

Antecedents and Correlates of Deviant Activity in Urban Youth Manifesting Behavioral Problems

This study examines both risk and protective factors preceding and associated with the origin and extent of deviant activity reported by 375 inner-city, primarily African-American, youth admitted to “youth bureaus” designed to address early problematic behavior in the community. This report focuses on the findings and key underlying issues for the development and evaluation of primary prevention strategies targeting high-risk youth. Study participants varied considerably in terms of their self-reported exposure to risk and protective factors and in the nature and extent of their previous engagements in deviant activity. The principal antecedents and correlates of deviant behavior were found to be age, gender, school behavior problems, and the deviance of peers. For youth reporting ever having engaged in delinquent activity, the most prominent predictors of the extent and severity of activity, besides chronological age, were age at first deviance, the deviance of peers and the manifestation of school behavior problems. Family deviance was an additional predictor of engagement in multiple forms of deviance. In addition to reaffirming the utility of self-reported measures of early development in the prediction of deviant behavior, results of the study point to the need for a finer differentiation of the predispositional characteristics and circumstances of targeted youth than is ordinarily undertaken in primary prevention efforts.