



The Relationship of Exposure to Violence on Substance Use among Juvenile Offenders

Abstract

The prison system of the United States is substantially cumbersome compared to other countries in the world. The youth incarceration rate is the highest in the world where an estimated number of 696,620 juveniles are arrested every single day in the country. Juveniles are found to experience several traumas at a young age and criminalization increases the risk for additional trauma such as physical, psychological, sexual, and emotional abuse. The current study aimed to examine the relationship of exposure to violence (indirect and direct) and drug and alcohol dependence among juvenile offenders. This is a secondary analysis of the baseline data from the Research on Pathways to Desistance study in Phoenix, AZ, and Philadelphia, PA from 2000-2010. This study and previous literature have presented that juvenile offenders experience exposure to violence, indirect and direct, and substance use. The need for social workers to address behavioral health issues is critical to supporting juvenile offenders who have lived through a great number of traumatic experiences.

Introduction

- ❖ Juveniles are a special population to experience a higher score of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs are childhood trauma experiences that increase the chance of chronic disease as adults
- ❖ Indirect and direct exposure to violence are other types of traumas that counts as an ACE
- ❖ ACEs are higher for children with drug and/or alcohol use especially for youth involved in the system
- ❖ Ecological Systems Theory

Gaps in Literature



- ❑ Risk factor to substance use and delinquency: exposure to violence, family violence, gang membership
- ❑ Association of gender with juvenile offenders and exposure to violence

Objectives

Research Questions:

- What is the impact of exposure to violence (indirect and direct) on alcohol dependence symptoms among juvenile offenders?
- What is the impact of exposure to violence (indirect and direct) on drug dependence symptoms among juvenile offenders?

Hypothesis

- ❑ Among juvenile offenders, there is a positive relationship between exposure to violence and symptoms of drug and alcohol dependence

Methods

The current study is a secondary analysis of the baseline data from the Research on Pathways to Desistance [Maricopa County, AZ and Philadelphia, PA] from 2000-2010

Sample:

- Purposive sampling technique

Data Collection:

- Self-reported data, and computer-assisted interviews

Measures:

- Independent Variable: Exposure to violence
 - Dependent Variable: Substance Use

Statistical Analysis:

- Spearman's Rho Correlation
- Descriptive statistics conducted for sample demographics

Results

Spearman's Rho

▪ Victim Score and Past 6 Months Drug and Alcohol Dependence Symptoms

Significant

Spearman's Rho

▪ Witnessed Score and Past 6 Months Drug and Alcohol Dependence Symptoms

Significant

Spearman's Rho

▪ Total Score-Witnessed Plus Victim and Past 6 Months Drug and Alcohol Dependence Symptoms

Significant

Discussion

Findings

- ❑ Being a victim of violence increases the risk of substance use among adolescents
- ❑ Juvenile offenders are prone to witness violence when living in disadvantaged neighborhood with poverty and high crime in the community
- ❑ Juveniles with bio parents with substance use, experiencing homelessness and not being in school increases the chance of experiencing violence and drug and alcohol use

Strengths

- Application of a multi-site project
- Large diverse sample
- Reliable and valid self report measures

Limitations

- Incorporating self-completed questionnaires
- Participants were majority male
- Cross-sectional study

Future Direction

- ✓ Hire more behavioral health professionals
- ✓ Policy change to enforce positive programs to support youth involved in the justice system
- ✓ Prioritize rehabilitation treatment, diversion programs instead of incarceration for youth under the age of 18
- ✓ Additional research about juvenile offenders and the impact of substance use and exposure to violence



Acknowledgement

Thank you to my family especially my dad and sister, Romylyn, for the unconditional love and support. Thank you to my loved ones and my boyfriend for the encouragement and for always pushing me to not give up

