Trauma and Violent Delinquent Behavior among Males: The Moderating Role of Social Support

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Abstract

This study investigated the moderating role of social support (i.e., "having anyone to count on") on the relationship between male youths' exposure to violence and other stressful life events and their violent behavior. Self-report interviews from a nationally representative sample of male adolescents aged 12 to 17 and their caretakers were used to assess youths' lifetime exposure to violence (i.e., being a victim and/or witness to physically abusive punishment, physical assault, sexual assault, and witnessing violence), past-year stressful life events (i.e., the loss of positively valued stimuli and the blockage of positively valued goals), levels of social support, and their violent offending behavior. Having someone to count on buffered the impact of being a victim of physical abuse and witnessing violence on violent offending. Potentially confounding variables, such as age, race/ethnicity, social class, family structure, geographic location, negative affect, and delinquent peer exposure were controlled. These findings underscore the significant role that social support may have on decreasing the likelihood that adolescent males who experienced trauma would engage in violent offending. Implications for intervention and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: trauma; delinquency; social support; moderation analysis