

Public Abstract

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Title:Gender Differences in Risks for Antisocial Behavior

Adolescent girls have always been a relevant presence in the juvenile justice system but have received limited attention from researchers. In response to the dearth of studies on female juvenile offenders, federal study groups and reviewers have called for more research to advance our understanding of the risk factors for antisocial behavior among adolescent girls. To date, however, much of the research on antisocial behavior in adolescent girls has had relatively serious methodological limitations, including relying on correlational or cross-sectional designs and focusing on a limited range of risk factors (e.g., family or school). The current study addressed these limitations by longitudinally examining how risks assessed in early adolescence across multiple domains of youths' social ecology (i.e., individual, family, peer, school, and neighborhood) predicted antisocial behaviors in late adolescence and early adulthood for both females and males. A representative national sample of 1,033 youths and their caregivers completed structured interviews that assessed risk factors in early adolescence, and these risk factors were used to predict subsequent antisocial behaviors. Results of path analyses indicated that peer relationship variables and low levels of academic commitment were most predictive of male antisocial behavior in late adolescence, while physical abuse and age were most predictive of female antisocial behavior in late adolescence. However, most of these same variables no longer predicted antisocial behavior in early adulthood. Overall, the findings suggest that treatments for antisocial behavior should be flexible enough to target the risks that are most salient for male and female youths.