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Metro and nonmetro youth: Evaluating differential pathways to delinquency

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Although much research has been conducted on risk factors and behaviors of delinquent youth, little is known about the nonmetro population and how they may differ from their metro counterparts. The purpose of this study is to test the hypothesis that metro and nonmetro youth experience significant differences in risk factors, behaviors, and experiences leading to delinquency. The findings are the result of a multi method approach incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analysis. An assessment of a pre-existing data set of 1706 delinquents identified initial differences between metro and nonmetro delinquents. Major risk factors between the two groups were then identified through a literature review. Next, to identify nonmetro pathways to delinquency a content analysis was performed on interview transcripts of 28 youth recently housed in Missouri Division of Youth Services Treatment Facilities. The above hypothesis was supported as several themes appeared. Significant differences were found in parent attributes between the two groups as well as how the youth experience and respond to parenting. Nonmetro youth were found to be referred for the first time at an earlier age and their referral was predicted by more and different variables than that of metro youth. A difference in resources and services along with diminished social support due to community size affect how nonmetro youth cope with fewer economic opportunities as well as greater poverty rates. Although more study is needed, this research improves our understanding of metro and nonmetro differences in delinquency and can be used to develop prevention and intervention strategies specific to nonmetro youth.