



Dually-involved youth: the thin line Between control and protection

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SAISIR ET SOUTENIR LES PROCESSUS
DE (RÉ)INTÉGRATION SOCIOCOMMUNAUTAIRE
CHEZ LES JEUNES JUDICIAIRISÉS DE 16 À 35 ANS

(A swift and non-exhaustive look at)
Theories explaining the links between abuse and delinquency: from psychology to macrosociology

- Theories related to victimization and re-victimization (Kendall-Tackett, 2002), complex trauma (Herman, 1992)
 - People who have been victimized are at greater risk of re-victimization in the future, delinquency, in particular, is a behavioural repercussion of abuse;
- Social learning theory (Akers, 1985; Bandura, 1973)
 - Children develop violent and delinquent behaviour through imitation;
- Social control theory (Sampson & Laub, 1994; Zingraff, Leiter, Johnsen, & Myers, 1994)
 - The abused child gradually loses the ability to self-regulate his or her social behaviour in response to the absence or significant lack of privileged social bonds;
- Social labelling theory (Lemert, 1965 and others)
 - Labelling is a process that places a powerful negative label on an individual or group, which then integrates this label and behaves as such.





Social labelling and social response


- Kaplan and Johnson (1991) were among the first to show that the problems associated with negative social labelling are exacerbated when, as is the case in Quebec, the same institutions are responsible for both child protection and delinquency control;
- A phenomenon subsequently confirmed by Ellenbogen, Trocmé and Wekerle (2013), Dodge, Coie and Lynam (2006), and Jonson-Reid and Barth (2000).

Two views

- From a socio-criminal point of view: maltreatment is a phenomenon that takes place within a weakened social structure that offers few opportunities for adopting a prosocial stance;
- From a psychosocial point of view: maltreatment alters the development of the individual (behaviour, regulation, identity, etc.) and leads to negative repercussions, including delinquency;

In both cases, the young person is a relatively powerless, a "victim"

Little is known about how youth themselves understand and make sense of the links between abuse and delinquency in their own lives

The background is an abstract, marbled pattern with swirling colors of blue, purple, pink, and yellow. A large white circle is centered on the page, containing the text. To the left of the circle, a dashed yellow line curves upwards. To the right, a solid orange circle is partially visible, overlapping the white circle's edge.

Two research
projects based on
youth perceptions

Transcendence project (Marcotte *et al.*, 2018)

- Aims:
 - Gathering life stories from *vulnerable* youth, enabling them to "transcend" their difficulties by giving meaning to their lives
- Narrative approach:
 - The participant as expert,
 - Life story interview inspired by Mc Adams:
 - "Tell your life story as it was a book divided by chapters; key moments (high point, low point, turning point) and the next chapter (future)"
 - 91 life-stories from youth aged 18 to 30
 - 21 youth dually-involved in the Child protection services and under the Youth Criminal Justice Act



Project (RÉ)SO: a major study in three phases (Brunelle et al., 2019)

- 140 youth aged 16 to 35 met for the first measurement period;
- 23 (7 women and 16 men) had experienced abuse and have been also followed by YCJA workers
- Nearly half were interviewed again 18 months later;
- An interview guide focused on their perceptions of the services they had received: what has been helpful and what has been less so;
- Many were (or are) followed by YCJA workers.



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Comparing the two projects

Transcendence

- Recruitment without targeting specific vulnerabilities
- Interview framework allowing participants to choose the significant events of their lives

RÉ(SO) 16-35

- Targeted recruitment
- Semi-directed interview framework

How youth tell and make sense of the links
between maltreatment and delinquency ?



KEY FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

Finding 1: Substance use = the ultimate mediator between abuse and delinquency

- First, to forget the trauma experienced

TRF68 "A child who has been abused is more violent and doesn't understand why. The child doesn't talk, he's afraid, he's ashamed, he's stuck with these emotions he's not supposed to have, but which he has because of the abuse. When I was 11, I took drugs, and I learned that I could free myself from a certain discomfort by taking them.

- Then, substance use then becomes necessary (abuse), by any means :

TRG18: "I stole for my substance use, I did any kind of shit for it. It became my mistress, it was my life. It took up three quarters of my life. When I was 14, I started doing cocaine steadily.

Finding 2: Delinquency = a need for belonging

- Delinquency/substance use help to counter disaffiliation, initiated by maltreatment and YP intervention, then fuelled by bullying in the school environment(s).

RT G38: "It was really later in life that I understood that to be respected, I had to go against my values. I wasn't a violent person, but being violent brought me love from others. So, during that period, I changed my personality, and created a tough image, a shell".

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TRG14: "Well, when it comes down to it, drug use really started when I was 12. Or maybe 13. I don't really know anymore. And that's when it started, well, that's it. I was like, I was already accepted a little [more] by [peers], I already had a couple of friends.

Finding 3: Delinquency = an identity that masks vulnerability

- Delinquency provides a strong identity that contrasts with that of being a victim

RSHRA: "I liked having the *power*, because I liked the thrills and it was easy money for me"

TRG32: "I think it I was also satisfied of the change in the image I had of myself over the last two years. Now I was in a violent environment, where the *strongest* wins. No one has any weaknesses, so in a way it helped me a little to cope with the pain I was going through

TRG38: "I created *a false identity* for myself. I've been searching myself all my life. Even today, I'm still looking for myself, but I have a shell that I put on. Deep down inside, there's someone who's in pain. We just don't let it show.



Finding 4: Delinquency = defending oneself, taking revenge, getting attention

- Delinquent behavior is a way of regaining power, expressing oneself and being "seen":

TRF60: "Well, that's when I started to explode, because I couldn't take what was being done to me, ... instead of talking about it, well, I exploded in a delinquent way. I was living with rage and pain, and I wanted someone to notice that I was hurting, that I needed help.

RSHAR: "I've always said that when my father stopped beating me... when I stopped seeing him, deep down... I told myself I'd never get hit again... without hitting back".



To summarize

- Delinquent behaviour in youth who have been placed in care (YP) comes from specific reality and unmet needs
 - including : (subsistence), belonging, identity, agency and attention
 - From one label to another: being a "delinquent" is less of a burden than being a "victim".
 - Delinquency is a defensive behavioural response, a regaining of power to externalize malaise and suffering.
 - A powerful catalyst is underlying most of these stories: substance abuse.
- When we look at the young people's point of view, it's difficult to see them simply as powerless individuals/victims.
- Choices, strategies for meeting needs, understanding the issues that lead to delinquency

Specific needs that require differential interventions

- Interventions that lean more towards the social (protection) than the criminal sphere (control):
 - Addressing substance use consumer issues
 - Normalizing (destigmatizing) the youth protection intervention process
 - Stability
 - Take advantage of the proximity of joint management of laws to "sensitize" intervention
 - Promote identity construction vs. co-construct identity around victimization
 - Life history
 - Creating opportunities for young people to exercise their power

