

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at:
<http://www.researchgate.net/publication/254357612>

Introduction to Part I: Trauma and Juvenile Delinquency: Dynamics and Developmental Mechanisms

ARTICLE *in* JOURNAL OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT TRAUMA · JUNE 2012

DOI: 10.1080/19361521.2012.671743

CITATIONS

3

READS

45

1 AUTHOR:



[Patricia K Kerig](#)

University of Utah

98 PUBLICATIONS 1,383 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

This article was downloaded by: [University of Utah], [Ms Patricia K. Kerig]

On: 16 October 2012, At: 16:43

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wcat20>

Introduction to Part I: Trauma and Juvenile Delinquency: Dynamics and Developmental Mechanisms

Patricia K. Kerig^a

^a University of Utah

Version of record first published: 08 May 2012.

To cite this article: Patricia K. Kerig (2012): Introduction to Part I: Trauma and Juvenile Delinquency: Dynamics and Developmental Mechanisms, *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 5:2, 83-87

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19361521.2012.671743>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Introduction

Introduction to Part I: Trauma and Juvenile Delinquency: Dynamics and Developmental Mechanisms

PATRICIA K. KERIG

University of Utah

This article introduces the first part of a two-part special issue featuring new directions in research on traumatized youth in the juvenile justice system. The articles in this issue focus on research devoted to investigating the underlying development mechanisms accounting for the associations among exposure to traumatic events, posttraumatic stress reactions, and delinquent behavior. The articles in this issue advance our understanding of these questions by expanding the scope of research to include the study of complex trauma as well as the differentiation between primary psychopathic traits among youth versus secondary psychopathy borne of trauma. In addition, studies are included targeting specific theoretically-derived mediators of the relations between childhood adversity and delinquency, including depressive cognitions, as well as specific symptom clusters of posttraumatic stress. The remaining articles shed light on the differential roles that trauma and demographic factors play in predicting recidivism and mental health functioning among youth involved in the juvenile justice system, including gender, ethnicity, age, and sexual minority status. Taken together, these studies suggest important directions for the development of effective interventions to target trauma-related sequelae among troubled youth and their families.

Keywords trauma, delinquency, mediators, complex trauma, gender, posttraumatic stress

The contributions to the first of this two-part special issue feature new research that advances our understanding of the association between trauma and juvenile delinquency. A substantial body of literature has established that youth in the juvenile justice system have experienced trauma at rates significantly higher than their peers and that youth in detention settings exhibit high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (see Kerig & Becker, 2012 for a review). However, the much-needed next step in this research is to identify the mechanisms responsible for this association (Kerig & Becker, 2010; Maschi, Bradley, & Morgen, 2008). Under what circumstances, and through what developmental

Submitted November 23, 2011; revised February 7, 2012; accepted February 24, 2012.

Address correspondence to Patricia K. Kerig, Department of Psychology, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112. E-mail: p.kerig@utah.edu

processes, does traumatic stress come to be linked to adolescent antisocial behavior? In this special issue, leading investigators in the field set out to explore these questions.

Although research is consistent in showing that detained youth exhibit higher rates of PTSD symptoms than their community peers, the proportions found have varied widely across samples. An alternative hypothesis is that the diagnosis of PTSD is too narrow and developmentally insensitive to fully capture the sequelae of the kinds of chronic interpersonal traumas that characterize the childhoods of juvenile justice-involved youth (Ford, Elhai, Connor, & Frueh, 2010; Kerig, Arnzen Moeddel, & Becker, 2011). Such complex histories of maltreatment may lead to a pervasive set of developmental dysfunctions, termed Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD), which has been proposed for inclusion in the forthcoming DSM-5 (van der Kolk et al., 2009). With this construct in mind, Silvern and Griese (this issue) investigate the associations between complex histories of multiple maltreatment and the types of symptoms displayed by male adolescent offenders. Their study enjoys unique strengths in a number of respects, including diverse reporters and indices of maltreatment. Consistent with the DTD construct, these investigators find that the experience of multiple maltreatment is more strongly related to youth reactive aggression and dissociation than are traditional measures of PTSD. These data expand our understanding of the sequelae of childhood traumatic experiences and contribute to a stronger empirical base for diagnostic criteria.

The theme of diversity in traumatic pathways is advanced further by the work of Tatar, Cauffman, Kimonis, and Skeem (this issue), who remind us that early theories of psychopathy postulated two types. In contrast to the “primary psychopath” who is inherently lacking in empathy or remorse, in “secondary psychopathy” a callous veneer arises from a history of trauma exposure. Results of Tatar et al.’s research show that, as predicted, youth characterized by secondary psychopathy display higher anxiety, more extensive trauma histories, and higher rates of PTSD than those characterized by primary psychopathy. The implications of this research are important for calling our attention to the fact that psychopathy is a heterogeneous construct, and the clinical implications are profound, suggesting that for a significant subset of these youth, intervention should be directed toward underlying traumatic distress.

Allwood, Baetz, DeMarco, and Bell’s (this issue) contribution also offers greater specificity regarding the mediators of the relations between traumatic events and delinquency. These investigators focus on the role of depression in explaining the link between childhood adversity and delinquency, and further unpack the concept to focus on the specific role of hopelessness. Their findings inform research on trauma and delinquency by focusing attention on a significant but little-studied symptom of PTSD (the sense of a foreshortened future) and are consistent with Brezina, Tekin, and Topalli’s (2009) research with “hardcore” youth offenders, who lacked not only the belief in a future but a seeming desire for one (i.e., “When you’ve got nothing, you’ve got nothing to lose.”)

Developing further the theme of increasing specificity in the types of traumas and outcomes investigated, Kerig, Vanderzee, Becker, and Ward (this issue) point to the paucity of research assessing whether PTSD mediates the relations between trauma and youth outcomes and investigate the ways in which attention to symptom clusters can refine our understanding of these associations. Consistent with findings from other laboratories, girls in this sample scored higher than boys on all measures of trauma exposure and PTSD. For girls only, reexperiencing and arousal acted as mediators of internalizing problems whereas, for boys only, noninterpersonal problems were related to PTSD symptoms and to internalizing. These results suggest not only the need for fine-tuning trauma treatments

to be sensitive to differences in symptom origin and expression, but also issues of gender (Zahn, Hawkins, Chiancone, & Whitworth, 2008).

The remaining articles increasingly focus on issues of concern to the understudied but important phenomenon of girls' delinquency. As girls' rates of incarceration surpass those of boys, accounted for alarmingly by the "up-charging" of girls' minor offenses to more serious crimes, we no longer can be content to allow all-male samples to stand in for the prototypical adolescent offender, nor for conceptual models that fail to consider gendered correlates and predictors of delinquency (Kerig, *in press*).

First, Becker and colleagues (this issue) investigate the differential roles that trauma and demographic factors play in predicting recidivism and mental health functioning among adjudicated youth followed over a three-year period. Consistent with the idea that involvement in the juvenile justice system itself may be associated with iatrogenic effects, particularly for traumatized youth (Griffin, 2002; Mahoney, Ford, Ko, & Seigfried, 2004), the investigators find that mental health problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse increase over the course of multiple admissions to detention. Most tellingly, analyses of recidivism rates reveal a triple interaction effect: Female African American youth with PTSD are the most likely to reoffend, and thus to be subject to the "arrested development" that might potentially follow from incarceration (Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004).

Why are girls with trauma histories more vulnerable to these negative effects? Solomon, Davies, and Luckham (this issue) investigate the hypothesis that exposure to trauma disrupts adolescent girls' decision-making capacities, with PTSD symptoms such as hyperarousal interfering with information processing and independent thinking. The authors dig deeper by examining whether the association between trauma and impaired decision making is mediated by specific emotional disturbances. Their results indicate that the relations between trauma exposure and decision making are accounted for by increases in anger, substance abuse, depression, somatic complaints, and suicidal ideation. These data provide insights into what may lie beneath the mask of antisociality among girls, and point to the possibility that their antisocial acts may reflect more desperation than cold calculation, akin to what Ford, Chapman, Mack, and Pearson (2006) referred to as "survival coping." The interventions called for by such a reconstrual of the dynamics underlying girls' delinquency are far from the punitive response that now prevails.

In the final contribution to this issue, Belknap, Holsinger, and Little (this issue) call our attention to the fact that one group of girls is particularly vulnerable: sexual minority status (SMS) girls. The intersections among trauma, SMS, and the juvenile justice system are compelling. Research reveals that SMS girls experience higher rates of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse than their heterosexual peers (D'Augelli, 2002), and that they receive harsher sanctions from the legal system than other youth (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011). In keeping with the theme of identifying underlying mechanisms linking trauma and delinquency, this research team investigates whether traumatic abuse acts as a mediator of the relationship between SMS status and negative outcomes. Their data show that family sexual abuse mediates the relationship between SMS status and self-harming behavior among delinquent girls, which speaks to the pivotal role that family relations play—for better or worse—in the development of delinquency. Parental rejection, particularly regarding sexual orientation (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2009), may set youth on a negative trajectory that includes engaging in behavior harmful to both self and others. The dilemma is particularly keen for youth—disproportionately girls—whose acting-out behavior represents a reaction to, method to cope with, or attempt to flee from an abusive family environment (Kerig & Becker, 2012).

The questions asked and the answers offered by the contributions to this issue provide valuable scientific insights into the mechanisms and dynamics underlying the relations between trauma and juvenile delinquency. Significantly, too, each of these contributions highlights the pressing need to develop intervention strategies that are sensitive to the role that trauma—often chronic, diffuse, and interpersonal—plays in the development of youths' problem behavior. This concern provides the theme of the second of this two-part special issue, which will feature promising new conceptual models and empirical trials of interventions designed to target trauma-related sequelae among delinquent youth and their families.

References

- Brezina, T., Tekin, E., & Topalli, V. (2009). "Might not be a tomorrow": A multimethods approach to anticipated early death and youth crime. *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 47(4), 1091–1129.
- D'Augelli, A. R. (2002). Mental health problems among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths ages 14 to 21. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 7, 439–462.
- Ford, J. D., Chapman, J., Mack, J. M., & Pearson, G. (2006). Pathways from traumatic child victimization to delinquency: Implications for juvenile and permanency court proceedings and decisions. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 57(1), 13–26.
- Ford, J. D., Elhai, J. D., Connor, D. F., & Frueh, B. C. (2010). Poly-victimization and risk of posttraumatic, depressive, and substance use disorders and involvement in delinquency in a national sample of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46(6), 545–552.
- Griffin, P. (2002). The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Project. *Pennsylvania Progress*, 9(2), 2–10.
- Himmelstein, K. E. W., & Bruckner, H. (2011). Criminal-justice and school sanctions against nonheterosexual youth: A national longitudinal study. *Pediatrics*, 127(1), 49–57.
- Kerig, P. K. (in press). *Relationships as sources of risk or resilience for troubled girls: Toward a new agenda for research on girls' delinquency*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press.
- Kerig, P. K., Arnzen Moeddel, M., & Becker, S. P. (2011). Assessing the sensitivity and specificity of the MAYSI-2 for detecting trauma among youth in juvenile detention. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 40, 345–362.
- Kerig, P. K., & Becker, S. P. (2010). From internalizing to externalizing: Theoretical models of the processes linking PTSD to juvenile delinquency. In S. J. Egan (Ed.), *Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD): Causes, symptoms and treatment* (pp. 33–78). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science.
- Kerig, P. K., & Becker, S. P. (2012). Trauma and girls' delinquency. In S. Miller-Johnson, L. Leve, & P. K. Kerig (Eds.), *Delinquent girls: Context, relationships, and adaptation* (pp. 119–143). New York: Springer.
- Mahoney, K., Ford, J. D., Ko, S. J., & Siegfried, C. B. (2004). *Trauma-focused interventions for youth in the juvenile justice system*. Los Angeles: National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Retrieved from <http://www.nctsn.org/products/trauma-focused-interventions-youth-juvenile-justice-system-2004>
- Maschi, T. Bradley, C. A., & Morgen, K. (2008). Unraveling the link between trauma and delinquency: The mediating role of negative affect and delinquent peer exposure. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 6(2), 136–157.
- Ryan, C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R. M., & Sanchez, J. (2009). Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in White and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics*, 123, 346–352.
- Steinberg, L., Chung, H. L., & Little, M. (2004). Reentry of young offenders from the justice system: A developmental perspective. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 2(1), 21–38.

- van der Kolk, B. A., Pynoos, R. S., Cicchetti, D., Cloitre, M., D'Andrea, W., Ford, J.D., et al. (2009). *Proposal to include a developmental trauma disorder diagnosis for children and adolescents in DSM-5*. National Child Traumatic Stress Network Developmental Trauma Disorder Taskforce. Retrieved from http://www.traumacenter.org/announcements/DTD_NCTSN_official_submission_to_DSM_V_Final_Version.pdf
- Zahn, M., Hawkins, S. R., Chiancone, J., & Whitworth, A. (2008). *The Girls Study Group: Charting the way to delinquency prevention for girls*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.