
Introduction to The Special Issue on Youth Violence

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I am pleased to have been asked to write the introduction to this special issue on youth violence with original contributions by four Canadian researchers written for the *Canadian Journal of Counselling*. The papers are insightful, enhance knowledge on antisocial child behaviour, and increase our options for interventions. Leschied and Cummings (this issue), in their overview of this area, address the important topics of the rate of youth violence in Canadian society and different types of interventions available to reduce violence. For that reason, I will briefly address some other aspects of violence that are relevant to interventions by counsellors, namely developmental pathways, victimization, and gender.

Developmental Pathways. Male violence during the juvenile years rarely emerges *de novo*, and usually develops following a long history of problem behaviour, particularly aggression. The sequence of behaviours leading to violence is clearest when we look back over time, and is more uncertain when we try to predict. There is now a body of research findings indicating a developmental pathway to violence. This pathway, called the Overt Pathway, tends to start with minor aggression, has physical fighting as a second stage, and more severe violence as a third stage (Loeber et al., 1993; Loeber, DeLamatre, Keenan, & Zhang, 1998). The worst violent youth also tend to develop other antisocial behaviours that typically emerge along two other pathways: the Authority Conflict Pathway, and the Covert Pathway. The Authority Conflict Pathway applies best prior to the age of 12. It starts with stubborn behaviour, and has defiance as a second stage, and authority avoidance (e.g., truancy) as a third stage. The Covert Pathway best applies to boys prior to age 15. It starts with minor covert acts, has property damage as a second stage, moderate delinquency as a third stage, and serious delinquency as a fourth stage. Boys can be on each of the pathways at the same time. Also, an early age of onset of problem behaviour or delinquency, compared to an onset at a later age, is more associated with boys' escalation to more serious behaviours in the pathways (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Loeber, 2000). The pathway model has now been replicated in several cities and with several ethnic populations (e.g., Loeber, Wei, Stouthamer-Loeber, Huizinga, & Thornberry, 1999; Tolan et al., 2000).

There are several other developmental models of delinquency. For example, Moffitt (1993) postulated that delinquent males can be divided into life-course persistent delinquents and adolescent-limited delinquency. Delinquents in the first group tend to start early in life with disruptive behaviour, become delinquent relatively early in life, and tend to continue to commit delinquent acts throughout their deviant career. In contrast, adolescent-limited delinquents usually start offending during adolescence and desist in their delinquent acts prior to

reaching adulthood. This appealing dichotomy, however, has proven too simplistic, and increasingly studies show that there are other, important antisocial subgroups such as adolescent males who start offending during adolescence, who become serious delinquents (e.g., Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002), and low-level chronic offenders (Fergusson & Horwood, 2002).

The developmental models are useful to practitioners because they can help them to better visualize the developmental history of cases that they see in clinical settings. Second, knowledge on how far young clients have progressed in developmental pathways, can help the practitioner to determine which problem behaviours can be expected to develop next, and then permits them to focus preventive efforts on reducing the risk of these problems becoming manifest. Unfortunately, the pathway model has not yet been tested on girls' development towards serious forms of delinquency.

Victimization. Delinquent youth are known to inflict harm on others, either through property loss or through physically hurting others. It is not sufficiently recognized, however, that violent juveniles are at high risk of becoming the victims of crime and of violence in particular (Rivara, Shepherd, Farrington, Richmond, & Cannon, 1995). In fact, studies on intentional physical trauma show that a high proportion of victims are highly delinquent youth (Loeber, DeLamatre et al., 1999). This is important, because criminologists rightly have emphasized that one step in the reduction of violence is to reduce violent victimization and the need to break cycles of revenge by injured parties.

Gender-related Aspects. McMahon's (1994) statement that "the question of whether different interventions may be required for girls than those for boys is, at present, an unanswered one" (p. 912) appears still true. There are several directions in which interventions for girls need to be improved (some of these points have been stressed by Leschied, Cummings, Van Brunschot, Cunningham, & Saunders, 2001). Adult criminal records indicate that women are frequently arrested for nonaggressive, covert forms of delinquency, such as shoplifting and fraud (Rutter, Giller, & Hagel, 1998). However, most interventions have been built around the reduction of aggression in males, and have focused less on the reduction of covert acts such as theft and lying, behaviours that are often at the core of antisocial behaviours in girls. Further, there is a much higher disagreement among studies about the effectiveness of interventions for girls than for boys (e.g., Hipwell & Loeber, in preparation). This makes it all the more important to be aware of current limitations to apply to girls intervention technology that has been developed on boys.

Having said this, however, two papers in this issue greatly help to focus on several gender-unique aspects that are relevant to interventions on girls. Berman, Izumi, and Arnold (this issue) discuss how sexual harassment affects girls' well-being and sense of self. One of the strengths of this paper is that it reports on girls' "lived experiences" as told in focus groups. Todd and Perry's paper (this issue) is very valuable because it discusses a much neglected issue of the therapist's preparing and motivating violent youth to begin treatment prior

to expecting change in behaviour to take place. These issues apply to each gender, but appear to have been practiced less with girls. A girl-specific intervention is reported by Walsh, Pepler and Levene (this issue), based on the Earls court Girls Connection. The paper highlights the need for systematic assessment of risk for disruptive girls below age 12. Promising intervention results were found for externalizing but not for internalizing problems. Thus, important progress is being made, but at the same time, since depression was associated with persistence of externalizing problems over time, it is crucial to test whether a reduction in depression would lead to a reduction in externalizing problems. Finally, Rahey and Craig (this issue) evaluated an ecologically oriented program to reduce bullying in schools. Their important finding that the intervention had positive results for girls but not for boys teaches us that we should never lose sight of the gender-perspective on interventions. What we need now is a better understanding of the etiology of externalizing and internalizing problems in each gender and replication of prevention and intervention strategies to reduce these problems once they occur, and even better, to ensure that serious problems do not develop in the first place in either boys or girls.

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