School Environments and Peer Relationships And Male Adolescent Criminal Behavior

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Abstract

Adolescents go through many life changes and different school environments. Sometimes these experiences are positive, but some are negative leading up to committing crimes, ranging from less serious income offenses to serious aggressive offenses. The study seeks to understand a teenage male's school environment and school relationships in relation to committing income and aggressive offenses. Looking at the possible start of their criminal behavior may help school staff and clinicians correctly identify and help the teenage boys that need it. The study hypothesizes that school environment and peer relationships will have a negative effect on both income and aggressive offenses. Pulling data from the Pathways to Dissonance study, this study uses 1,100 adolescent male offenders and data collected by interview. The original study had both male and females however this study only uses the male data. These participants were interviewed using multiple evidenced based measures over two state juvenile detention centers. The results show that antisocial behavior was positively associated with aggressive offenses. Also, both antisocial influence and behavior were positively associated with both income and aggressive offenses. There were small correlations between school relationships and aggressive behaviors, but they were weak in strength. The same was true for school environment and income offenses significant and weak in strength. By specifically addressing the antisocial aspects in a teens life, whether it be his friends, or his own behaviors, clinicians and school personnel can work together to try to find interventions to keep these adolescent boys from committing crimes and ending up in the prison system.

Introduction

Significance of Study
- This study is rooted in prevention and early intervention, with the intentions of understanding violent teenage offenders better in order to find ways of helping those teens boys overcome their challenges and grow into successful adults

Research Questions
1) What is the relationship between strength of social support and severity of violent offenses among male juvenile offenders?
2) What is the relationship between negative educational experiences and severity of violent offenses among male juvenile offenders?

Hypotheses
- Among male juvenile offenders, there is a negative relationship between strength of social support and severity of violent offenses
- Among male juvenile offenders, there is a positive relationship between negative educational experiences and severity of violent offenses

Literature Review

School Environment
- Research has found that negative school environment tends to lead to delinquency (Lotz & Lee, 1999)

Suspensions/Expulsions
- In the 2015-2016 school year 78% of high schools took at least one serious action of discipline compared to middle (61%) and elementary (18%) schools. (Zhang et al., 2019)
- Those students who have been suspended or expelled 10% of them dropped out of school (Fabelo et al., 2011)

Attendance
- those students that choose to skip school are more likely to be more physically violent to others (Yuksek & Solakoglu, 2016)

School Commitment
- The less the students are committed to school the more likely they are to rebel and show delinquent behaviors (Kelly & Pink, 1972; Gottfredson, 2000; Yuksek & Solakoglu, 2016)

Relationships With Teachers
- Teachers unintentionally alienate "bad" students from the rest of their peers which lowered their desire to be at school and lead to a likelihood of developing criminal behavior (Kelly & Pink, 1972)

Peer Relationships
- Adolescents and their friends behave comparably, notably in anti-social and delinquent behaviors (Poulin, Dishion, & Haas, 1999; Laird, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates,1999; Lacourse, Nagin, Tremblay, Vitaro, & Claes, 2003; Deptula, & Cohen, 2004; De Kemp, Scholte, Overbeek, & Engels, 2006)

Close Friends
- A study looking at five different types of delinquency (smoking, getting drunk, fighting, and general delinquency) and found that the influence of a single best friend is reduced when the group of friends is larger or the discrepancy between the actions of the group and the best friend (Rees & Pogarsky, 2011)

Quality of Friendships
- Those adolescents who are involved who have friends that have delinquent behaviors are more likely to commit violent acts than those who have never had those types of friends (Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, & Jang, 1994; Lacourse, Nagin, Tremblay, Vitaro, & Claes, 2003)

Antisocial Influence
- low conscientiousness is a risk factor for adolescents in developing delinquent behaviors (Mrug, Madan, & Windle, 2012; Vitulano, Fite, & Rathert, 2010; Slagt, Dubas, Deković, Haselager, & van Aken, 2015)

Violence
- Male adolescents tend to engage in more predatory delinquency than females do (Augustyn et al., 2013)

Indirect Violence
- Animal cruelty has also been found to be a precursor for future criminal behavior (Walters & Noon, 2015)
- Gannon and colleges (2010) found that the typical fire setting had these characteristics: early beginnings in criminal behavior. White, younger male, low economic status, and low skilled
- In a study where adolescents were verbally asked and modeled to steal with confederate peers, those that were both given a verbal and modeled que increased their likelihood to steal (Gallupe, Nguyen, Bouchard, Schulenberg, Chenier, & Cook, 2016)

Direct Violence
- Males have also been found to possess more destructive violence than females do in any criminal setting (Augustyn, & McGloin, 2013)

Theoretical Background
- It was found that the process of learning delinquent behavior is like the way any other behavior is learned, as explained in the differential association theory (Sutherland, Cressey, & Luckenbill, 1992)
- The researchers who created the social learning theory agreed with the importance of frequency, intensity, priority, and duration in the socialization of any behavior, especially criminal behavior (Akers, 1973; Hoeben, Meldrum, Walker, & Young, 2016)

Gaps and Limitations in the Literature
- Most studies, especially those with an adolescent sample, tend to use both female and male samples
- This study has a single gender sample to understand how criminal behavior manifests specifically with male adolescents
- A lot of studies are looking at the delinquency behavior, not as individual entities
- The current study pulls apart the different crimes and delinquent behaviors and looks at them individually with different moderators in order to look for patterns across specific crimes

Methodology

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures
- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from The Pathways of Dissonance which was conducted from 2000-2010
- This study is a prospective cohort (longitudinal) study that followed its subjects of 1,354 serious juvenile offenders interviewed over 10 years conducted from two locations Arizona and Pennsylvania
- Interviews were given to each of the subjects at 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 48, 60, 72, and 84 months after their baseline interview
  - This current study only looks at the baseline data making it cross-sectional sectional study
- These individuals were between the ages of 14 and 18 when they committed these crimes and were charged
- Data was collected by trained interviewers who randomly assigned participants
- Interviewers are randomly assigned participants and usually met with the participants individually in their home or in a private room in the facility they are being held in
- Data was collected by computer assisted personal interview (CAPI) where the interviewer and participant sat side by side looking at the computer

Sample and Sample Methods
- This study only uses male participants bringing the 1,354 participants down to 1,170
- Includes white (19.2%), black (42.1%), Hispanic (34%), and other ethnic backgrounds (4.6%)
- The Pathways to Dissonance study found their study sample with purposive sampling
- Drug offenses took up a large percentage of youth in the original pool of potential male subjects, so there was a limit on 15% of drug offenses for the males
- In order to keep the females accounted for in the final sample, researchers allowed females with drug charges to be included in the study
- The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 26 was used to conduct descriptive statistics for the sample demographics and inferential statistics

Measures
- The measure used to test variables in school attachment is the Education: School Bonding Attendance Activities and Orientation
  - Participants were asked to look at 13 statements and rate them on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree". The higher numbers show greater school attachment
- The measure used to determine the quality of friendships is the Friendship Quality Scale
  - The measure before this asks about 5 of the subject's closest friends and those identified 5 are the focus of this measure
  - The interpersonal support is measured through a set of 10 questions ranging from "How much can you count on the people for help with a problem" to "How much do you depend on these friends". To each of these questions there is a 4-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 = "not at all" to 4 = "very much"
- To assess the antisocial influence of friendships this study uses a subset of the questions asked in the Rochester Youth Study (Thornberry et al., 1994)
  - Looks at two elements: antisocial behavior of the subject ("During the last six months how many of your friends have sold drugs?") and antisocial influence of peers ("During the last six months how many of your friends have suggested that you should sell drugs?")
  - There are 19 questions in the scale that can be answered by a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 = "none of them" to 5 = "all of them" and then computed summaries of both behavior and influence which take the mean of the 19 questions showing the prevalence of the antisocial nature
- Violent behaviors are categorized in this study in two different entities: indirect violence and direct violence
- Offenses are self-reported using The Self-Reported Offending measure (Huizinga, Esbensen, & Weihar, 1991)
- The adolescents in the original sample were asked "what is your sex?" in order to gather data on gender. The responses were 1 = "male" and 2 = "female" and then for the current sample the female participants were excluded

Sample Characteristics (N = 1,170)

Characteristic	f	%
Ethnicity		
White	225	19.2
Black	493	42.1
Hispanic	398	34
Other	54	4.6
Family Structure		
Two biological parents	175	15
Single bio mom, never married	248	21.2
Single bio mom, divorced or separated	184	15.7
Single bio mom, widowed	19	1.6
Bio mom and stepdad	204	17.4
Single bio dad	70	6
Other adult relative	142	12.1
Bio dad and stepmom	37	3.2
Two adoptive sisters	10	0.9
No adult in home	51	4.4
Other	4	0.3
Single bio mom, married, bio dad not present	20	1.7
Single bio mom, marital status unknown	6	0.5

Descriptive Statistics: Study Variables (N = 1,170)

Variables	f	%
School Environment		
Suspensions	M = 16.99	SD = 44.46
Expulsions	M = 1.65	SD = 1.60
Academic Commitment	M = 3.49	SD = 0.80
Attendance	M = 13.72	SD = 1.90
Satisfaction with High School	M = 3.33	SD = 0.90
School Orientation	M = 3.54	SD = 3.71
School Relationships		
Close Friends	M = 3.54	SD = 3.71
Bond to Teachers	M = 3.33	SD = 0.82
Deviance Relationships	M = 3.22	SD = 0.82
Quality of Friendships	M = 3.34	SD = 0.45
Antisocial Influence	M = 0.29	SD = 0.87
Antisocial Behavior	M = 1.79	SD = 0.87
Violence		
Income Offending	M = 0.36	SD = 0.25
Aggressive Offending	M = 0.31	SD = 0.21

Results

Spearman's Rho
- A Spearman rho correlation coefficient was computed among suspensions, expulsions, engagement, bullying, being bullied, orientation, satisfaction, fights, and both offending violence. A significant result occurred between school engagement and income offenses rs(1053) = -.338, p < .01.
- The results of the correlational analyses showed that all eight school environment variables were statistically significant and weak in strength to aggressive offences: suspensions and aggressive offenses, rs(1058) = .207, p < .01; expulsions and aggressive offenses, rs(477) = .134, p < .01; engagement and aggressive offenses rs(1053) = -.277, p < .01; orientation and aggressive offenses rs(1053) = -.274, p < .01; satisfaction and aggressive offenses rs(1053) = -.186, p < .01.
- A Spearman rho correlation coefficient was computed among close friends, bonds with teachers, quality of friendships, antisocial influence, antisocial behavior and both offending violence. A significant finding was between antisocial influence and income offenses rs(1151) = .489, p < .01. There is no statistically significant correlation between both number of close friends and income offenses and quality of friends and income offenses.
- The results of the correlational analyses showed that three of the school relationship variables were statistically significant and weak in strength to aggressive offenses: bond to teachers and aggressive offenses rs(1053) = -.229, p < .01; antisocial influence and aggressive offenses rs(1151) = .475, p < .01; and antisocial behavior and aggressive offenses rs(1129) = .574, p < .01. Bonds to teachers was related to aggressive offending. There is no statistically significant correlation between both number of close friends and aggressive offenses rs(1164) = .057, p = .051; and quality of friends and aggressive offenses rs(1120) = -.028, p = .347)

Intercorrelations for School Environment, Relationships, and Violence

	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.	Suspension	16.99	44.46	—											
2.	Expulsion	1.65	1.60	.17**	—										
3.	Engagement	3.49	.03	-.14**	-.01	—									
4.	Orientation	3.54	.74	-.12**	-.002	.91**	—								
5.	Satisfaction	3.33	.90	-.08*	.05	.50**	.66**	—							
6.	Close Friends	4.85	7.13	.056	.04	.01	.02	.02	—						
7.	Teacher Bonds	3.33	.82	-.13**	.01	.41**	.46**	.69**	-.008	—					
8.	Quality of Friendship	3.37	.45	.043	-.01	.14**	.15**	.10**	.034	.05	—				
9.	Antisocial Influence	1.79	.87	.035	.06	-.20**	-.19**		-.12**	-.003	-.13**	-.09**	—		
10.	Antisocial Behavior	2.35	.93	.15**	.09	-.22**	-.22**		-.15**	.05	-.18**	-.02	.73**	—	
11.	Income Offending	.36	.25	.20**	.17**	-.34**	-.32**		-.17**	.02	-.22**	-.05	.49**	.57**	—
12.	Aggressive Offending	.315	.21	.21**	.13**	-.28**	-.27**		-.19**	.06	-.23**	-.03	.49**	.57**	.78**

Discussion

Implications
- **School Environment**
  - The correlational analyses for school environment to income offenses illustrated statistically significant and weak in strength
  - The strongest being the relationship between school engagement and income offense
  - Adolescents who are more engaged and committed to school would have less time for any stealing or other income offenses
  - The results were similar for the effects of school environment and aggressive offenses, significant and weak
  - Which makes sense because usually those perpetrating the bullying are already committing violent acts so its not surprising that they have continued the aggression agreeing with the study's hypothesis
- **School Relationships**
  - The results showed that two of the school relationship variables are statistically significant and weak in strength
  - The bonds to teachers would be a buffer to the path of stealing by giving the teens a positive role model or having the accountability of a caring adult
  - Antisocial influence is just influence, so the adolescent does not have to act on what others around are doing, possibly making that a weaker relationship
  - There was no significant correlation between number and quality of close friends and income offenses
  - This does not support the hypothesis of this study and could be due to the friends adolescents were hanging out with because they could be doing the stealing and damaging property together as friends, skewing the data
  - The results of the correlations between school relationships and aggressive behaviors were significant and weak in strength for the bond to teachers.
  - There was no significance between number and quality of close friends and aggressive behaviors
  - Some of these groups of friends might be just as aggressive between themselves making it hard to differentiate if those variables actually lead to aggressive offenses

Major Findings
- The relationship between antisocial behavior and income offenses which had had a significant correlation moderate in strength
- The antisocial behavior can account for the lack of empathy and desire to keep to one's self which can eventually lead to stealing and other income offenses
- Both antisocial behavior and influence on aggressive behavior which were both significant and moderate in strength
- The lack of empathy with antisocial behavior plus a teenager's impulsivity may create a greater chance of an aggressive outburst
- With that finding it would make sense that the antisocial influence was hanging out with higher rates of aggressive offenses because of the lack of empathy those that are the influence can become physical with everyone around them, making the aggressive offenses more likely

Strengths
- The data was taken across three states to try and get a more generalized sample
- The number of variables used per each independent variable. This helped give a greater depth to each category to help understand the concepts better.
- The evidence-based questionnaires that were used to gather the data and even though it is based on self-report there was an interviewer present
- The research questions were the current topics chosen to study. Violence in schools is increasing more and more research needs to be addressed towards it.

Limitations
- The sample was only the adolescents who got caught and had to do time, it did not include those that just got fined or punished at school and not by law
- The data is also self-report which can be bias from both the researcher and the interviewer
- The study only used correlated data which means, it can not be said that either variable causes another

Future Research
- This data can be used by both clinicians and school personnel on all levels of these kids' lives
  - At a macro level schools can set systems in place if they can understand the effect that their school and teachers have on these adolescents
  - Classes may be able to be structured with more social emotional learning to help the teenage boys understand what is happening and what some of the choices could lead to
  - The micro level clinicians and teacher could better understand how to support the teens individually and try and lead them down different paths
- Researchers need to look more into the past of these juvenile offenders and dig into the influential people in their lives
- This study only looked at peer and teacher relationships but there are so many more people that these boys are connected to
- Taking a look into any trauma in their past could also better inform clinicians in how to treat young children in order to hopefully buffer against some of the risk factors leading to crimes in their futures

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