

Anxiety in Mexican-American Juvenile Offenders

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ABSTRACT

A link between anxiety and delinquency has been identified amongst the research along with an overrepresentation of adolescents with mental disorders among juvenile offenders. Historically, ethnic minorities have been overrepresented in both the adult and juvenile justice systems, however the number of Latinos within the juvenile justice system is inconsistent across studies (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, n.d.; Kang et al., 2018; Knight et al., 2012; Sawyer, 2019). The present study aimed to examine the relationship between anxiety, friendship quality and neighborhood conditions amongst Mexican American juvenile offenders. Neighborhood conditions were positively associated with anxiety, while no significant relationship was found between friendship quality and anxiety. The findings suggest that adolescents' mental health is impacted more by interactions between the adolescent and their community rather than the relationship with their peers.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study

- Adolescent from low-income families are less likely to receive treatment for mental disorders such as anxiety and depression (Ghandour et al., 2019).
- Roughly 65 percent of juvenile offenders have a psychiatric disorder (Jolliffe et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Research

- To further understand the correlation between increasing anxiety disorders amongst adolescents and how systems impact Mexican American juvenile offenders.

Research Question and Hypothesis

- What is the relationship between neighborhood conditions, friendship quality and levels of anxiety among Mexican-American juvenile offenders?
- This study hypothesizes that the higher the degree of community disorder, the higher the level of anxiety; as the quality of friendship increases, the level of anxiety will decrease.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety in Latinx Adolescents

- Studies have found that compared to non-Latino European Americans, in community samples, Latinos were less likely to be diagnosed with anxiety; however, in detained juvenile samples, Latinx youth were more likely to have anxiety (Kang et al., 2018).

Friendship Quality

- Friendship quality has been linked to prediction of treatment outcomes for adolescents diagnosed with anxiety disorders, however, there is a lack of consensus in the research on the extent to which friendship quality impacts adolescent anxiety (Biggs et al. 2012; Rodebaugh et al., 2015).

Neighborhood Conditions

- Adolescents living in high crime communities are more likely to partake in aggressive and harmful activities as well as externalizing their problems (Weissman et al., 2017). While social economic status is linked to the development of adolescent anxiety, the role it plays is complex and differs at the household and neighborhood level (Vine et al., 2012).

Research Gaps

- Studies on peer relationships and community conditions on mental health tend to focus on the general population of adolescents and clump all Latinos together as one.
- The number of Latinx youth within the juvenile justice system is inconsistent across studies, further limiting the information on Mexican American youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

METHODS

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- A secondary analysis of the data from the Pathways to Desistance study, which was intended to provide policy makers and juvenile justice professionals empirical information to be applied to improve practice and decision-making.
- The original study was a longitudinal study conducted over a 10-year period. The study consisted of self-reported information through interviews; a baseline interview and various follow-up interviews.
- A cross sectional study utilizing baseline data

Sample and Sampling Method

- A subsample of 320 self-identified Mexican American Juvenile Offender who reported having at least one friend. (See Table 1)

Measures

Independent Variables

Friendship Quality

- Friendship quality was measured by the mean score of the 10-item scale, Friendship Quality Scale.
- Youth responded on a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much".
- Sample question of the scale: "How much can you count on the people for help with a problem?"

Neighborhood Conditions

- Neighborhood condition was defined by the mean score of the Neighborhood Conditions measure, a 21-item scale assessing the environment surrounding the adolescent's home.
- Youth responded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Often"
- The scale measured physical and social disorder of the neighborhood.

Dependent Variable

Anxiety

- Anxiety was defined by the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS), a 37-item scale which assesses the level and nature of anxiety.
- A total score was computed based on 28 items, which were divided into three anxiety subscales:
 - physiological anxiety
 - worry/oversensitivity
 - social concerns/concentration



Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N=320)

Characteristic	n	%
	M = 16	SD = 1.09
Age in years		
Gender		
Female	31	9.7
Male	289	90.3
Ethnicity: What country were you born		
United States	271	84.7
Other	49	15.3
Ever run away from where you were living		
No	204	63.7
Yes	116	36.3
Number of biological parents living at home		
0	48	15
1	209	65.3
2	63	19.7
Mothers education level		
College graduate	8	2.6
Business or trade school/some college/grad of 2yr college	37	12
High school diploma	57	18.5
Some high school	96	31.2
Grade school or less	110	35.7
Fathers education level		
Some grad or prof school/prof or grad school	3	1.2
College graduate	9	3.7
Business or trade school/some college/grad of 2yr college	25	10.3
High school diploma	63	26
Some high school	53	21.9
Grade school or less	89	36.8

RESULTS

Inferential Analysis

- The study conducted three multiple linear regression analyses and used a level of statistical significance of less than .05.
- The results of all analyses predicting the relationship between anxiety outcomes among Mexican American juvenile offenders, friendship quality and neighborhood conditions can be seen in Table 2.
- Significant findings were found among all three analyses between anxiety and neighborhood conditions.
 - Neighborhood conditions **significantly** and **positively** predicted psychological anxiety among participants ($b = .852, p < .001$).
 - Neighborhood conditions **significantly** and **positively** predicted worry or oversensitivity among participants ($b = .641, p < .05$).
 - Neighborhood conditions **significantly** and **positively** predicted social concerns/concentration among participants ($b = .696, p < .001$).
 - Participants who lived in neighborhoods with a higher level of disorder were more likely to have higher levels of anxiety. As community disorder increased, so did anxiety.
- Friendship quality **was not a significant** predictor of psychological anxiety, worry/oversensitivity, or social concerns/concentration among the participants.

Table 2. Results of Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting the Relationship Between Anxiety Outcomes among Mexican American Juvenile Offenders, Friendship Quality and Neighborhood Conditions

Variable	ANOVA	R ²	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Physiological Anxiety	F(5, 301) = 5.70, p<.001	.08					
Constant			1.69	2.19	--	.775	.439
Friendship quality			.281	.270	.059	1.041	.299
Neighborhood conditions			.852	.177	.271	4.825	<.001
Age			.013	.118	.006	.111	.912
Gender			-.869	.444	-.113	-1.95	.051
Mothers' education			-.044	.120	-.021	-3.67	.714
Worry / Oversensitivity	F(5, 301) = 3.07, p<.05	.05					
Constant			-.403	2.88	--	-.140	.889
Friendship quality			.239	.356	.039	.672	.502
Neighborhood conditions			.641	.233	.158	2.753	.006
Age			.100	.156	.036	.641	.522
Gender			-.559	.585	-.056	-.956	.340
Mothers' education			.330	.159	.121	2.081	.038
Social Concerns/Concentration	F(5, 301) = 5.58, p<.001	.08					
Constant			-.666	1.89	--	-.352	.725
Friendship Quality			-.162	.233	-.039	-.694	.488
Neighborhood conditions			.696	.152	.256	4.567	<.001
Age			.151	.102	.082	1.479	.140
Gender			-.202	.383	-.030	-.526	.599
Mothers' education			.118	.104	.065	1.137	.256

DISCUSSION

Implications for Integrated Behavioral Health

- While this study focused on Mexican American offenders it is important to highlight the need of providing integrated, coordinated physical and mental health services for all youth involved in the justice system and in their communities once they have been released to positively impact their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.
- Moreover, with Mexican-American youth more likely being from poor communities, a comprehensive assessment for anxiety could identify youth early on and it would provide the opportunity to treat and decrease anxiety symptoms along with maladaptive behaviors learned from their communities while they are serving their time.
- In current efforts to shift the juvenile justice system towards a rehabilitation model of care, it is pivotal to recognize that the justice system is not designed to address underlying problems that people involved in the justice system face, such as inadequate nutrition, housing instability, trauma, and lack of social networks.
- Policy changes on a federal level could allocate additional funds for preventative services in the justice system and streamline a set of "required services" to ensure that juveniles are receiving quality care while in residential facilities.

Future Direction

- Once an integrated and rehabilitation model of care has been implemented, future research can benefit from comparing anxiety levels based on the specific neighborhoods and identifying any specific factors exacerbating anxiety or identifying a specific community disorder influencing the onset of anxiety to better implement community resources.

Strength

- Instead of deeming a community as having disorder solely based on the average household incomes, utilizing the Neighborhood Conditions Scale provided a holistic picture of the severity of the community disorder.

Limitation

- The study had a lack of representation of female offenders, as the data being analyzed only had 31 females out of the 320 participants.

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