When Does Rule Violating Behavior Affect Peer Delinquency Between Middle School and High School Boys and Girls?

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Abstract

During adolescence, peers are very influenced by the behavior of others. Some researchers have propose that delinquency predicts peer delinquency. Other researchers predict that peer delinquency leads to delinquent behavior. These delinquent acts are referred to as rule-violating behavior (RVB) (Cohn et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to test whether peer delinquency leads to rule violating behavior or if rule violating behavior leads to peer delinquency. Findings revealed that the RVB of boys in Middle School is influenced by their peers, while the opposite is true for High School Boys in that peer delinquency is influenced by their own RVB. For Middle School girls, both peer delinquency and RVB are influenced by each other, while for High School girls it is the opposite in that neither RVB nor peer delinquency influence the other. Explanations for these differences are discussed as to why there may be a relationship between associating with peers that are delinquent and future RVB, and why RVB might lead to association with delinquent peers.

Introduction

- Adolescents place great importance on who they are friends with and these friends carry an impact on an individuals actions (Haynie & Osgood, 2006).
- Delinquency is seen as a companionate activity, therefore the first people an individual would look to as a co-offender would be their friends (Haynie & Osgood, 2006).
- Adolescents take part in delinquent acts more if they have delinquent friends (Haynie & Osgood, 2006).
- Males are more likely to be involved with friends that support rule violating behavior than females. This finding explains why Peer Delinquency is noticed more in males compared to females (Piquero et al., 2005).
- Age differences have not been contributing influencing factors for peers or their tendency to engage in RVB (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007).

Current Study

- Used secondary analysis of longitudinal data ages 11-21
- Used data from the New Hampshire Youth Study
- Competing hypotheses are being tested
- Hypothesis 1: Peer Delinquency leads to RVB
- Hypothesis 2: RVB leads to Peer Delinquency

Method

- Participants:
  - 448 middle school (195 males, 253 females)
  - 350 high school (134 males, 216 females) students.
  - In the first phase, the average age of the middle school students was M=12.29 (SD=.50) and the average age of the high school students was M=15.34 (SD=.52)
- Materials:
  - Demographics including sex, race/ethnicity, grade in school, parents’ education, and average grades were recorded.
  - Peer Delinquency measured the number of delinquent peers the students considered friends.
  - Rule-violating behavior measured how many times participants engaged in certain behaviors over the past 6 months. Both peer delinquency and RVB were measured at T1 and T2.
- Procedure:
  - Data was collected from eight middle schools and five high schools in four New Hampshire communities. The data used in this study was collected during Fall 2009 (T1) and Fall 2010 (T2). This was a survey study.

Results

- As a result of our analyses, we found there to be opposite findings in the relationship between peer delinquency and RVB between Middle School and High School Boys.
- A regression analyses revealed peer delinquency predicted future RVB in Middle School males, but RVB influenced future peer delinquency in High School males.
- In predicting Middle School male Peer Delinquency at T2, we were able to account for 49.0% of the variance. Additionally, in predicting Middle School Male RVB at T2, we were able to account for 36.3% of the variance in scores.
- In predicting High School male Peer Delinquency at T2, we were able to account for 62.7% of the variance. Additionally, in predicting High School male RVB at T2 we were able to account for 62.8% of the variance.
- Regression analyses revealed that peer delinquency influenced future RVB in Middle School Females, and RVB also predicted future peer delinquency in Middle School Females.
- There were no significant findings for High School Females of RVB predicting future peer delinquency or of peer delinquency predicting future RVB.
- In predicting Middle School female Peer Delinquency at T2, we accounted for 68.7% of the variance. Additionally, in predicting Middle School Female RVB at T2 we accounted for 59.9% of the variance.
- In predicting High School female Peer Delinquency at T2, we accounted for 57.0% of the variance. Additionally, in predicting High School Female RVB at T2 we accounted for 41.8% of the variance.

Discussion

- We found that the RVB of boys in Middle School is influenced by their peers, while the opposite is true for High School Boys in that peer delinquency is influenced by their own RVB.
- For Middle School boys, both peer delinquency and RVB are influenced by each other, while for High School girls, RVB is not related to peer delinquency.
- Limitations of this study are that dishonesty in responses of participants is possible, which would make the data unreliable.
- Future studies could control for certain rule violating behaviors, such as drug use, violence, and theft.
- Rather than looking at genders separately, they could be combined to see if they influence each other’s RVB.
- Additionally, future research could look at younger students to make our findings more generalizable.
- Other waves of the NHYS could be used to determine if the effects replicate with older participants.

References