

Study links mental health issues to youth violence

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(Medical Xpress) -- Serious mental health issues in childhood may predict future youth violence, according to a UT Dallas study sponsored by a grant from the National Institute of Justice.

Criminal justice experts and psychologists have long debated the role that mental health problems play in influencing [violent behavior](#) in teens and adults. Dr. Denise Paquette Boots, associate professor of [criminology](#) at The University of Texas at Dallas, looked at how various [mental health problems](#) corresponded with violence among participants in a [longitudinal study](#) involving inner-city Chicago residents.

Boots and her colleague Jennifer Wareham, an associate professor of criminal justice at Wayne State University, found that children identified as having antisocial and oppositional defiant behaviors were significantly more likely to commit violent offenses across adolescence and adulthood. They recently published their findings in a final technical report submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice.

The study controlled for community-, peer-, familial- and individual-level risk factors that may also influence violent tendencies over time. The report's findings may lead to increased calls for better diagnosis and treatment of young people with mental health issues, said Boots, who works in UT Dallas' School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences.

“There are obvious social costs of violence, but there are also significant long-term economic costs that can be traced to the [mental health issues](#)

associated with future violence,” she said. “Understanding what causes violent behavior and identifying risk factors for it in childhood is a vitally important goal from a public policy and health perspective.”

Among the other factors that predicted violence in teens and adults were: gender, with males much more likely to commit criminal violence; a history of earlier violent behavior; and association with delinquent peers. Family strife or depression also played a role in predicting future violence, Boots said.

Previous studies have found children with depressed parents were almost three times more likely to develop mental illness than young people with healthy parents. Other research has reported more than half of the violent and homicidal youths said they have at least one close family member with a psychiatric condition.

Provided by University of Texas at Dallas

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