


SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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ID# 144

Location: Imperial Ballroom (Grand Hyatt/2nd Floor)

Time of Presentation: Jun 02 5:45 PM - 7:45 PM

Category/Theme: Context and Prevention

The Influence of School Variables on the Developmental Trajectories of Delinquency for Asian, African American, Hispanic, and White Youth

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The age-crime curve suggests that delinquency increases during preadolescence, peaks between mid to late adolescence, and then decreases thereafter (e.g., Hirschi & Gottfredon, 1983). Many studies have also revealed the importance of context, and how different contexts (neighborhood, community, family, school) might moderate psychological and behavioral outcomes of youth, or influence psychosocial processes related to outcomes. Using two nationally representative data sets, the Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) and the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY97), this study examined the effects of school context in terms of student ethnic diversity, teacher ethnic diversity, school size, school attitudes, and school achievement on the developmental trajectories of delinquency for Asian, African American, Hispanic, and white youth.

Trajectories were modeled using Mplus 5.21 statistical software. Multigroup analyses were modeled for the four racial groups: Asian, African American, Hispanic, and white. Based on fit indices, the optimum trajectory (e.g., linear, quadratic, etc.) was determined for each group, followed by group invariance testing across the four racial groups. The unconditional growth model was first developed and tested, followed by the conditional models with time invariant covariates (e.g., gender, country of birth). The effect of each time invariant covariate on the delinquency intercept and slope(s) was determined by regressing each intercept and slope on the evaluated covariate for each racial group.

In the Add Health data, greater student ethnic diversity resulted in higher initial delinquency estimates at age 13 for all groups and highest for Asians, but teacher diversity had no effect. Instead, greater proportion of female teachers decreased initial estimates for all groups except African American, whereas a larger school size increased the estimates except for Hispanic youth. In both data sets and for all ethnic groups, lower SES status and being U.S. born increased the initial estimates of delinquency, but more positive perceptions of school and higher school achievement lowered the initial estimates. In addition, regardless of initial delinquency at age 13 year, all groups eventually converged to low values in young adulthood, at age 21 year. This convergence was also true when covariates were added to the models.

These results lend support to the age-crime curve theory and Rowe et al.'s (1994) assertion that different racial/ethnic groups have similar developmental trajectories for delinquency. It also highlights the importance of school context in moderating the initial value of growth patterns for delinquency.

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