Factors Associated with Both Mental Health and Juvenile Justice Involvement Among Children with Severe Emotional Disturbance

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Background

- Over-representation of children with mental health problems in the juvenile justice system – 40% to 50% of children compared to 18% - 22% of the general child population (Kazdin, 2000).
- Limited research
- Gender differences in predictors of risk (Gorman-Smith & Loebel, 2005)
  - Ecological systems might have unique, gender-based influences on development.
  - Behavior can be multiply determined.
- We do know some things...

Acknowledgements

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Past Research

Demographic Factors

- Boys more likely to be dually-involved
- Significant controversy regarding disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system
  - Visher’s (1983) study: older, European American girls were less likely to be arrested than were younger, African American girls.
  - African American children and adolescents reported to engage in more violent behaviors compared to European American or Hispanic children and adolescents
  (Moen et al., 2003; Klesner et al., 1999).

Person-Level Factors

- Antisocial behavior associated with:
  - Internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety (Crick et al., 2003).
  - AD-HD and more general attention problems (e.g., Graves, 2003; Loebel et al., 1995, Zoccolillo, 1993).
  - Social problems (Lipsky & Derzon, 1998).
  - This might be particularly problematic among girls who tend to put more emphasis on social relationships (Maccoby, 1990).

Family-Level Factors

Antisocial behavior more likely when:

- Families are overextended in terms of resources
  - Caregiver strain linked with co-morbid diagnostic profiles and greater psychological distress (Brannan et al., 2002; Garland et al., 2003).
  - Different patterns based on gender have not been investigated.
- As the number of living transitions increases, child functioning decreases (particularly in the school environment) (Simmons et al., 1988).
School-Level Factors

- School failure characterized by high absenteeism and poor academic performance have been identified as risk factors (Loeb & Farrington, 2000).
  - Some research indicates that this relationship might be stronger for females compared to males (e.g., Thornton et al., 2002).

Hypotheses

- A larger proportion of boys will be dually-involved than girls;
- Each of the proposed factors (i.e., anxious/depressed, depressed/withdrawn, social problems, ADHD-type symptoms, caregiver strain, high number of living transitions, and low school functioning) will be positively associated with dual-involvement;
- The family-level factors (caregiver strain and number of living transitions) will be equally important among boys and for girls;
- The person-level factors of anxious/depressed, depressed/withdrawn, and social problems will be stronger predictors of dual-involvement for girls than for boys;
- Although previous findings have been somewhat inconsistent (German-Smith & Loeb, 2005), it is hypothesized that school functioning will be a stronger predictor of dual-involvement for girls than for boys.

Method

Participants:
- African-American and White adolescents (11- to 17-year-olds)
- Children and primary caregivers
  - (N = 1,166; 63% boys; 37% girls)
- Average age: 13.86 years (SD = 1.78)
- Ethnicity (22% African-American, 78% White)
- Family income: 46% (< $15,000); 54% (> $15,000)
- All children identified as highly “at-risk”
  - (Average CAFAS 8-Scale Score: 109.22)

Procedures

- Interviewed on a variety of instruments at baseline and at six-month intervals thereafter over a three-year period.
- 2-hour in-home interviews were conducted with the caregiver;
  - 1-hour in-home interviews were conducted with the adolescent.
- Monetary incentives are provided to the respondents ($25.00 for baseline interviews; $30.00 for follow-up interviews).
- Where siblings were enrolled for system of care services, only one of the siblings was included in the longitudinal evaluation.

Measures

Demographic Information
- Demographic Information Questionnaire (DIQ; Center for Mental Health Services, 1997) – 37 items
  - Completed as part of the baseline evaluation interview

Person-Level Factors
- CBCL (Achenbach, 1991) and YSR (Achenbach, 1991):
  - Utilized 7-scores from the Attention Problems, Social Problems, Anxiety/Depression Subscales, and Depressed/Withdrawn separately by reporter.
  - Caregiver and child reports correlated at least r = .20, p < .001.
  - Averaged the 7-scores across caregiver and child reports for each construct separately.

Family-Level Factors
- Caregiver Strain Questionnaire (Broman & Helfinger, 1997):
  - 21 items (e.g., “ Interruptions of personal time,” “ Financial strains,” and “ Feeling socially isolated”)
  - Utilized global strain scores
  - Scores range from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating more strain.

Descriptive Information Questionnaire:
- “How many times has the child changed living residences in the past six months?”

School-Level Factors
- Child/Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS; Hodges, 1994):
  - School Rule Scale (caregiver reported), (e.g., “non-compliant behavior which results in frequent or repeated detentions,” and “frequently truant”)
  - 25-point scale (0 = no impairment to 50 = severe impairment)
Dual Involvement

Delinquency Survey (DS; CMHS, 1994):
- “Have you ever been told to appear in court for something you were suspected of doing?”
- Children responded: 1 = No and 2 = Yes

Control Variables

- Level of Delinquency:
  - Reported on the CBCL and YSR
  - Utilized the combined composite T-score
    - (caring and adolescent reports correlated.38, p < .001)

Hypothesis One: Who was “dually-involved?”

Hypothesis One was Confirmed:

- 545 (46.7%) were dually-involved

Follow-Up Analyses

- Girls had significantly higher levels of impairment (M = 122.08) compared to boys that were dually-involved (M = 113.03), t(499) = 2.00, p < .05, and also compared to girls who were not dually-involved (M = 104.43), t(384) = 3.43, p < .001.
- Among those children who were not dually-involved, there were no significant gender differences in terms of levels of impairment, F(631) = 1.03, ns.

Hypotheses Two - Five: What predicts dual involvement?

- Two cross-sectional logistic regressions were conducted, one regression for each gender.
  - Step 1 (Demographic Factors and Controls):
    - Age, Ethnicity, Delinquency
  - Step 2 (Person-Level Factors):
    - Inattention, Social Problems, Anxious/Depressed, Depressed/Withdrawn
  - Step 3 (Family-Level Factors):
    - Number of Living Transitions, Caregiver Strain
  - Step 4 (School-Level Factors):
    - School Functioning
Cross-Sectional Logistic Regression Model to Predict Dual Involvement Among Boys (n = 740)

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<td>2.19</td>
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Cross-Sectional Logistic Regression Model to Predict Dual Involvement Among Girls (n = 433)

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Discussion

- Boys more likely to be dually-involved than girls
  - Girls more severe -- raising the question of whether we are waiting too long to intervene for this population.
    - Consistent with other research - girls who are involved in the juvenile justice system have higher rates of mental health problems compared to boys (NMHA, 2004).
  - Are we missing the early warning signs among girls that might lead to involvement in the juvenile justice system?
    - Silverthorn and Frick (1999) - when a girl engages in a predominantly “male” event (i.e., delinquency), she tends to be more severely impaired.

- Internalizing symptoms and social problems stronger predictors for girls than for boys

- Social problems decreased the likelihood of dual-involvement
  - Peer rejection/isolation versus deviant peer association
  - Is it less likely that these girls engage in antisocial behaviors as part of a group of peers due to the decrease in frequency that they are within a peer group?
    - Need longitudinal study to examine whether these girls eventually gravitate toward deviant peer groups for acceptance and belongingness

- Dual-involvement more likely for both boys and girls when:
  - children who were older
  - children who had more transitions in their living situations
    - Do multiple placements result when there is caregiver burnout?
      - (caregiver strain and number of living transitions correlate r = .21, p < .001 in the present sample)

- School functioning was not related to dual-involvement among either boys or girls.
  - Follow-up logistic regression analyses:
    - School functioning does predict dual involvement (p < .001), but only when delinquency is not included as a control variable.
    - Overlapping variance: delinquency & school functioning (p < .001 level)
      - Consistent with previous research (e.g., Loeb & Farrington, 2000) -- if levels of school functioning are low, delinquency behaviors are more likely.
Strengths and Limitations

**Strengths:**
- First known study that explores clinical factors across a variety of domains that might predict dual-involvement in SED sample
- Multi-ecological approach
- Use of multiple reporters

**Limitations:**
- Dual-involvement assessed with a single, child-reported question
- Generalize only to those children who have SED and are at risk of being removed from their homes
- Cross-sectional data might be problematic if reciprocal causation is a possibility

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**Implications:**
- Several gender-specific factors related to dual-involvement
- Supports previous research (e.g., Foster, Queen, & Conner, 2004) highlighting the need for greater system-wide collaboration for children and adolescents with SED
- E.g., treatment planning, case-matching, comprehensive screening and assessment, integrated trauma-informed information systems, and cross-training of staff
- Mental health and juvenile justice must work together in multidisciplinary teams using clinical variables to help guide placement decisions
- A stronger understanding of the mental health needs of children and adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system could help in coordination and comprehensive treatment planning for our youth

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**References**


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**Questions?**

Thank You For Your Attention!!!


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