R<sup>2</sup></b> .070		
<b>F</b>	6.738			<b>F</b> 10.068			<b>F</b> 3.012			<b>F</b> 4.473		

Note: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

## Discussion

### Implications

- Findings for all results were generally inconsistent with previous literature
- Findings can help inform social work practice with juvenile offenders, particularly with trauma processing and family therapy
- This research can also aid social workers in facilitating collaborative, rehabilitative care in the community for juvenile offenders
- Social work policy should advocate for more mental health services for juvenile offenders in locked facilities, as well as preventative services in schools for youth at-risk of offending

### Study Limitations

- Current study was a cross sectional analysis; no claims of causality can be made
- There was little data regarding parental history of mental health issues
- There was much missing data regarding fathers due to the absence of fathers in some participant's lives

### Future Directions

- Further research on the impact of parental substance abuse history on juvenile offender's mental health should be conducted
- Risk/protective factors for mental health among different ethnicities and genders should be further researched
- The role of maternal hostility in children's mental health should be studied further
- Additional research should be done to explore insignificant results in this study, namely the role of parental incarceration and psychiatric hospitalization on children's mental health outcomes