



## Research article

## Adolescent exposure to violence and adult illicit drug use

Scott Menard<sup>a,\*</sup>, Herbert C. Covey<sup>b</sup>, Robert J. Franzese<sup>c,1</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, Sam Houston State University, Campus Box 2296, Huntsville, TX 77341, USA<sup>b</sup> Adams County Human Services Department, USA<sup>c</sup> Department of Sociology, University of Oklahoma, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 12 September 2014

Received in revised form

30 December 2014

Accepted 5 January 2015

Available online 24 January 2015

## Keywords:

Marijuana use

Illicit drug use

Adolescent exposure to violence

Life course

National Youth Survey Family Study

Logistic regression

## ABSTRACT

Informed by a strain theory perspective, this study utilizes data on adolescent exposure to violence (AEV) from a prospective, longitudinal, national household probability sample that originally consisted of 1,725 respondents, first interviewed as adolescents in 1977 and last interviewed in middle adulthood in 2003. Findings from bivariate correlations and logistic regression models indicate that AEV is associated with both adolescent and adult illicit drug use, but some of the association between AEV and adult illicit drug use becomes nonsignificant when controlling for adolescent illicit drug use. Specific types of AEV associated with adult illicit drug use differ by gender. Implications, limitations, and future research directions are discussed.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

Are exposure to (witnessing or awareness of) neighborhood violence, witnessing violence between parents, physical abuse by parents, and more general violent victimization (excluding physical abuse by parents) associated with adolescent illicit drug use and, net of adolescent drug use, predictive of adult illicit drug use? Both exposure to violence and illicit drug use are matters of concern, each in its own right. Each affects millions of Americans (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2011) and is associated with physical and mental health problems (Chen & Lin, 2009; Springer, Sheridan, Kuo, & Carnes, 2007; Tajima, 2004), economic disadvantage (Covey, Menard, & Franzese, 2013; Huang, Evans, Hara, Weiss, & Hser, 2011), criminal victimization and crime perpetration (Barroso et al., 2008; Elliott, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989; Menard, 2012; Rebellon & Van Gundy, 2005).

Studies of the relationship of childhood and adolescent exposure to violence to illicit drug use have been marked by methodological limitations and inconsistency of results (Kendall-Tackett, 2013; Lynch, 2003; Widom, 2014; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003), particularly with respect to the relationship of witnessing parental violence to illicit substance use; compare, for example, Fergusson and Lynskey (1997) and Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl, & Moylan (2008) with Zinzow et al. (2009). Widom (2014) summarizes the state of this research by noting that “Hundreds of papers have been published describing a relationship between child maltreatment and substance abuse, primarily based on cross-sectional designs. Few longitudinal studies have followed abused and/or neglected children into adulthood, and, based on these few studies . . . the evidence linking child abuse and substance abuse is mixed” (p. 231, italics in original). While there

\* Corresponding author.

<sup>1</sup> Retired.

may be hundreds of studies of *maltreatment* (a term including but not limited to physical abuse) in *childhood* (sometimes including adolescence, under age 18, but often limited to younger ages), and *short term* associations with illicit drug use, there are far fewer studies of specifically *adolescent* exposure to violence and its *long term* relationship to illicit drug use.

In their meta-analysis of 118 studies of child exposure to domestic violence, Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, and Kenny (2003) found that only 10 utilized adolescent samples. Yet evidence from Thornberry, Ireland, and Smith (2001; see also Ireland, Smith, & Thornberry, 2002) suggests that when adolescents and younger children are compared, it is exposure to violence in adolescence, rather than earlier childhood, that poses the greater risk of later illicit drug use. This may occur for three reasons. First, childhood is more removed in time than adolescence is from adulthood, and it may be that more proximate experiences of exposure to violence have greater impact. Second, if exposure to violence occurs in childhood but not adolescence, that may indicate that the problem has been solved; but exposure to violence in adolescence indicates either continuity of problems from childhood, or the emergence of new problems in adolescence, either of which may have a greater impact on substance use than exposure to violence that has been successfully alleviated or mitigated. Third, in addition to the general issues of identity formation and transition to adult statuses characteristic of adolescence, adolescence is the stage of the life course in which exposure to, access to, and onset of illicit drug use is typically initiated (Elliott et al., 1989). It is thus more likely that adolescents, rather than children, might respond to exposure to violence in the short term with illicit drug use which, once initiated, may become a stable behavioral pattern that continues into adulthood.

In view of the relative neglect and suggested importance of exposure to violence in adolescence as a risk factor for illicit drug use, in the present study we focus on adolescent exposure to violence (hereafter AEV) as a predictor of adult illicit drug use. AEV, as described by Covey et al. (2013), Eitle and Turner (2002), Finkelhor et al. (2009), and Menard, Weiss, Franzese, and Covey (2014), is a general term encompassing direct physical abuse, witnessing parental violence, and perceptions of neighborhood violence, as different and specific forms of the broader concept of exposure to violence. We also consider more general adolescent violent victimization, separate from physical abuse by parents, as a predictor of illicit drug use. We examine the relationship of AEV to two forms of illicit drug use, hard drug use and marijuana use. Consistent with much of the literature, we distinguish between the use of marijuana, considered a “softer” drug whose use is comparatively widespread, and the less prevalent “harder” drugs including cocaine, heroin, and hallucinogen use plus nonprescription amphetamine and barbiturate use. We consider the association between AEV and illicit drug use in adolescence, but focus more on the much less studied, longer term, relationship of AEV to illicit drug use in middle adulthood.

## Theory

Although no theoretical perspective has been specifically developed to explain the relationship of experiencing physical abuse, witnessing parental violence, and exposure to neighborhood violence in adolescence with illicit drug use in adulthood, the broad category denoted as strain theories is straightforwardly applicable to this relationship. According to the anomie theory of Merton (1938), at the individual level, the experience of strain may lead to different modes of adaptation, one of which, retreatism, is particularly associated with substance use problems. Retreatism involves the abandonment of both success goals and of normative constraints defining legitimate means of achieving goals. Research by Menard (1995, 1997) supports the relationship of strain via retreatism to illicit drug use. Menard, like Merton, however, focused on economic strains rather than experiences of victimization and exposure to violence. More directly applicable to the present issue in that respect is the general strain theory (GST) of Agnew (1985). GST proposes that there are three types of strains: (1) strains that result from the inability to achieve positively valued goals; (2) strain that occurs when positively valued stimuli are removed; and, most pertinent to the present study, (3) strains that are present with the introduction of negative or noxious stimuli, including but not limited to witnessing or being a victim of violence. GST has been tested extensively in relationship to juvenile delinquency in general (e.g., Broidy, 2001), but largely absent in previous tests of GST is a clear, direct examination of the relationship of exposure to violence (strain type 3) to illicit drug use. Some evidence for the applicability of strain theory to the explanation of illicit drug use comes from Harrison, Fulkerson, and Beebe (1997), who found that physical abuse was associated with increased likelihood of marijuana and other drug use and that victims indicated that they were using substances as a form of self-medication, a pattern consistent with the retreatist adaptation in anomie theory.

Strain theories vary in how they suggest a linkage between exposure to violence, including AEV, and illicit substance use. As noted above, Merton's (1938) anomie theory allows for different modes of adaptation, not all of which lead to substance use. Agnew's (1985) GST suggests that strain is mediated by negative emotionality, including feelings of depression and anger, but does not specify how negative emotionality might lead to illicit substance use, as opposed to violence (externalizing) or mental health problems (internalizing). Anda et al. (2006) and Perry (2001) suggest a neurobiological approach in which trauma affects brain functioning in ways that lead to adverse behavioral and mental health outcomes, but are not specific in describing how AEV would result in illicit substance use. Other theoretical perspectives might be suggested here, but to our knowledge none besides strain have been used to date to explain or predict the relationship of AEV (or exposure to violence more generally) to illicit drug use. Moreover, of the theories linking victimization and offending discussed in Menard (2012), some would clearly not apply here: learning theories would expect AEV to result in further violence, not substance use, and self-control theories, which emphasize voluntarily placing oneself in risky situations, would not appear to be applicable to the (presumably involuntary) situation of witnessing parental violence (although an argument might be made for self-control provoking physical abuse or resulting in greater exposure to neighborhood violence).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6832643>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6832643>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)