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QAC 201
Research Plan

The Associations between Familial Relationships, Daily Activities and Delinquency

1. Background

The environment in which a child grows up – their family life, their daily activities – can profoundly shape their development and behavior in later years (Caprara, et al., 2005; Caspi, et al., 1995; Fulkerson, et al., 2006; Nielson, 1994; Odgers, et al., 2012). Various environmental variables have been found to account for the persistence of either social or antisocial behavior (Caspi and Moffitt 1995).

A child's success is intimately linked with relationships to their family, particularly their parents (Caprara et al. 2005). Empirical research has indicated that adolescents' satisfaction with their families can influence a child to be more pro-social and to hold a higher self-value (Caprara, et al., 2005). The importance placed on filial closeness may thus guide outcomes of a child's self-efficacy, delinquency, use of substances and other risky behavior.

In addition to sheer closeness, parenting styles and efficacy also have a strong influence on developing children, especially those of whom belong to neighborhoods of lower socioeconomic statuses (Odgers, et al. 2012). There has been evidence that supportive parenting mediates the effects of antisocial behavior (Odgers, et al., 2012). Maternal warmth and parental monitoring can strongly alleviate the effects of both neighborhood and family-level socioeconomic deprivation, which may sometimes manifest in violence or other forms of delinquency (Odgers, et al., 2012).

Furthermore, family mealtimes appear to be an asset in the development of youth.

Consistent positive associations have been found between the frequency of family dinners and both internal (self-efficacy, confidence) and external (behavior) factors of their children (Fulkerson et al. 2006). Mealtimes, as an indicator of familial closeness, may thus predict commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Fulkerson, et al., 2006). Subsequently, there also seems to be an inverse relationship between the frequency of family dinners and high-risk behaviors (Fulkerson, et al., 2006).

Outside of the home, the activities in which adolescents participate in have a strong impact on delinquency and non-delinquency rates (Nielson, et al. 1994). Agnew and Petersen (1989) found that participation in highly structured leisure activities, like sports, are linked to low levels of antisocial behavior, while participation in activities with minimum structure, like peer-oriented social activities and watching television, are associated with high levels of antisocial behavior (Nielson, et al., 1994). But is the question *what* activities are they involved in or with *whom*? There is a gap in literature on childhood activities related to delinquency.

More questions remain: How can we shape adolescents' goals in terms of their family life and daily activities to counter the temptations of violence, substance use and delinquency? This study will examine adolescents from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth). The goals of the analysis will include 1) establishing the association between familial relationships, daily activities and delinquency; and 2) determining whether consistency of meal times with parents and/or family relates to delinquency, after adjusting for these factors.

2. Method

2.1 Sample

The sample in the present study is from the first wave of the AddHealth database, which represents children in grades 7-12 during the 1994-1995 school year. Eighty high schools were selected to represent all U.S. schools with respect to region of country, urbanicity, size, type, and ethnicity. The total core sample of adolescents interviewed was 12,105.

2.2 Measures

An In-Home Questionnaire, a self-administered survey, was used to assess the various adolescent factors. The questionnaire included topics such as social and demographic characteristics, education and occupation of parents, household structure, risk behaviors, expectations for the future, self-esteem, health status, friendships and extracurricular activities. The survey contained detailed questions on the frequency, quantity and patterning of each topic (“How much do you feel that you and your family have fun together?” and “During the past week how many times did you do hobbies?”).

In addition to isolated variables, aggregate variables will quantify overarching “scores” for both the explanatory and response factors. “Delinquency Score,” for example, will be a sum of responses to variables measuring rates of violence, prevalence of substance use and habit of smoking. This score will then be categorized by frequency into “never/low”, “sometimes/medium” and “often/high”. Family relationships will be measured by three variables assessing closeness with parents and siblings, how much fun family has together and mealtime frequency data points.

3. Implications

If the present study shows significant correlations between familial closeness, daily

activities and delinquency rates, it could be an instructive means of positive change for delinquency in youth by informing the development of prevention programs. The focus on mealtimes is an attainable goal, which may particularly benefit youth in risk. Creative and realistic strategies for enhancing and supporting familial bonds should be explored to stimulate healthy adolescent development. Family routines and certain daily activities may have the preventative power of reversing rapidly increasing risky behavior within the fast-paced lives of today's society. If such actions do indeed have so much influence, this study could ultimately direct a tangible course of action.

References

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