

# Variations in Mental Health Problems, Substance Use, and Delinquency between African American and Caucasian Juvenile Offenders: Implications for Reentry Services

Michael G. Vaughn, John M. Wallace, Jr.,  
Larry E. Davis, Giselle T. Fernandes and  
Matthew O. Howard

Prepared by Alanna Hay  
UNC School of Social Work  
Copyright 2009

# Juvenile Justice in the U.S.

- Recent statistics indicate the current juvenile justice population at approximately 900,000 (Mauer & King, 2004)
- Overrepresentation of minorities in every state, especially in those with smaller populations of minorities (Lieber, 2002)

# Juvenile Justice in the U.S.

- African American youth are more overrepresented than Hispanic youth (Lieber, 2002)
- Black male youth 4x as likely to be in residential placement as compared to White male youth (Pope, Lovell, & Hsia, 2002)
- Research found that half of the incarcerated youth had a substance use disorder (Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002)
- 2/3rds fulfilled DSM-IV criteria for a mental disorder (Teplin et al., 2002)

# Sample

- Interviewed 723 youth at the residential rehabilitation services of the Missouri Division of Youth Services
- Study focused on African American and White youth (90% of the total population)

# Method

45-minute interview included the following measures:

- Brief Symptom Inventory- 53 item scale to assess psychiatric symptoms
- Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI-2) Traumatic Experiences Subscale- 5 items to assess trauma and suicide ideation
- Multi-item polysubstance use matrix & MAYSI-2 Alcohol and Drug Problems Index- assesses lifetime substance use and substance related problems

# Method (cont'd)

- Self-report of Delinquency (SRD)- measures type and frequency of offending
- Antisocial Process Screening Device- measures lifetime substance use and general delinquency
- 4-item victimization index to measure personal victimization

# Significant differences in mental health, substance use, and delinquency

	African American participants	White participants
<b>Mental Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Witnessing someone injured or killed</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anxiety</li><li>• Depression</li><li>• Interpersonal Sensitivity</li><li>• Obsessive-Compulsive</li><li>• Suicide Ideation</li></ul>
<b>Substance Use</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Substance related problems</li><li>• Substance related blackouts</li><li>• Early substance use</li><li>• Lifetime polysubstance use-stimulants and depressants</li></ul>
<b>Delinquency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Total delinquency</li><li>• Violence</li><li>• Weapon carrying</li><li>• Gang fighting</li><li>• Personal victimization</li></ul>	

# Major Findings

- African American youth reported higher levels of overall delinquency, violence, personal victimizations, gang fighting, weapons carrying, and witnessing of severe injury and death
- White youth reported higher levels of mental health distress, suicide, substance use, and substance related problems.

# Major Findings (cont'd)

- Significant predictors of delinquency
  - White youth-impulsivity and prior mental health diagnosis
  - African American youth-traumatic experience and general delinquent involvement

# Additional Findings

- White youth tended to initiate substance use earlier
- African American youth less likely to use substances to the point of not remembering what happened

# Additional Findings

- African American youth were twice as likely to have witnessed someone being injured or killed, 5x more likely to be involved in gang fighting, & 65% more likely to carry a hidden weapon
- Prior victimization was a predictor mental health symptoms for African American youth but not for White youth

# Discussion

- African American youth may reside under adverse environmental conditions where violent encounters are common
- White youth report earlier substance use and offending yet both groups reach the juvenile justice system around the same time
  - Smaller "margin for error" for African American youth?

# Discussion

- Juvenile delinquency problem origins
  - Sociopathological for African American youth
  - Psychopathological for White youth

# Limitations

- Cross-sectional design limiting a fuller understanding of the temporal order of variables
- Only self-report data with no administrative or clinical case data for back-up
- Collected minimal data concerning youth family and neighborhood background

# Implications

- Policy- Those that ameliorate concentrated disadvantage in urban areas will likely prevent future incarceration and recidivism
- Adapt post-release services to patterns of risk factors

# Implications

- Individual level interventions may be less successful for African American youth who require neighborhood change
- White youth may benefit more from individual level mental health and substance abuse services
- Recognize and confront racial disparities

# References

- Leiber, M. J. (2002). Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC) of youth: An analysis of state and federal efforts to address the issue. *Crime & Delinquency*, 48, 3-45.
- Mauer, M., & King, R. (2004). *Schools and prisons: Fifty years after Brown v. Board of Education*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.
- Pope, C. E., Lovell, R., & Hsia, H. M. (2002). *Disproportionate Minority Confinement: A review of the research literature from 1989 through 2001*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved November 12, 2009, from [http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/dmc/pdf/dmc89\\_01.pdf](http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/dmc/pdf/dmc89_01.pdf)
- Teplin, L. A., Abram, K. M., McClelland, G. M., Dulcan, M. K., & Mericle, A. A. (2002). Psychiatric disorders in youth in juvenile detention. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 59, 1133-1143.
- Vaughn, M.G., Wallace, J.M., Davis, L.E., Fernandes, G.T., & Howard, M.O. (2008). Variations in mental health problems, substance use, and delinquency between African American and Caucasian juvenile offenders. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 52(3), 311-329.