

Special Issue: Adolescence and Social Deviance

Guest Editors: Ginesa Torrente and Alexander T. Vazsonyi

Introduction: Adolescence and Social Deviance

Ginesa Torrente¹ and Alexander T. Vazsonyi²

¹ University of Murcia (Spain)

² University of Kentucky (United States of America)

Abstract: The goal of the present monograph is to bring together recent scholarship from teams of researchers across different developmental contexts to study predictors and correlates of adolescent maladjustment or deviance. These include intrapersonal factors, such as the Big Five personality construct, but also interpersonal factors, including family processes and relationships, and peer group relations. They also include larger structural characteristics, such as socioeconomic status or consequences of migratory processes, now prevalent and relevant across societies.

Key words: Social deviance; antisocial behavior; aggression; bullying; adolescence; immigration.

Título: Introducción: Adolescencia y desviación social.

Resumen: El objetivo del este monográfico es reunir trabajos recientes de equipos de investigación de diferentes contextos centrados en el análisis de los predictores y los correlatos de la conducta inadaptada en la adolescencia. Entre estos se incluyen factores individuales, como la personalidad del adolescente, analizada con el modelo Big Five; factores interpersonales, incluyendo los procesos y las relaciones familiares o con el grupo de iguales. También se consideran factores estructurales amplios, como el nivel socioeconómico o las consecuencias de los procesos migratorios, tan relevantes en las sociedades actuales.

Palabras clave: Desviación social; conducta antisocial; agresión; *bullying*; adolescencia; inmigración.

Currently, public concern about antisocial acts and behaviors committed by youth continues to be on the rise across Europe and North America. Deviant or maladjusted behaviors are understood as any behaviors that imply violations from social norms. This broad definition includes a variety of behaviors including robbery, vandalism, drug and alcohol use, aggression, bullying, and so forth, that is, any behavior that reflects some externalized behavior problem.

Adolescence is a developmental stage in which these types of behaviors become more prevalent. In fact, as found in a number of studies, the probability of an individual becoming involved in antisocial actions increases considerably during late adolescence, specifically, between 16 and 18 years (for example, Agnew, 2001; Caspi & Moffitt, 1995; Torrente, 2002), and subsequently declines and decreases by as much as 50% by early 20's and 85% by late 20's (Caspi & Moffitt, 1995). This fact, along with the relative ease with which thorough studies can be conducted with self-reports from youth, leads to considering adolescents ideal for this kind of research, particularly from a practical point of view (Cullen & Agnew, 2006).

This has resulted in a large number of studies, with the aim of establishing the causal factors and influences on these behaviors, as well as recommendations about what to do about these behaviors to reduce the social problem. One

example of this is the proliferation of journals, publications, and scientific societies focusing on this topic. Without meaning to be exhaustive, we mention some of the most important journals from the areas of Social Psychology and Developmental Psychology, which are constantly publishing articles about this problem, such as *Deviant Behavior*, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *Interpersonal Violence*, *Developmental Review*, *Developmental Psychology* or *Child Development*, which shows its relevance as a current target of study.

When analyzing this problem in more detail and looking first at the data from Spain, official data show that a large number of minors are involved in deviant behaviors. For instance in 2010, minors committed 31,061 offenses in Spain; the most frequent behaviors included crimes against private property (10,886), robbery (7,882), and petty crimes against people (6,831) (National Institute of Statistics, INE, 2012). These data, although informative, give very little insight into the actual number of norm violations committed by youth.

Outside of Spain and across Europe, we find very similar evidence based on official data. The data from the European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics (2010) indicate that the percentage of minors convicted represented 6% of the total number of delinquents. Specifically, the most frequent offenses include theft and robbery (13 and 21%, respectively), sexual crimes (between 10 and 17%, depending on the crime), and interpersonal threats or violence (8%).

Lastly, in the United States, data provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for 2010 indicate that the total number of minors (under 18 years) who were arrested for committing a crime reached 1,154,096. The most frequent offenses included property crimes (a total of 259,847),

*** Dirección para correspondencia [Correspondence address]:**

Ginesa Torrente Hernández, Ph.D., Department of Psychiatry and Social Psychology, School of Psychology, University of Murcia, 30100 Murcia (Spain). E-mail: gine@um.es

Alexander T. Vazsonyi, Ph.D., John I. and Patricia J. Buster Endowed Professor of Family Studies, Professor of Psychology. University of Kentucky, 316 Funkhouser Building, Lexington, KY 40506-0054 United States. E-mail: vazsonyi@uky.edu

followed by robbery and theft (199,654), and offenses related to disturbing the peace (107,040).

Although we find similarities in the rates of these behaviors committed by youth in Europe and the United States, we do not know the extent to which the etiology is similar or different across cultures and nations. The general patterns of offenses appear quite similar in Europe and the United States, thus leading to the potentially erroneous conclusion that the same etiology underlies these behaviors on both continents. In fact, without a rigorous test of this particular question, we are unable to conclude the same. On the other hand, we recognize a host of risk factors known to be associated with social deviance; these include individual or intrapersonal (e.g., personality), interpersonal (e.g., family processes) or group processes more generally (e.g., peer group), and lastly, structural factors or characteristics, such as socio-economic factors that might exert considerable influence through the minor's family and immediate environment. An often overlooked, yet current example includes the impact by migratory processes on youth and their families.

The current monograph focuses on the analysis of these individual, interpersonal, and social or structural factors that affect the onset and development of deviant and maladaptive behaviors. The contributions can be organized into four main topics: (1) The analysis of the influence by macro-structural or cultural characteristics of countries to explain variability in self-reported adolescent deviance; (2) the influence by the Big Five personality constructs on deviant or antisocial behaviors and the possible moderating effect by parenting processes on these links; (3) the influences by acculturation processes, following immigration, on adolescent adjustment; and (4) an examination of potential intervention mechanisms to address and potentially reduce maladaptive and deviant behaviors, including aggression.

In the first article, Vazsonyi, Schwartz, and Chen examine to what extent macro-cultural differences in per capita income, crime rates, divorces rates, drinking age, and mean population age can account for variability in self-reported deviance. This is a study that provides a new impetus for cross-national comparative work on crime and deviance, by linking both official, society-level data with data collected from large samples of youth (14,290) on three continents: Hungary, Japan, The Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Taiwan, Turkey, and the United States. Their results indicate that with the exception of alcohol use, which does appear to have different meaning in the diverse cultures studied, the factor structure of the deviance measures was consistent across the nine countries. Substantial between country variability in deviance measures was found (though the study was underpowered to study level 2 effects), yet only official, national crime rates predicted some of the self-reported deviance measures.

Torrente and Vazsonyi focused on minors' Big Five personality constructs and their interactions with perceived

parenting processes on deviant behaviors. Traditionally, both the Big Five personality constructs and parenting behaviors have been targeted for study related to understanding adolescent deviance; however, very little work has examined the extent to which parenting behaviors condition or moderate the link between Big Five measures and deviance. In the current effort, the authors focused on all Big Five dimensions (neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness) and on three specific parenting processes, namely closeness, communication, and conflict. Consistent with previous research, their findings supported direct effects by personality constructs as well as parenting processes; more specifically, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were associated with drug and alcohol consumption, vandalism, and theft. With regard to the moderating effects by parenting processes, the authors found some evidence that negative parenting processes moderated the relationships between Big Five personality constructs and measures of vandalism and theft.

Migratory flows are particularly relevant in the contemporary world, and of great importance in western societies in the last years of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. The migratory process affects immigrants' psychosocial well-being because the acculturation process requires them to adapt psychologically and socioculturally to the new host society (Ward, 1996; 2001). In this context, the analysis of the influence of this process on the adolescents' adaptation is increasingly important (see Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), because this vital stage is where important processes for later development such as identity, self-esteem, or self-concept are set, and the main social support networks outside of the family nucleus are configured. This adaptation will depend, to a great extent, on the successful development of the appropriate cultural competences (Oppedal, 2006) in the new host society.

The third focus of the monograph about acculturation processes on minors' psychosocial adaptation includes work by Sobral, Gómez-Fraguela, Romero, Luengo, and Villar, which examines samples of Latin American adolescent immigrants who live in Spain; much like Torrente and Vazsonyi, it also focuses on personality constructs (impulsivity, sensation-seeking, and empathy) and measures of family functioning (interaction, cohesion, adaptability, and family supervision), and the extent to which these are affected by adjusting to a new host society. Their results indicate that, following the nomenclature of the bidimensional model of Berry (1990; 1997; 2005; Berry et al., 2006), individuals who present higher scores in the separation strategy—the second most numerous group after the integration group—and who also have low levels of empathy and self-control and family functioning (characterized by scarce adaptability, cohesion, and family supervision) present more high-risk social situations for the development of these behaviors. These findings again support the notion

of a close interplay between an adolescent's personality, experienced family functioning, acculturation, and externalized behaviors.

Next, the work of Mirsky focuses on the risk factors linked to social maladjustment of adolescents who emigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union, an ethnic group of particular relevance, because it makes up 17% of the Israeli population, and between 10 and 11% in the case of adolescents. This work reveals the adaptation difficulties of these adolescents to their new setting, because the minor immigrants in general, and those from the former Soviet Union in particular, report higher academic maladjustment and higher rates of consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs; they are also more frequently involved in delinquent behaviors. Once again, the influence by the family is underlined as decisive in the process of maladjustment, especially because of these minors' risk of becoming the direct or indirect target of violence. Family functioning appears to be one of the decisive factors for the adolescent adjustment, especially insofar as it refers to cohesion, parenting style, and parental support.

Related to the previous paper, Oppedal and Idsoe analyze the effects by acculturation processes and pre-migratory traumas on the onset of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in a particularly unique and highly relevant population, namely unaccompanied refugee youth. In considering the adjustment of these adolescents, not only do we need to consider the acculturation process they undergo to a new host society, with different rules and behaviors from those of their country of origin, but also their prior history that frequently is plagued by traumas from exposure to wars and conflicts. The results of this work, carried out in Norway, show a higher incidence of internalizing behavior problems, specifically depression, versus externalizing behavior problems, and a greater relevance of the acculturation process in the maladaptive behaviors of the adolescents versus pre-migratory traumas. This work again invites a more careful consideration of how the acculturation process impact the development of youth and their psychosocial well-being. The work underlines the importance of acquiring cultural competencies both of the society of origin—which requires them to maintain some identity tied to their own cultural group—and of the host culture, putting down roots.

Also focusing on immigrant youth, the work by Strohmeier, Fandrem, and Spiel focuses on aggressive/bullying behaviors; in their work, they examine how reactive aggression and peer acceptance/ need for affiliation are associated with aggressive/ bullying behaviors among immigrant and nonimmigrant adolescents in data from Austria and Norway. Findings provide evidence that being an immigrant does not place youth at risk for aggressive behaviors; however, acceptance and need of peer affiliation were associated with aggressive behaviors and bullying others among immigrant youth. The implication is that immigrant youth appear more vulnerable to peer rejection

and feel the need to be accepted, thus highlighting the salience of social support in successfully resolving the acculturation process (Strohmeier, Kärnä & Salmivalli, 2011; Strohmeier & Spiel, 2003).

Lastly, the work of Cerezo and Méndez pursues three essential goals: First, to determine adolescents' levels of social risk as measured by the presence of predelinquent behaviors, and their personal risk as a function of the degree of addictive substances they consume. The second goal is to examine the relation between these risk behaviors and the onset of academic failure and the role assigned to bullying (aggressor, victim, or victim-aggressor). The last goal is to elaborate a proposal of an intervention program to implement in the classroom. Their results confirm that adolescence is a stage at which the individual is particularly vulnerable, performing a large number of acts characterized by high social and personal risk, and in which drug use and manifestations of antisocial behavior become especially relevant. Regarding the relation between these dynamics of risk and bullying, the authors conclude that it is more frequent for aggressive youth to display other manifestations of externalizing behaviors and academic failure than for nonaggressive adolescents. Lastly, their proposed intervention calls for the need to consider the individual and the immediate social setting (the school or family) to improve relationships and to establish clear rules that help the individual to develop and engage in more adaptive behavior.

The collection of papers provide important insights into correlates of social deviance, across a variety of cultural and national settings; this perhaps is the greatest contribution collectively, the insights gained from youth across a number of different cultural developmental contexts. At the same time, many factors and known predictors of deviance were not considered, despite the fact that they are central to today's theoretical discourse in Criminology. This includes, for example, the influence of other individual characteristics on deviance such as neuropsychological problems (Moffitt, 1993) or low self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), the development of cognitive processes such as certain beliefs or values that justify this kind of behavior (Farrington, 2005, 2007; Hirschi, 1969), the presence of tension or frustration (Elliot, Huizinga & Ageton, 1985), the influence of the peer group (Agnew, 2005; Farrington, 2005, 2007; Thornberry, 1996; Thornberry & Krohn, 2005) or situational opportunities (Farrington, 2005, 2007; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), among others. The analysis of all these factors would lead to the elaboration of another monograph in which we would focus more exhaustively on mechanisms and prevention and intervention programs to meet the needs of the numerous professionals who work with youth trying to prevent or reduce social deviance.

Acknowledgements.- We thank the Editor of the journal *Anales de Psicología* for his invitation to participate as guest editors of this monograph.

References

- Aebi, M. F., Aubusson de Cavarlay, B., Barclays, G., Gruszczynska, B., Harrendorf, S. et al. (2010). *European sourcebook of crime and criminal justice statistics*. The Hague: Boom Juridische uitgevers.
- Agnew, R. (2001). *Juvenile delinquency. Causes and control*. Los Angeles: Roxbury.
- Agnew, R. (2005). *Why do criminal offend? A general theory of crime and delinquency*. Los Angeles: Roxbury.
- Berry, J. W. (1990). Psychology of acculturation. In R.W. Brislin (Eds.), *Applied cross-cultural psychology* (pp. 232-253). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46, 5-34.
- Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 697-712.
- Berry, J. W., Phinney, J., Sam, D., & Vedder, P. (2006). *Immigrant youth in cultural transition. Acculturation, identity and adaptation across national context*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. (1995). The continuity of maladaptive behaviour: From description to explanation in the study of antisocial behaviour. In D. Cicchetti & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Developmental psychopathology* (pp. 472-511). New York: Wiley.
- Cullen, F. T., & Agnew, R. (2006). *Criminological theory. Past to present (Essential Readings)*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Elliot, D. S., Huizinga, D., & Ageton, S. (1985). *Explaining delinquency and drug use*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Farrington, D. P. (2005). The integrated cognitive antisocial potential (ICAP) theory. In D. Farrington (Ed.), *Integrated developmental and life-course theories of offending. Advances in criminological theory* (vol. 14, pp. 73-92). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Farrington, D. P. (2007). Origins of violent behavior over the life span. In D. J. Flannery, A. T. Vazsonyi, & I. D. Waldman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of violent behavior and aggression* (pp. 19-48). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI (2010). *Crime in the United States 2010*. Retrieved on May 28, 2012, from www.fbi.gov
- Gottfredson, M. R., & Hirschi, T. (1990). *A general theory of crime*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE (2012). *Estadística de los Juzgados de Menores* [Statistics from the Minor's Penal Court]. Retrieved on May 28, 2012, from www.ine.es.
- Moffitt, T. (1993). Adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behaviour: A developmental taxonomy. *Psychological Review*, 100, 674-701.
- Oppedal, B. (2006). Development and acculturation. In D. Sam & J. Berry (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology* (pp. 97-112). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Strohmeier, D., Kärnä, A., & Salmivalli, C. (2011). Intrapersonal and interpersonal risk factors for peer victimization in immigrant youth in Finland. *Developmental Psychology*, 47, 248-258.
- Strohmeier, D., & Spiel, C. (2003). Immigrant children in Austria: Aggressive behavior and friendship patterns in multicultural school classes. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 19(2), 99-116.
- Thornberry, T. P. (1996). Empirical support for interactional theory: A review of the literature. In J. D. Hawkins (Ed.), *Delinquency and crime: Current theories* (pp. 198-235). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Thornberry, T. P., & Krohn, M. (2005). Applying interactional theory to the explanation of continuity and change in antisocial behavior. In D. P. Farrington (Ed.), *Integrated developmental and life-course theories of offending* (pp. 183-209). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Torrente, G. (2002). *Patrones de interacción familiar relacionados con el desarrollo de la conducta antisocial en adolescentes murcianos* [Patterns of family interaction related to the development of antisocial behavior in adolescents from Murcia]. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Murcia (Spain).
- Ward, C. (1996). Acculturation. In D. Landis & R. Bhagat (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training* (pp.124-147). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ward, C. (2001). The ABC's of acculturation. In D. Matsumoto (Ed.), *The handbook of culture and psychology* (pp. 411-445). New York: Oxford University Press.

(Article received: 15-06-2012; reviewed: 26-06-2012; accepted: 28-06-2012)