Understanding Violent Adolescent Males: Implications for Post Release Recidivism

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Abstract

Simple assault is common among mid-adolescent males in Iowa and throughout the United States. The barriers and supports that exist for mid-adolescents when choosing nonviolence is well-documented in past research. Little is known about the choice of nonviolence for mid-adolescent males who have been labeled delinquent by juvenile courts.

Problem

Current research on peer influence has primarily been conducted on minority youth, high risk youth, conducted on both male and female youth, general peer influence, and youth refusal to a plethora of general delinquent and nondelinquent behaviors. Little is known about barriers and supports to nonviolence and fighting for young adult males, specifically for those who were adjudicated or received an informal adjustment for simple assault. Further, no research was found that were conducted on this specific of sample group.

The number of complaints for simple assault has not declined. Nationally, the number of simple assault complaints for adolescents 15 to 17 years of age increased by 139% from 1980 to 2009. In Iowa, there were more than 2,000 adolescents convicted of simple assault each year from State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2003 to SFY 2011 while adolescent populations residing in Iowa decreased (Iowa Juvenile Court Services, 2010, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2011)

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into what served as barriers and supports to nonviolence and fighting for young adult males who were adjudicated or received an informal adjustment for simple assault during middle adolescence.

Committee

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Relevant Literature

Research on Violence

•Farrell et al. (2010) determined peer pressure to fight, peer instigation, direct verbal victimization, and pressure from a bystander to fight to support violence. Farrell et al. determined support from friends for nonviolent behavior, lack of support from friends to fight, peer pressure for nonviolence, and concern of adolescent over pro-social image and reputation to support nonviolence.

•Youth weighed their responses to interview questions on friendships, alternatives, and consequences (i.e., trouble at home or school, or getting hurt), and found that poor solving skills and inability to select a response served as barriers to nonviolence (Farrell et al., 2008).

Research on Delinquency

•The **principle of differential association** is that people become delinquent when they receive an excess of definitions in favor of the conduct than prosocial messages from intimate personal groups (Sutherland et al., 1992).

•Communication can be in verbal form or as gestures, but impersonal forms of communication (i.e., movies or newspaper) are relatively unimportant in committing criminal behavior (Sutherland et al., 1992).

•The quality of definitions during adolescence is dependent upon frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of the definitions received (Sutherland et al., 1992).

Research Questions

RQ_1: What were barriers to nonviolence and fighting for young adult males who were adjudicated or received an informal adjustment for simple assault during middle adolescence?

RQ_2: What were supports to nonviolence and fighting for young adult males who were adjudicated or received an informal adjustment for simple assault during middle adolescence?

RQ_3: What is the response of young adult males who were adjudicated or received an informal adjustment for simple assault during middle adolescence?

Procedures

Design

- Exploratory Research

Sample

- 3 young adult males
- Participants were clients living in a transitional house for at-risk youth.
- The executive director agreed to allow the nonprofit organization to participate in this study.

Data Collection

- Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted using the *Barriers and Supports Interview Protocol* designed by Farrell et al. (2010).

Procedure

- The interviews were conducted in a conference room located at the nonprofit organization for the transitional house where the study was conducted.

Data Analysis

Transcribe data
Organization of transcripts
- Reading transcripts while listening to the recordings.
- Epoche
- Highlighting and underlining significant statements.
- Developing themes.
- Consolidation of similar themes.

Findings

Barriers to nonviolence included self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, beliefs about the world, beliefs supporting violence and fighting, negative outcome when using a nonviolent response, and perceived ineffectiveness of response.

The **supports to nonviolence** were self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, prosocial values and goals, beliefs against violence and fighting, fear of physical harm from violence or fighting, and other negative outcomes when choosing violence or fighting.

The participant's school or people at his school, neighborhood and community, peers, family, and past experiences were all points of consideration when interpreting the findings.

Limitations

Participants may have **been charged for multiple offenses**.

Participants may have provided distorted responses to interview questions because of personal bias, anger or anxiety, politics, and simple lack of awareness.

It was difficult to compare simple assault offenses committed by participants, because no simple assault offense is the same. In this study, I focused on barriers and supports to nonviolence and fighting not on the offense or punishment of participants.

Conclusions

Findings were consistent with expected behavioral normal development of middle adolescent males.

Findings were consistent with previous studies on barriers and supports to nonviolence and fighting.

Social Change Implications

Individual and Family Level
- Learning Tool

Community Level
- Needs-based programming (i.e., mentoring programs)

Societal and Policy Level
- To contribute to curriculum and future studies.
- To help inform the development of new policy and amendments of existing policy.
- To help with development of curriculum.
- To help contribute to future studies.