

Hidden Trajectories of Influence for Youth Before, During and After Incarceration: Examining Reentry and Positive Youth Development

Raphael Travis Jr., DrPH, LCSW, Texas State University – School of Social Work; San Marcos, Texas



Introduction

- Individuals in helping professions must be at the forefront of helping improve the health and well-being of formerly incarcerated youth and stemming the tide of these individuals returning to prison after release.
- Disproportionate minority contact (DMC) with the criminal justice system (Cabaniss, Frabutt, Kendrick, & Arbuckle, 2007), disparate rates of incarceration for African American and Latinos (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007) and an increasingly diverse US population requires attention to effective strategies for inhibiting incarceration and re-arrest.
- The aims of this longitudinal research were three-fold. Key research questions were:
 - How well does a positive youth development (PYD) model predict re-arrest, where PYD constructs of *competence*, *character* and *connection* inhibit mental health and substance use issues?
 - In what ways does participation in the treatment group of the Health Link case management program impact re-arrest, when controlling for other research informed predictors of recidivism?
 - How stable were constructs over time including a self-medication pathway where mental health issues predicted substance use issues?

Sample

- This study used data collected in the 1997-2002 evaluation of the Health Link Program. The Health Link program was established to help reduce substance abuse among individuals returning from Riker's Island in New York City.
- Permission was given by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) to access data from study number 3978. All necessary confidentiality agreements were made with an understanding of the requirements of handling and analyzing sensitive data.
- The full sample in the dataset included 1048 cases of all ages and gender. The focus of this study was adolescent males.
- The study sample for analyses included 529 males.

Key Definitions: PYD Constructs

- Competence* has been defined as a "positive view of one's actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational (Jelicic, 2007).
- Character* has been defined as "respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity" (Jelicic, 2007). Character is an attempt to quantify pro-social behaviors and attitudes.
- Connection* has been described as "positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship" (Jelicic et al., 2007).

Results

Category	% of Sample (n=529)	n
Sample Characteristics		
Age Group (at Intake)		
16	17	88
17	37	197
18	46	244
Treatment or Comparison Group		
Treatment	50	264
Comparison	50	265
Ethnicity		
Latino	37	198
African American	54	287
Bi-racial	3	13
Unidentified	6	31
Prior Arrest		
Yes	90	477
No	10	52
Re-arrest After Discharge		
Yes	44	232
No	56	297

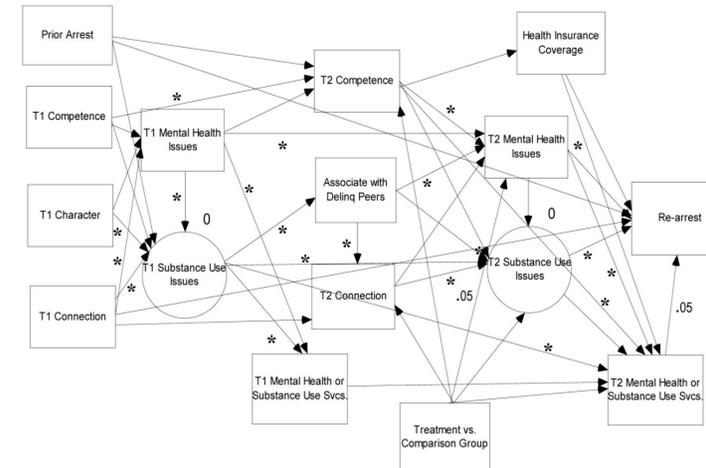
Significant paths for full model 5, including standardized parameters and r-square

Variable (Predictor)	Co-variate	Standardized Coefficients (Full/Basic Model)	r-square
T1 Competence	T2 Competence	.124	--
T1 Connection	T1 Mental Health	-.187	--
	T1 Substance Use Issues	.173	--
T1 Character	T1 Substance Use Issues	-.223	--
T1 Mental Health Issues	T1 Substance Use Issues	.381	.04
	T2 Mental Health Issues	.143	
	T1 MH or SA Services	.147	
T1 Substance Use Issues	T1 MH or SA Services	.344	.244
	T2 Substance Use Issues	.339	
	T2 MH or SA Services	.194	
	Associate with Delinquent Peers	-.116	
T2 Competence	T2 Mental Health Issues	.228	.02
T2 Connection	T2 Substance Use Issues	-.105	.08
Associate with Delinquent Peers	T2 Substance Use Issues	-.054	.01
	T2 Mental Health Issues	-.104	
	T2 Connection	.280	
T2 Mental Health Issues	T2 MH or SA Services	.041	.09
	Re-arrest	-.228	
T2 Substance Use Issues	Re-arrest	.186	.15
Health Link Treatment Status	T2 Mental Health Issues (p=.05)	-.084	
T2 Mental Health or Substance Use Services	Re-arrest (p=.05)	.625	.76
T1 Mental Health or Substance Use Services	--	.	.18
Health Insurance Coverage	--	--	.05

Analyses

- Statistical models were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with the outcome modeled as continuous for the single time point models and categorical for the final full model.
- MLM and WLSMV estimates were used to account for non-normal data with continuous and categorical outcomes respectively
- Analyses were completed using Mplus 5.1 (Muthen and Muthen, 2008)

Conceptual model of PYD, mental health, substance use, mental health or substance use services, association with delinquent peers, health insurance coverage and re-arrest with statistically significant pathways



Fit indices from structural equation models of PYD, mental health, substance use, mental health or substance use services, association with delinquent peers, health insurance coverage and recidivism (n=529)

Model Type	Chi-square	df	P	Scaling Correction	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
M1: COVAR	18.7	15	.23	n/a	.994	.992	.022
M2: T1PYD	16.9	8	.03	1.22	.969	.930	.046
M3: T2PYD	7.9	6	.24	1.16	.983	.959	.025
M4: T1T2XLAG	62.8	28	<.01	n/a	.959	.955	.048
M5: FULL	91.6	51	<.01	n/a	.957	.947	.039

Acknowledgements

- This study was supported by:
 - Funding and mentorship from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Connections Program
 - Permission to use data from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR)
 - Guidance and support from the Center for Children and Families
 - Support from the Texas State School of Social Work

Discussion

- The full conceptual model fit the data well and supported many of the a priori hypothesized relationships among variables. However, the full model (#5) fit less well in comparison to a model constructed of predictors of recidivism (#1).
- Of the 10 possible direct effects, PYD constructs were significant predictors in 6 pathways with mental health or substance issues across time points.
- Overall, the risk inhibiting impacts of good character and positive connection were similar to prior literature. But, of the PYD constructs, connection was the most robust and pervasive in the model with important links to both mental health and substance use issues.
- Study results suggested two linked but divergent paths among the study sample that may have corresponded to differences in internalizing and externalizing behaviors.
- Most clearly, results suggested that in the sample individuals were able to address their mental health issues more successfully than individuals were able to address substance use issues.
- These relationships also suggest the enduring importance of supportive and prosocial relationships, a core tenet of prior research on positive youth development (Lerner & Benson, 2003) as well as a key factor for African American (i.e., supportive adults) and Latino youth cultures (i.e., family cohesion). Future research can examine differences across ethnicity.
- These findings help illustrate the concerns expressed by Butts (2008) that it is important to look outside of mental health and substance use toward development-oriented processes that facilitate well-being and inhibited risk with youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

Limitations and Strengths

- Several limitations exist that may impact validity and reliability. Validity may be impacted by inconsistent measures for PYD constructs between Time 1 and Time 2 and limited robustness for PYD constructs due to the use of proxies based on secondary data analysis.
- Different aspects of the constructs were measured and thus this may have suppressed the magnitude or changed the nature of the relationship between Time 1 and Time 2 constructs. However, relationships between Time 1 and Time 2 constructs were largely significant and in the expected direction.
- The PYD constructs were also not based on established validated scales. However, the variables used were consistent with the definitions and meaning attributed to the construct in the literature.
- The strengths of this study include an explicit conceptual model articulated a priori that integrated several theoretical models including hypothesized relationships based firmly in research literature. Thus, this was a research informed confirmatory model.

