

Disadvantaged adolescents prone to adult crime and substance abuse problems

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A new article published in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* concludes that early intervention among young adolescents with delinquency problems may help prevent the development of long-term crime, alcohol use disorders (AUDs), and risky sex behaviors, especially among disadvantaged youth.

The study examined the influence of delinquency behavior in late childhood development among over 800 youth from low- compared to middle-income backgrounds, ages 10 to age 24. The adolescent and young adult subjects were asked to complete self-report assessments which included questions on delinquent involvement, alcohol use, and [sexual activity](#) in late childhood; delinquency and alcohol use in adolescence; and crime, AUDs, and risky sex in early adulthood.

Youth from low-income backgrounds were twice as likely to report early sex onset (by age 11) and more likely to report early delinquency (by age 10) than those from middle-income backgrounds. By contrast, youth from middle-income backgrounds were 1.5 times more likely to report early alcohol use (by age 10) than those from low-income backgrounds. Furthermore, those that showed early and frequent involvement with risky sex, delinquency, and alcohol use beginning in late childhood and extending throughout adolescence showed an increase in long-term crime, alcohol use disorders (AUDs), and risky sex behaviors in young adulthood.

W. Alex Mason, Ph.D., lead author of the study: "Crime, alcohol use

disorders, and risky sex are common among [young adults](#), especially those from low-income backgrounds. These problems are costly to address, they decrease the health and well-being of young people, and usually begin during young adolescence. We wanted understand how problem behaviors, such as delinquency and alcohol use, in childhood and adolescence lead to young adult crime, alcohol use disorders, and risky sex. These outcomes can help identify early warning signs and can lead to the development of interventions designed to keep early behaviors from progressing to more advanced problems."

Provided by Wiley

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