

# What is the Relationship Between Delinquency and Depression Among Adolescents?

Giovanna Rocha  
California State University, Fullerton



## ABSTRACT

Adolescent years are a time of rapid change that influence the development of an individual in adulthood. During these critical years, adolescents experience mood disorders such as depression that can influence negative behaviors such as delinquency. Delinquent behaviors can have long lasting consequences that can impact the individual in adulthood. To add to existing research, the relationship of delinquent behaviors and depression among adolescents was studied. The current study used a subsample of participants from the original Add Health study for the in-home interview conducted between April and December 1995. The study consisted of 6230 adolescent participants. The study hypothesizes that higher levels of depression among adolescents are associated with increased delinquent behavior. The results of the study indicated that there is a statistically significant and positive correlation between depression and delinquency. Adolescents that engage in delinquent behaviors demonstrate higher levels of depression.

## INTRODUCTION

**Significance of the Study:** The significance of this research in the field of social welfare is to examine the relationships between depression and the prevalence of delinquent behaviors.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research is to provide knowledge to mental health professionals on adolescents dealing with depression, who are at higher risk of experiencing delinquent behaviors. The importance of this issue can lead professionals to properly use appropriate interventions in order to intervene in the right areas.

**Research Question:** What is the relationship between delinquency and depression among adolescents?

**Hypothesis:** The hypothesis for this research is the more depression symptoms present, the higher amount of delinquent behavior among adolescents.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**General Strain Theory:** GTS proposes that individuals experience strains (negative emotions) that lead to outcomes associated with crime. (Jennings et al., 2019).

**Prevalence of Depression:** Studies found that adolescents reported elevated levels of depression while in the juvenile justice system in comparison to those that were not involved in the juvenile justice system.

**Depression-Delinquency Influenced by Another Variable:** Youth who have previous trauma exposure have a greater possibility of internalizing symptoms that places them at a greater likelihood for delinquency. Adolescents exposed to maltreatment during their upbringing have higher levels of internalizing symptoms that result in increase the likelihood of delinquency (Bender et al., 2011). Lastly, adolescents that experienced the absence of a father reported higher levels of delinquent behavior in comparison to those that did not have a father absent (Markowitz & Ryan, 2016).

**Depression and Delinquency:** Studies illustrated that offending was connected with higher levels of depression throughout adolescence and early adulthood. Furthermore, offenders demonstrated consistency among depression and anxiety over time (Edwards et al., 2019).

## RESULTS

- Statistically significant and positive relationship between depression and delinquency. Higher levels of depression were associated with higher levels of delinquency.
- Statistically significant and positive relationship between age and depression. Higher levels of depression were associated with increased age.
- There was no relationship between age and delinquency.
- Based on the multiple linear regression, younger male study participants who had higher scores of depression demonstrated higher levels of delinquency.

Table 2  
Regression Model for Delinquency

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant***	2.199	.495	
Age*	-.070	.032	-.027
Gender***	1.647	.111	.180
Minority	.069	.113	.007
Depression***	.170	.008	.278

Reference group: Female, Non-Minority. \*\*\*p < .001; \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05

## METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** The study is a secondary analysis from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) (Harris & Udry, 2008). A cross-sectional designed is used with Wave I and a total of 6,504 respondents.

**Sampling Methods:** Participants who did not fully respond to depression and delinquency questions were excluded from the study. Of the 6,504 original Wave 1 study participants, the current study retained 6,230 adolescents.

**Data Collection:** The data collection for Wave I happened between September 1994 and August 1996. The data collection included in-school questionnaires (Harris & Udry, 2008).

### Measures

- **Independent Variable:** The independent variable for this study is delinquency. There were 15 questions used to create a cumulative delinquency scale.
- **Dependent Variable:** The dependent variable for this study is depression. There were 19 questions use to create the depression scale.

## DISCUSSION

- Findings are consistent with current research showing that delinquency is associated with depression.
- There were two tools used in the current study to calculate the findings, the use of Pearson's correlation, and multiple linear regression.
- The findings in the current study are relevant to general strain theory in order to understand the current hypothesis of the study.

### Strengths and Limitations

- Because only Wave I of the study was utilized, the results cannot be generalized to imply that all adolescents with a history of delinquent behavior were a result of higher levels of depression.
- Strengths in the current study are that it helps in understanding how high levels of depression among adolescents can influence delinquency.

**Implications for Practice:** The results provide evidence that delinquent behavior is associated with depression. Therefore, it is essential to intervene with proper interventions in order to stop the pattern of delinquent behavior among adolescents.

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