



Differences in risk and protective factors between crossover and non-crossover youth in juvenile justice



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ABSTRACT

Risk and protective factors embedded in the domains of individual, family, peer, school, and community have been reported to be significantly associated with the risk of offending and re-offending for youth in juvenile justice. However, few studies have examined risk and protective factors for youth with a history of child welfare system involvement in juvenile justice (i.e., crossover youth). Using administrative records from a large urban county and Cox Proportional Hazards Regression analyses, the current study examined differences in risk and protective factors between crossover and non-crossover youth. It also examined male and female comparisons in risk and protective factors between crossover and non-crossover youth. Moreover, this study investigated the relationship between risk and protective factors with the risk of recidivism for crossover youth compared to non-crossover youth in juvenile justice. Results revealed that crossover youth engaged in delinquency at an earlier age and were more likely to recidivate than non-crossover youth. Additionally, crossover youth had higher risk and lower protective factors than non-crossover youth. Female crossover youth engaged in delinquency at a later age compared to male crossover youth. Female crossover youth showed equivalent levels of offending and re-offending rates when compared to male non-crossover youth. The domains for substance use, education, and peers were found to be significant in estimating the risk of recidivism for crossover youth, whereas the domain for education was found to be significant for non-crossover youth. Implications for working with crossover and non-crossover youth are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Each year approximately 600,000 children and youth are in the child welfare system due to allegations of maltreatment (U.S. DHHS, 2015). While it is difficult to ascertain how many youth in the child welfare system “crossover” to the juvenile justice system, studies have estimated that more than a third of youth in child welfare are known to the juvenile justice system (Halemba, Siegel, Lord, & Zawacki, 2004; Herz, Harada, Lecklitner, Rauso, & Ryan, 2009; Herz, Ryan, & Bilchik, 2010; Stewart, Dennison, & Waterson, 2002). Moreover, delinquency rates for youth involved in child welfare are approximately 47% greater than non-maltreated counterparts (Ryan & Testa, 2005). Not surprising as studies have shown that a history of child abuse and/or neglect increases the risk of arrest by 55% and committing a violent crime by 96% (Halemba & Siegel, 2011; Widom, 1989). In fact, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and their negative impact on children's lives are well documented (Anda, Butchart, Felitti, & Brown, 2010). Children who have ACEs suffer from traumatic stress, which interrupts a child's

development and affects functional changes on brain development (Cicchetti, 2013; Danese & McEwen, 2012). Sexual, physical, and emotional child abuse and neglect have been increasingly found to affect children's lives in the short- and long-term, which can subsequently lead to substance abuse, poor mental and physical health, and delinquency (Baglivio et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998).

Child abuse and neglect significantly increases, not only the likelihood of engaging in delinquency and violence, but also in the risk of reoffending (Baglivio et al., 2014; Dannerbeck & Yan, 2011; Duke, Pettingell, McMorris, & Borowsky, 2010; Huang, Ryan, & Herz, 2012; Kingree, Phan, & Thomson, 2003). For example, Herrera and McCloskey (2001) interviewed children about different forms of abuse in the family, and followed up with juvenile court records five years later. Findings indicate that exposure to family violence predicts later engagement in juvenile delinquent activities. Comparatively, studies estimating the prevalence of ACEs in the juvenile justice population have found that youth in the juvenile justice system have experienced ACEs roughly three to eight times more than youth in the general population (Abram et al., 2004; Dierkhising et al., 2013). Moreover, several recent studies estimate the rate of re-offending for crossover youth to be as high as 70% (Halemba & Siegel, 2011; Huang et al., 2012; Ryan, Williams, & Courtney, 2013). With an increase in research focused on

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youth in child welfare who cross over to the juvenile justice system (Grogan-Kaylor, Ruffolo, Ortega, & Clarke, 2008; Widom, 2003), studies have consistently identified a maltreatment history as a powerful predictor of juvenile delinquency and violence later in life (Chapple, Tyler, & Bersani, 2005; Dannerbeck & Yan, 2011; Ryan & Testa, 2005).

Since child welfare services are intended to provide safe, stable, and therapeutic environments for children and youth who have been maltreated to mitigate their trauma, and moderate any negative consequences, the purpose of this study was to identify risk and protective factors for crossover youth compared to those in the general juvenile justice population. Findings can help develop services that can improve the youth's environment and provide appropriate rehabilitative services, which may help deter further involvement in violence, and ultimately prevent youth with a history of child welfare system involvement crossing over to the juvenile justice system.

1.1. Risk factors for juvenile delinquency for youth in child welfare

Before examining risk factors for delinquency with youth in child welfare, an explanation of the different terms used to describe this population is warranted. Several terms have been used to describe youth who are involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Herz (2010) provides three terms that have been used to describe these youth, with differences noted between the terms. *Crossover youth* are youth who had experiences of maltreatment and also engaged in delinquency, regardless of the time order of involvement with both systems, while *dually involved youth* are a subgroup of crossover youth who are concurrently receiving services from both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. *Dually adjudicated youth* are an additional subgroup of dually involved youth who are simultaneously adjudicated by the two systems of child welfare and juvenile justice (p. 90). The current study uses the term *crossover youth* because there was no indication in the data as to the timing of child welfare system involvement either prior to or after juvenile justice system involvement.

In an effort to better understand the pathways that children and youth take from the child welfare system to the juvenile justice system, studies have examined individual-level risk factors, (e.g., demographic profiles and behavioral problems) (Crooks, Scott, Wolfe, Chiodo, & Killip, 2007). Females and African American youth were found to be over-represented among crossover youth, compared to those in the general juvenile justice population (Ryan & Testa, 2005; Ryan, Marshall, Herz, & Hernandez, 2008; Ryan et al., 2013). Overrepresentation of African American youth may be due to child welfare bias in which African American crossover youth are more likely to be placed in correctional or congregate settings in judicial processing (Herz et al., 2010; Ryan, Herz, Hernandez & Marshall, 2007; William, Van Dorn, Bright, Jonson-Reid, & Nebbitt, 2010).

Contextual factors such as substantiation of abuse allegations, type of placement, and placement instability have also been found to be significant predictors of juvenile justice system involvement (Chiu, Ryan, & Herz, 2011; Ryan et al., 2008; Ryan, Hong, Herz, & Hernandez, 2010). Specifically, youth in out-of-home placement have been found to be three times more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors compared to those who remain at home (Doyle, 2007; Johnson-Reid & Barth, 2003; Ryan & Testa, 2005; Ryan et al., 2008). However, it is important to note that not all children involved in the child welfare system are involved in delinquent behaviors or enter the juvenile justice system (Stewart, Livingston, & Dennison, 2008; Widom, 1989).

1.2. Risk and protective factors for youth in child welfare and juvenile justice

It is widely accepted in the juvenile delinquency literature that the determinants of delinquent behavior among youth are embedded within several domains (i.e., individual, family, peer, school, and community) that influence such behavior (Costa et al., 2005; Lee, 2013; Nash & Kim,

2007; U.S. Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, U.S. National Institute of Mental Health, & U.S. Center for Mental Health Services, 2001). These domains function, not only as risk factors, but also as protective factors (Herrenkohl et al., 2003; Stouthamer-Loeber, Loeber, Wei, Farrington, & Wikström, 2002). Risk factors increase the likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviors as well as the risk of recidivism (Arthur, Hawkins, Pollard, Catalano, & Baglioni, 2002; Emeka & Sorensen, 2009), whereas protective factors reduce the likelihood of negative behavioral outcomes (Pollard, Hawkins, & Arthur, 1999; Stattin & Magnusson, 1996). Low self-esteem, deviant peers, poor academic performance, inadequate family relationships, and substance abuse problems have been identified as risk factors (Bartlett, Holditch-Davis, Belyea, Halpern, & Beeber, 2006; Crosnoe, Erickson, & Dornbusch, 2002). Protective factors include high self-esteem, positive peer networks, attachment to school, and parental support (Adedokun & Balschweid, 2008; Bartlett et al., 2006; Hart, O'Tool, Price-Sharps, & Shaffer, 2007; Herrenkohl et al., 2003). Essentially both risk and protective factors have the same domains, but in positive directions.

Studies report that having multiple protective factors directly (Adedokun & Balschweid, 2008; Bartlett et al., 2006; Lodgewijks, de Ruiter, & Doreleijers, 2010) and indirectly reduce delinquent behaviors such as stealing, fighting, property damage, weapon use, risky sexual behavior, and substance use (Garnier & Stein, 2002; Lohman & Billings, 2008; Reingle, Jennings, & Maldonado-Molina, 2012). For example, using official conviction records of male adolescents, Lodgewijks et al. (2010) found a 38% recidivism rate when no protective factors were present, and a 0% violent recidivism rate when one or more protective factors were present. Reingle et al. (2012) also reported that parental involvement indirectly reduced violence by 55%. Using low-income adolescent males, Lohman and Billings (2008) reported that protective factors of parental monitoring and academic achievement decreased 33–84% of risky sexual behaviors over time.

The extant literature also reports that protective factors moderate the relationship between risk factors and delinquent behaviors (Crosnoe et al., 2002; Lodgewijks et al., 2010; Pollard et al., 1999). By interacting with risk factors, protective factors buffer the impact of risk factors on the likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviors. Crosnoe et al. (2002) report that family structure, teacher bonding, and academic achievement moderate the risk of substance use among adolescents in high school in California and Wisconsin.

Since crossover youth are a part of the juvenile justice population, studies have found the same domains for risk and protective factors in the general juvenile justice population for crossover youth. For example, in a study conducted by Herz et al. (2009), researchers examined overall risk level for crossover youth in Los Angeles County in order to identify the need for behavioral and social interventions for this population. Researchers utilized the risk and intervention needs data that were assessed and collected by a joint assessment team, which was composed of staff from the child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health agencies. Results showed that crossover youth had the highest need in family interaction, followed by delinquent affiliation, social isolation, and academic engagement. Several other studies have added to the findings on family factors and the association with offending and re-offending among crossover youth. These factors include parental monitoring, quality of the relationship with parents and caregivers, and parenting practices (Dannerbeck & Yan, 2011; Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2008; Robertson, Baird-Thomas, & Stein, 2008; Ryan et al., 2013; Salzinger, Rosario, & Feldman, 2007). Specifically, parental monitoring and a positive relationship with parents/caregivers serve as a protective role (Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2008) that decreases the likelihood of youth engaging in delinquent behaviors.

Other studies have examined factors in the domains of peer, school, and substance use among crossover youth. Conducting multilevel analyses, Crooks et al. (2007) examined the role of school climate on the relationship between child maltreatment experiences and violent

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