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### **"Examining Antisocial Behavioral Antecedents of Juvenile Sexual Offenders and Juvenile Non-Sexual Offenders"**

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#### **THE QUESTIONS**

Do juveniles who have offended sexually and who have been identified as displaying antisocial behavior follow different antisocial paths to their sexually offending behavior? Do youth who have sexually offended and who display antisocial tendencies have different antisocial pathways from youth with antisocial behaviors who have committed non-sexual offenses? Are variable intervention and treatment strategies required to address these potentially different pathways of antisocial behavior in youth who have sexually offended?

#### **THE RESEARCH**

The authors acknowledge that there is great heterogeneity among youth who have offended sexually. Although prior non-sexual antisocial behavior defines a sub-set of these youth, it is likely that there is heterogeneity in their antisocial pathways to sexually offending behavior, as well. "There is more than one type of 'antisocial' JSO," the authors assert, which enables us to "facilitate a more accurate assessment of JSO heterogeneity."

Developmental criminologists have identified four main dimensions of -- or pathways to -- antisocial behavior. These include:

1. An authority conflict pathway

2. A covert pathway
3. An overt pathway
4. A reckless pathway

Further, Rolf Loeber and colleagues have developed a pyramid-shaped model that identifies the different developmental pathways of antisocial behavior among youth with serious and violent behavior. Yet these models have not been used to examine the antisocial behavior of youth who have sexually offended. A 2010 meta-analysis by Michael Seto and Martin Lalumière found that youth who have sexually offended have engaged in less criminal behavior than youth who had offended in non-sexual ways, suggesting that those who have sexually offended engage in less antisocial behavior, as well. Yet, other studies have reported that there is little difference between these groups of youth in terms of prior antisocial and criminal behavior, thus presenting a disparity in the empirical research that requires further study.

To address this disparity, the authors began from a place of understanding that antisocial behavior is key to the etiology of sex offending by youth, that an examination of the different antisocial pathways that lead to sexual offending behaviors is necessary, and that varying pathways likely require different intervention and treatment strategies.

Between 2005 and 2011, the authors interviewed incarcerated male adolescents in open and secure facilities in British Columbia, Canada. The sample consisted of 51 youth who had received an official criminal charge for a sexual offense and 94 youth who had committed a non-sexual criminal offense. All of these adolescents were considered by the courts to be serious and violent young offenders and were interviewed using the Measurement of Adolescent Social and Personal Adaptation in Quebec (MASPAQ) that measures authority conflict, covert, and overt behavior in a number of categories such as: disturbing the classroom; skipping class; forcing others to do things; stealing a car; teasing and hitting; and several others. The authors used latent class analysis (a method for identifying otherwise unobservable patterns or subgroups) to identify three different behavioral pattern groups: Low Antisocial, Primarily Overt, and Primarily Covert, as well as 11 behavioral indicators.

## **RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Although the model of the three behavioral classes succeeded in interpreting the meanings of latent/otherwise unobservable patterns, it could not determine that youth who had sexually offended fit just one of these behavioral patterns. In other words, the adolescents' behavioral pathways were heterogeneous. Importantly, the findings also indicated that their behavioral patterns were not necessarily different from those of youth who had committed non-sexual offenses. The "low antisocial" group was the most common behavioral pathway at about 50 percent of the sample, both for youth who had sexually offended and those who had offended non-sexually. The other half of the sample of both groups was split almost evenly between the overt and covert pathway groups. This overt/covert finding suggests similar developmental antecedents of the youth who had offended sexually and those who had offended non-sexually.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS**

The complexity of the study is matched only by the complexity of the youth themselves. If anything, this study highlights the importance of considering the developmental antecedents and pathway to sexual abuse that each client has taken. Understanding the difference between an overt and covert pathway, for example can be crucial for professionals to consider when determining supervision and treatment strategies, as well as safety planning. Likewise, understanding the effects of high and low levels of past antisocial behavior can inform both assessment and treatment processes. Because the lay public is often unable to distinguish between high- and low-quality information regarding young people, it is all the more important that professionals communicate what they know about pathways to offending in an even-handed manner. This study helps in this area.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD**

Beyond the obvious conclusion that youth are often more heterogeneous than they may seem, these findings point to how difficult it can be for stakeholders and society to understand the developmental pathways to offending behavior. Given how subject to change adolescents actually are, there is a question of whether we should even use the word “antisocial” to describe them, except under the most extreme circumstances. The fact that half of this sample was made of “low antisocial” youth suggests that we should not think in these terms, and rather focus on the often transitory nature of their behavioral pathways in an individualized fashion. Instead of asking how antisocial these youth are, it may be more appropriate to ask how adults can best help them to develop new pathways to success.

## **ABSTRACT**

In prospective longitudinal studies of juvenile offenders, the presence of multiple developmental pathways of antisocial behaviors has consistently been identified. An “antisocial” type of juvenile sex offender (JSO) has also been identified; however, whether antisocial JSOs follow different antisocial pathways has not been examined. In the current study, differences in antisocial pathways within JSOs and between JSOs and juvenile non-sex offenders (JNSOs) were examined. Data on Canadian male incarcerated adolescent offenders were used to identify whether behavioral antecedents differed within JSOs and between JSOs ( $n = 51$ ) and JNSOs ( $n = 94$ ). Using latent class analysis (LCA), three behavioral groups were identified. For both JSOs and JNSOs, there was a Low Antisocial, Overt, and Covert group. Overall, there were important within-group differences in the behavioral patterns of JSOs, but these differences resembled differences in the behavioral patterns of their JNSO counterpart. Risk factors including offense history, abuse history, and family history were more strongly associated with the Overt and Covert groups compared with the Low Antisocial group. Implications for JSO assessment practices were discussed.

**CITATION**

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