

# Alternative Pathways to Violence in Persons with Schizophrenia: The Role of Childhood Antisocial Behavior Problems

Jeffrey W. Swanson · Richard A. Van Dorn ·  
Marvin S. Swartz · Alicia Smith · Eric B. Elbogen ·  
John Monahan

Published online: 30 June 2007

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**Abstract** Violence in schizophrenia patients may result from many factors besides the symptoms of schizophrenia. This study examined the relationship between childhood antisocial behavior and adult violence using data from the NIMH CATIE study. The prevalence of violence was higher among patients with a history of childhood conduct problems than among those without this history (28.2% vs. 14.6%;  $P < 0.001$ ). In the conduct-problems group, violence was associated with current substance use at levels below diagnostic criteria. Positive psychotic symptoms were linked to violence only in the group without conduct problems. Findings suggest that violence among adults with schizophrenia may follow at least two distinct pathways—one associated with premorbid conditions, including antisocial conduct, and another associated with the acute psychopathology of schizophrenia.

**Keywords** Violence · Schizophrenia · Childhood conduct problems

The study of the life course and social trajectories has a long tradition in the social sciences (Elder 2001), and in recent years this perspective had been brought to bear in an attempt to better understand the early antecedents and long-term outcomes of severe mental illness (Hodgins et al. 2005); Mueser et al. 1999). In a cogent application of the life-course paradigm along these lines, an emerging research literature has focused on the link between childhood deviant behavior and adult outcomes for persons with mental disorders, including schizophrenia (Arseneault et al. 2003; Hodgins et al. 1999; Hodgins et al. 2005; Mueser et al. 2006; Tengstrom et al. 2001). Studies to date have begun to characterize a subpopulation of schizophrenia patients whose course of illness and treatment is shaped by a complex developmental trajectory—the intertwining of psychosis with the sequelae of childhood antisocial conduct, trauma and victimization, and substance abuse. At the center of this knot of pathologies lies the problem of violent behavior.

The precise extent to which violence—in its proportions and precipitants—differs in the conduct problem-laden subgroup compared to larger population of schizophrenia patients remains poorly understood. This study employs new data from the NIMH Clinical Antipsychotic Trials of Intervention Effectiveness (CATIE) project to examine the prevalence and correlates of violent behavior among 488 schizophrenia patients with a history of childhood conduct problems, compared to 956 schizophrenia patients with no history of conduct problems.

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J. W. Swanson (✉) · M. S. Swartz · E. B. Elbogen  
Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Duke  
University, School of Medicine, 3071, Brightleaf Square, Suite  
23-A, 905 West Main Street, Durham, NC 27710, USA  
e-mail: jeffrey.swanson@duke.edu

R. A. Van Dorn  
College of Social Work, Justice, and Public Affairs, Florida  
International University, Miami, FL, USA

A. Smith  
School of Criminal Justice, State University of New York at  
Albany, Albany, NY, USA

J. Monahan  
University of Virginia, School of Law, Charlottesville, VA, USA