

Longitudinal Effects of Peer Delinquency and Family Type on Adolescent Male Delinquency

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INTRODUCTION

- In 2007, 73% of delinquency cases involved adolescent male offenders (Puzzanchera et al., 2010).
- Research suggests that involvement with delinquent peers is a risk factor for delinquent behavior (Dishon, Patterson and Griesler, 1994).
- Furthermore, violent peers rather than delinquent peers in general may be particularly critical in the observed negative peer influence (Fergusson, Lynskey, & Horwood, 1999).
- Family characteristics also affect adolescent delinquency. In prior work Henry, Tolan and Gorman-Smith (2001) noted different configurations of dimensions of family characteristics predicted risk of delinquency, with struggling families (low functioning on all dimensions) and task-oriented (adequate on parenting practices, low on family relationship characteristics) evidencing more delinquency than exceptional (high on all dimensions and those average on all). For this study we collapse those four types into two groups referred to as high (average and exceptional) and low (struggling and task-oriented).
- Henry, et al. (2001) reported that predictive influence of family characteristics and peer characteristics was found to be interdependent.
- However, that study did not examine variation in how this interdependence occurs; how peer influence may vary by family functioning configuration.
- This study examines how violence among peer friends explains delinquency level 2-3 years later, examining within low and high functioning families.

HYPOTHESIS

- We hypothesize that presence of violent peers in one's friend network will relate to later higher delinquency in both levels of family functioning.
- In addition, since research suggests that family has strong effects on peer delinquency, we hypothesize that adolescents in highly functioning families will have less individual delinquency as compared to adolescents in low functioning families

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were 246 male adolescents from the 1991 Chicago Youth Development Study (CYDS), a longitudinal study examining the development of high risk, inner-city male adolescents. This comprises the portion of the original sample that had data across the first five waves of data.

- African Americans made up 57% of the sample and Hispanics made up 43%.
- Measures were collected over a 5 year period. Seventy-five percent of the eligible participants completed interviews during Wave 1.
- Participants were between the ages of 11 and 15 ($M = 12.41$) during the first wave of interviews. And by wave 5 between the ages of 17 and 21. Over 90% of Wave 1 participants were retained for Wave 5 data collection.
- Half of the participants in the study were considered high risk for development of serious aggression based on teacher ratings on the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991).

MEASURES

Peer Violence

- The Social Network Questionnaire (SNQ; Nair & Jason, 1985) was used to calculate peer violent delinquency.

- Participants listed those individuals that were a part of their social network and were asked whether a network member committed any of 13 criminal offenses.
- At each wave, scores were assigned for the number of peers in the network that the youth reported had committed violent offenses.
- For this analysis we assigned a score of presence of violent peers if there were any violent peers mentioned in either wave 2 or 3.

Individual's Violent and Nonviolent Delinquency

- Individual violent and nonviolent delinquency was measured using the Self-Report of Delinquency scale (Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985), which is a 30 item self-report of delinquent acts committed in the past year.

- As undertaken by Elliott et al. (1985) we assigned a score of 1-5 to differentiate response by relative seriousness and frequency of delinquency reported.

Family Type

- Henry, Tolan, and Gorman-Smith's previous study (2001) identified four clusters of family functioning based on scores on measures of parental monitoring, parental discipline practices, and family cohesion and organization.

- Each used dimension had been related to predicting delinquency separately in various other studies (e.g., Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Zelli, & Huesmann, 1996).

- The first group for analysis was the *high functioning* family group, which included *exceptionally functioning* families ($n = 72$, 27%), characterized by high levels of effective parenting practices and high levels of cohesion and structure, and *moderately functioning* families ($n = 72$, 27%), who were midrange on all indicators.

- The second group for analysis was the *low functioning* family group, which included *struggling* families ($n = 52$, 20%), characterized by low levels of parenting practices, structure, and low levels of cohesion as well as *task oriented* families ($n = 67$, 25%), characterized by high levels of parenting practices but low levels of emotional warmth and beliefs about the importance of family

ANALYSIS

Analysis of covariance models (ANCOVAs) were run separately by family grouping to examine the association between peer violence and individual delinquency within low and high functioning families. Age and ethnicity were added as covariates in the model. See Figure 1 for a representation of the number of participants within each family type with violent and nonviolent peers.

RESULTS

Within the low functioning family group, there was a significant difference in self-reported delinquency as measured two-three years later for adolescents with and those without violent peers, $F(1, 90) = 10.79, p = .001$. As can be seen in Figure 2, the adolescents who had nonviolent peers had a lower level of individual delinquency ($M = 1.11, SE = .15$) than those who had no violent peers ($M = 2.01, SE = .22$). When this comparison was made for those in the high functioning families, there was not a significant difference in self-reported delinquency, $F(1, 114) = 1.41, p = .24$. Individual delinquency for adolescents who had violent peers ($M = 1.47, SE = .27$) did not differ from those who did not ($M = 1.12, SE = .12$).

Given this difference in effect by family type, we conducted the analysis across family groups with a family type by peer violence category interaction term in a linear regression model. After controlling for age and ethnicity the interaction between family type and peer violence on individual delinquency was significant, $\beta = .22, p = .001$, consistent with our prior finding of the effect being limited to low functioning families.

FIGURE 1 Proportion of Peers By Family Type

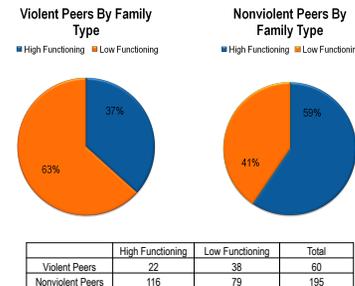
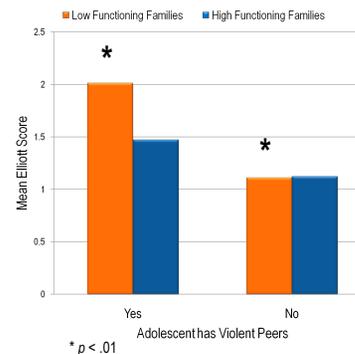


FIGURE 2 Individual Delinquency by Family Type



DISCUSSION

- In low functioning families, males with violent peers self-reported higher individual delinquency 2-3 years later than those with no violent peers.
- There was no difference in individual delinquency between males with violent peers and without violent peers for adolescents in high functioning families.
- It is possible that high functioning families serve as a protective factor against the negative impact of violent peers (Henry, Tolan, Gorman-Smith, 2001).
- Results suggest interventions may need to focus differentially on involvement with deviant peers depending on family functioning.
- Limitations include the reliance only on self-report measures and the limited measurement of quality of peer relationships. These findings may not generalize to youth residing in neighborhoods that differ in critical ways from these high-risk inner-city communities. Also, applicability to ethnic groups other than African American and Hispanic may be limited.

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