

## An independent randomized clinical trial of multisystemic therapy with non-court-referred adolescents with serious conduct problems

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*Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol 81(6), Dec 2013, 1027-1039. doi: 10.1037/a0033928

<http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/ccp/81/6/1027>

**Objective:** Adolescent conduct problems exact serious social as well as personal costs, and effective treatments are essential. One of the most widely disseminated and effective programs for the treatment of serious conduct problems in adolescents is Multisystemic Therapy (MST). However, most evaluations of MST have involved the developers of MST. The purpose of the present study was to conduct an independent evaluation of MST, with non-court-referred adolescents with conduct problems.

**Method:** Participants were 164 adolescents ages 11–18 years who were recruited from self-contained behavior intervention classrooms in public schools. Adolescents and their families were randomly assigned to receive MST or services as usual. Outcome measures assessed conduct problems, school functioning, and court records of criminal behavior. Participants were followed for 18 months after baseline using parent, adolescent, and teacher reports; arrest data were collected for 2.5 years postbaseline.

**Results:** Two of 4 primary outcome measures focused on externalizing problems showed significant treatment effects favoring MST. Several secondary and intervention targets pertaining to family functioning and parent psychopathology showed positive effects of MST, and no negative effects were identified.

**Conclusions:** Results provide some further support for the effectiveness of MST, although smaller effect sizes than previous studies also suggest the complexity of successful dissemination, particularly to non-court-referred populations.