

THE LINK BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND YOUTH VIOLENCE IN ADOLESCENCE

A Multilevel Test of *DSM*-Oriented Problems

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The early identification of mental illness in youngsters is an important goal for youth, their families, and society. This study utilized continuous indicators of *DSM*-oriented psychopathology to explore the link between adolescent mental health and physical violence. Relying on data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) and controlling for various community, friend, family, and individual risk factors of violence, the role of various mental health problems on self-reported violence is examined. Both violence prevalence and frequency outcomes were studied. Results indicated that oppositional defiant problems was a weak predictor of violence prevalence but stronger predictor of violence frequency, controlling for other indicators. Other individual-level predictors of violence included prior violence, deviant peers, family criminality and mental health problems, and poor family relations. Community-level predictors were neighborhood ties, neighborhood decline, neighborhood organizations, and anomie, though the latter variable reduced offending.

Keywords: mental health; oppositional defiant; delinquency; violence; PHDCN; multilevel

A surprising proportion of people suffer from mental health problems throughout their lifetimes, and some people with mental health problems are at risk of becoming involved in criminal offending. The nature and severity of mental health problems examined in research vary from general composite indicators to specific diagnostic indicators. Much of the literature has relied on specific operational criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000)* to diagnose psychiatric disorders among adults as well as children and adolescents. *DSM*-oriented mental health problems studied include externalizing problems such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), conduct disorder (CD), and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and internalizing problems such as anxiety, depression, and

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