



Differences between juvenile offenders with and without substance use problems in the prevalence and impact of risk and protective factors for criminal recidivism[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Background: Little is known about the needs of substance-using juveniles in treatment aimed at reducing criminal recidivism. Therefore, we aimed to examine treatment needs of substance-using juvenile offenders.

Methods: Differences were examined between juvenile offenders who abstain from substance use (ASU; $n = 1974$) and substance-using juvenile offenders without (SU; $n = 7000$) and with substance use problems (SUP; $n = 3317$), in the prevalence of risk/protective factors for criminal recidivism and strength of associations between risk/protective factors and criminal recidivism. We conducted secondary data analysis on recidivism risk assessments, collected with the Washington State Juvenile Court Assessment, and re-offending data. Analyses of variance and Partial correlations, adjusted for age, gender and ethnicity were applied, as well as Fisher's z tests and logistic regression analyses.

Results: Results showed that substance-using offenders, especially those with substance use problems, had more risk factors and less protective factors than ASU youths in the domains of school, use of free time, relationships, family, attitude, aggression and skills. The associations between most of the risk/protective factors and recidivism were stronger in the ASU group than in the SUP group. Substance use uniquely predicted recidivism, net of risk factors.

Conclusions: These results suggest that general interventions for juvenile offenders addressing risk and protective factors with the aim to reduce recidivism may be less effective for offenders with substance use problems, and that substance use (problems) should be addressed, too.

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1. Introduction

Recent meta-analyses (Bender et al., 2011; Tripodi and Bender, 2011; Tripodi et al., 2010) have suggested that reducing substance abuse among juvenile offenders may be more difficult than among non-offending youth. Tripodi and Bender (2011) explained the smaller effects among juvenile offenders than among youth in the general population by: "challenges inherent in working with adjudicated youth, including difficulty engaging youth in treatment, a high incidence of involuntary clients, encouragement to participate in treatment by other authority figures, and a preponderance of individual, familial, and social risk factors among youth involved in the juvenile justice system" (p. 250).

Little is known about the effect of treatment aimed at reducing criminal recidivism among substance-using juvenile offenders. There are some indications that interventions aimed at reducing recidivism are less effective in substance-using juvenile offenders than in non-using juvenile offenders. For example, Henggeler and colleagues (1999) examined the effect of MST among substance-abusing juveniles and found no significant effect of MST on reducing criminal activity among substance-abusing juveniles, whereas relatively strong effects of MST were achieved in several earlier studies among non-abusing juveniles (Henggeler, 1999). In a more recent study, Henggeler and colleagues (2006) evaluated the effectiveness of juvenile drug court and determined whether the integration of evidence-based practices enhanced the outcomes of juvenile drug court. In this study, it was shown that (a) drug court was more effective than family court services in decreasing rates of substance use, but not in decreasing rearrests or incarcerations and (b) that the use of MST within the drug court context improved youth substance-related outcomes, but the well documented capacity of MST to reduce rearrest rates and out-of-home placements (Curtis et al., 2004) did not emerge in substance-abusing juvenile

[☆] Supplementary material can be found by accessing the online version of this paper. Please see Appendix A for more information.

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offenders. Because little is known about the needs of substance-using juveniles in treatment aimed at reducing criminal recidivism, the aim of our study is to increase knowledge on this topic by examining the impact of risk and protective factors on criminal recidivism in substance-using juveniles.

1.1. Substance abuse and (re-)offending

An extensive body of the literature has documented significant associations between juvenile substance abuse and delinquency (e.g., Dembo et al., 1997; Lipsey and Derzon, 1998; Pakiz et al., 1997; Rossow et al., 1999). Nevertheless, because most studies on the relationship between substance abuse and delinquent behavior are cross-sectional, very little is known about directionality of the association between substance abuse and delinquent behavior. Wagner (1996) reviewed the literature on causality between substance abuse and delinquent behavior and concluded that the few available longitudinal studies on this topic (Dembo et al., 1993; Kandel et al., 1986; Newcomb and McGee, 1989; White, 1991; White et al., 1993) found only limited support for the hypothesis that substance abuse leads to delinquent behavior, but strong support for the hypothesis that delinquent behavior predicts later substance use. More recent longitudinal studies also found that early antisocial behavior predicts later substance use. For example, White and colleagues (2001) found that conduct disorder and violence predicted higher levels of alcohol and marijuana use. Molina and Pelham (2003) found that conduct disorder and severity of ADHD symptoms predicted later substance use in children with ADHD.

Research on substance abuse problems and criminal recidivism revealed mixed findings. For example, in one longitudinal study, youths with substance use disorder were more likely to commit future substance offenses (Colins et al., 2011), while in another, these youths were less likely to re-offend (Wiersma and Forehand, 1995). However, a few longitudinal studies with larger sample sizes found evidence suggesting that juvenile offenders with substance abuse problems are more likely to recidivate compared to those without substance use problems (McReynolds et al., 2010; Schubert et al., 2011; Hoeve et al., 2013). In these studies, substance use disorder elevated the risk of re-offending, net of prior offending behavior. Thus, although most longitudinal studies find evidence that substance use problems elevate the risk of recidivism, offending behavior has also been shown to predict later substance abuse problems.

1.2. Risk and protective factors

Offending behavior is the result of complex interactions between risk and protective factors (e.g., Loeber et al., 2008a; Prinzie et al., 2008). Risk factors increase the likelihood of offending behavior, whereas protective factors are associated with a smaller probability of offending behavior. Risk and protective factors comprise on the one hand personal characteristics of the individual and, on the other hand, factors in the social environment, including the family, peers, school and community (Howell, 2003; Loeber et al., 1998, 2008b; Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 2002). Examples of risk factors are high truancy, low academic achievement, anti-social friends, high parental stress, running away, bad neighborhood, and examples of protective factors are high intelligence, a positive attitude toward school, prosocial friends, good supervision and high family socioeconomic status (Loeber et al., 2008b). Several meta-analyses have shown that in order to reduce offending behavior, it is important that interventions target “dynamic” risk and protective factors that are related to recidivism (Andrews and Bonta, 2006, 2010; Andrews et al., 1990, 2011). Dynamic factors are circumstances or conditions in a youth’s life that can potentially

be changed, such as the youth’s friends or school performance. Dynamic factors that are related to recidivism are also referred to as criminogenic needs and they are used to guide the rehabilitative effort.

1.3. The current study

To effectively treat substance-using juvenile offenders it is important that interventions target the dynamic risk/protective factors that are most closely related to recidivism (Andrews and Bonta, 2006, 2010; Andrews et al., 1990, 2011). Therefore, it is important to know which risk and protective factors are most strongly related to criminal recidivism in substance-using offenders. If the factors associated with criminal recidivism are the same in both juvenile offenders with and without substance use problems, then treatment programs developed for general offenders may also be effective for substance-using juvenile offenders, for example in addition to treatment aimed specifically at reducing substance use. To our knowledge, there are no previous studies in which a comparison is made between juvenile offenders with and without substance use problems in the strength of associations between risk/protective factors and recidivism.

In addition, it is important to know whether substance use problems contribute to recidivism, over and above risk and protective factors of recidivism. Substance use problems may be associated with delinquency and recidivism, because risk and protective factors might contribute to both substance abuse and delinquency. To the best of our knowledge, only one study (Schubert et al., 2011), examining the influence of substance abuse on recidivism, adjusted for several risk factors. However, important risk factors including relationships, free time and parenting factors were not considered in that study.

To examine criminogenic needs of substance-using juvenile offenders, we analyzed differences between three groups of offenders: offenders who abstain from substance use (ASU), substance-using offenders (SU) and offenders with substance use problems (SUP), in the strength of associations between risk/protective factors and criminal recidivism. To characterize ASUs, SUs and SUPs, we first examined differences between these groups in background characteristics, recidivism rates and the prevalence of risk and protective factors. To confirm the association between substance use and criminal recidivism, we then examined the unique contribution of substance use to recidivism, adjusting for dynamic risk factors. Third, we examined differences between the three groups in the strength of associations between risk/protective factors and criminal recidivism. Finally, we examined multivariate associations between risk factors and recidivism in order to investigate the unique contribution of the risk and protective factors separately for each subgroup.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

For this study, secondary data from the Washington State Juvenile Court Assessment (WSJCA) validation study were used (Barnoski, 2004a). The dataset consisted of Washington State probationers with ages 12–18 years. The WSJCA is a screening and risk assessment instrument, which comprises two parts: a full assessment and a pre-screen (see instrument section). The pre-screen is administered to all youth on probation with the aim to indicate whether a youth is at low, moderate or high risk for reoffending. The full assessment is required only for youth who are assessed as having moderate or high risk on the pre-screen (71% of the juvenile offenders) with the aim to identify a youth’s risk and

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