

**School absenteeism, disruptive classroom behavior, and disruptive family
processes in a sample of court-involved youth**

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Introduction

School absenteeism within the public school system in America has reached a crisis point, primarily because it has been linked to school drop-out rates, which at the national level has reached the average of 30% of all students (Reimer, Smink, 2005). All students who drop out of high school experienced chronic school absenteeism at some point within their school career; however, not every chronically absent child drops out of school. This means that the national rates and that of each geographic region (Northeast 27%, Midwest 23%, South 35%, West 31%) represent only “the tip of the iceberg” when it comes to identifying the problem of chronic school absenteeism.

In response, lawmakers have attempted to create laws that “fix” this problem, with one option being to fine and jail the parents of chronically absent students. This idea is based on the belief that parents are at fault in these situations, and that their prosecution will reduce school absenteeism. More specifically, it is believed that, if the parent’s of chronically absent students are held legally accountable for their child’s attendance, they will take the issue more seriously and get their children to school.

Currently, hundreds of billions of government dollars are being spent on the chronic school absenteeism issue (Zhang, 2002). A sample of U.S. counties that have chronic school absenteeism programs that will later be discussed include Neosho County (Kansas), Atlantic County (New Jersey, Project Helping Hand), Kern County (California, Truancy Reduction), and the state of Arizona (Save Kids Partnership). In later discussion, the content of these programs and how they involve the parents of chronically absent students in correcting the rising problem of chronic school absenteeism will be addressed.

“Chronic absenteeism” is defined generally as persistent nonattendance from work or school (McCray, 2006). Webster further defines the word “chronic” as that which is “marked by long duration or frequent recurrence.” Hence, chronic school absenteeism is absenteeism within the school system that occurs multiple times over a long period of time.

Chronic school absenteeism differs from the following in that school absenteeism can also be described under various terms such as truancy and school phobia, terms that together can provide greater understanding of school absenteeism. Truancy, by definition, is the act of staying away from school without permission (McCray, 2006). School phobia, on the other hand, has been defined as an irrational fear or anxiety about attending school (Chitiyo and Wheeler, 2006). However, truancy and school phobia are specific terms that are linked to possible underlying reasons for not attending school, and while touched upon will not be the focus of this effort. Instead, chronic school absenteeism will be used, as the term is more general and denotes the problem instead of the possible causes.

Yet another rising problem that school systems are facing nationwide is disruptive classroom behavior. Disruptive classroom behavior causes harm within the classroom on several different levels. At one level, disruptive classroom behavior affects individual learning, interferes with graduation, and reduces the chance of higher education (Finn, Fish, Scott, 2008). Disruptive classroom behavior also becomes a burden on the classroom when both instruction and the normal functioning of the classroom are interrupted. According to the article, “Educational Sequelae of High School Misbehavior,” disruptive classroom behavior creates stress and distraction for the

teachers exposed thus detracting from academic time. A recent survey of eight hundred and five members of the American Federation of Teachers Union reported that 17% of teachers lost over four hours a week to disruptive behavior, while an additional 19% of teachers lost between two and three hours a week to disruptive behavior. As disruptive classroom behavior increases within schools an unbalanced atmosphere is created, causing teachers and administrators to spend more time honing in on negative behavior instead of performing duties consistent with the creation of a positive learning environment.

Disruptive behavior within the classroom is defined in terms of students being late, cutting class, leaving seats, speaking without permission, refusing to follow directions, not completing assignments, and cheating. These forms of disruptive classroom behavior are directly linked to dropping out and/or reduced academic achievement. Research has found that non-compliance in the classroom as well as depressed academic performance can be linked to drug and alcohol use among the misbehaving youth. However, the tendency of physical aggression within the classroom can be linked to prior smaller acts of aggression occurring at a younger age (Finn, Fish, Scott, 2008).

A recent national study was performed to assess disruptive classroom behaviors including skipping class, disrupting the class, fighting, getting into trouble, using alcohol or marijuana, and gang membership. Finn, Fish, and Scott found that one third of students with one disruptive trait displayed another driving the belief that disruptive traits are interlocked and not isolated behaviors. The study also found that, of the 43.3% of students that skipped class regularly, 31.9% also were frequently disruptive when they

were in class. Of the students who were found to be disruptive within the class, students from a low SES (-20,000 per year per home) were more likely to misbehave. This illuminates the concept that a low economic status is a driving factor behind disruptive behavior within the classroom. Per the amount of students that misbehaved within the classroom, no difference was found between public, private, and Catholic schools. There was also no difference between urban and suburban school, however rural districts reported less disruptive classroom behavior (Finn, Fish, Scott, 2008).

Predicting the successful outcomes of a child can be assessed through family income, the mother's psychological functioning, and the quality of the home environment. Research has shown that children raised in single parent homes do not fair as well in the education system as children raised in two parent homes regardless of race, education, or parental remarriage. Single parent's homes are more likely to rear children with higher levels of emotional, psychological, and behavioral problems. Aside from the family structure, SES acts as a predictor of behavioral outcomes as low income homes have proven to have negative consequences for children. Low SES can also lead to less effective parenting and can lead to behavior problems (Carlson, Corcoran, 2001).

A study was created to estimate the effects of family structure on behavioral outcomes using the tool the Behavior Problems Index. The first findings of the study found that gender plays an important role in predicting behavior problems created within the home. The study found females had fewer overall behavioral problems. Aside from evaluating gender, the study also found that more siblings are associated with fewer individual behavioral problems. Also in relation to estimating the effects of family structure on behavioral outcomes it was found that a predictor of a child developing

behavior problems is having a mother with mental health complications (Carlson, Corcoran, 2001).

Children who display aggressive behavior are placed at a greater risk for maladaptation in the realms of continued aggression, conduct problems, and a lack of social skills to further hinder development. Research has found that early aggression stabilizes over time acting as a predictor of behavior problems in adolescence and criminality. Current research is overturning that child maltreatment is linked to aggression and disruptive behavior problems. Maltreated children have an increased likelihood of displaying atypical behavior rather than aggression. However, unlike other forms of maltreatment within the home, physical abuse is one of the highest predictors of aggression in children. Children who have been abused exhibit hostile attribution biases, access aggressive behavioral responses, and view aggression favorably. Children who have not been physically abused yet are maltreated with hostile, neglectful, or inconsistent parenting hinder emotion regulation at a young age. Yet children who are maltreated but not physically abused did not display nearly as much aggression or difficulties regulating their emotion as children who were (Teisl, 2007). Research toward the negative effects that any form of negative family factors is continuing to surface, yet pre-existing research has already painted a clear image of the damaging effects a negative home life can have on the affected children.

Factors related to chronic school absenteeism

In terms of contributing reasons beyond parental responsibility, school absenteeism has been traced to such factors as unsupportive schools, lack of a positive community, chaotic family life, and individual academic and/or social deficits (McCray,

2006). Thus, school absenteeism is a multi-factor problem that can best be explained by an examination of multiple domains associated with individual, family, community, and school factors.

Researchers suggest that the student, the family, and the school should be studied jointly. The following are thought to be the six main predictors for chronically absent and disruptive students: 1.) unfavorable perceptions of school; 2.) inconsistent parental discipline; 3.) parents who are controlling have negative child rearing patterns, 4.) perceptions of academic inferiority; 5.) family conflict; and 6.) social incompetence in class (Reimer and Smink, 2005). Further, researchers also have reported that chronically absent students experienced low cohesion in the family, lack of parental acceptance, and lack of discipline. Likewise, disruptive students had low cohesions in the family, lack of parental acceptance, and lack of proper discipline (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998). Hence, because both chronic school absenteeism and disruptive behavior in the classroom are associated with negative family factors, it is plausible to hypothesize that the three factors in fact “spill over” on each other. Connected, then, such spillover would demand a solution that recognizes the interrelated nature of these factors (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998).

The role of gender

Chronic school absenteeism prevention can be developed on a more detailed and personal manner when the chronically absent are divided by gender. Within the juvenile system males are over-represented by seven times as many females, yet both males and females are reported to be equally chronically absent. By being able to hone in on gender, the chronically absent are assessed more specifically to their needs. This can

help to prevent future involvement in the juvenile court as chronic school absenteeism is considered an indicator for future involvement in the courts.

When chronic school absenteeism is divided among researchers by gender insight is gained on the over-representation of males in the juvenile courts. Chronically absent males are suspended from school at a higher rate. Of these males, those that become chronically absent have consistently lower grades and are two times as likely to have an IEP. Males who do become chronically absent are more likely to be chronically absent linked to gang activity and failure in school. Male who are chronically absent are more often chronically absent to avoid conflict with teachers and peers. Research has shown that chronically absent males do have difficulties within the family causing aggressive behavior (National Center for School Engagement, 2005).

Within the school systems, chronically absent females are less likely to be suspended, to have an IEP, and consistently hold higher grades. Females who do become chronically absent are more likely to be linked to family issues such as pregnancy and a poor home life. Females often feel pressure from their family and friends to meet responsibilities outside the home leading to chronically absent behavior, leading to social and emotional bullying upon chronic school absenteeism. Research has also shown that chronically absent females have more problems within the home with male authorities who are not related to them. Yet chronically absent females remain less likely to be physically aggressive (National Center for School Engagement, 2005). Compounding research illuminates the concept that females and males while equally chronically absent become chronically absent for very different reasons. This perhaps provides insight as to why more chronically absent males than females find themselves in the juvenile courts.

Overall delinquent behavior may or may not have derived from the same pathways for both genders, yet recent studies tend to focus on females. In 1997 26% of all arrests were female which is a 37% increase over the past 10 years. Of those females in the juvenile courts, 75% have been sexually abused which leads to running away from home, chronic school absenteeism, and ultimately juvenile courts. Yet parental disapproval can act as a predicting factor towards juvenile court for both genders. Delinquent males and females both report equal difficulty with family relationships with females have more problems with authority not related to them (Hinton, Shepris, Sims, 2003) As mentioned above chronically absent females report taking issue with male authority that have entered the family but are not related to the chronically absent female (National Center for School Engagement, 2005). These recent findings only provide a glimpse into the importance of evaluating negative family factors of delinquent children by gender.

The role of race

As teachers evaluate their students, their judgments on the child's performance is deeply impacted by race depending upon their own race. Teachers of African American students who are African American view them more favorably than white teachers who often emphasize African American student's misbehavior more vividly than white students across a studies from grades kindergarten through eighth.

White teachers were found in a recent study to rate African American student's classroom engagement as less engaged than white students. Researchers believe that white teachers merely misread the cultural difference as disobedience. This could be backed up by the fact that Asian pupils are consistently rated as good students and are

culturally quieter and more disciplined than white students. The increased disruptive behavior of African American students versus white students could be said to be caused by African American's lack of comfort in the classroom against their white teacher's judgmental eyes; that rate African American students as less mature than white students as early as first grade. Across a recent study African American students are rated as poorer classroom citizens than whites. Teachers rate African American students as exhibiting more externalizing behavior problems than whites. Yet when African American students were evaluated by African American teachers, the judgment was less harsh in a study by Downey and Pribesh in 2004.

Within the same study by Downey and Pribesh the evaluation of African American kindergarteners varied depending on the teacher's race; this continued through adolescents. Research is showing that African American student's negative evaluations are due to a lack of matching the students to teachers of their own race. This is supported by the fact that the pattern of negative evaluation of African American student's behavior is entirely dependant on the race of the teacher evaluating it. Research has also found that the SES of African American students did not affect their chance of negative evaluations by white teachers (Downey, Pribesh, 2004). This startling research sheds light upon the concept that perhaps disruptive behavior in the classroom, when judged by race, is completely situational.

To date, no national chronic school absenteeism research exists, yet researchers have begun to explore chronic school absenteeism among large cities that have high chronic school absenteeism rates. A distinct relationship between race and chronic school absenteeism has not been explored within the realm of research in detail. The

chronic school absenteeism data that is surfacing in the juvenile court system is beginning to reveal whites as being under-represented within the chronic school absenteeism statistics. To date African Americans and Latino Americans have the highest drop-out rates. This data could provide insight into the statistics of chronic school absenteeism that leads up to the act of dropping out (Eric Development Team, 2003). With so little research available on the link between race and chronic school absenteeism, prevention programs that are culturally specific are unheard of. If research could find its way down the path of correlating race and chronic school absenteeism, chronic school absenteeism prevention could reach amazing new heights.

A recent study by Amato and Fowler in 2002 evaluating race and parenting found few exceptions that parenting practices did not differ among race in predicting a child's outcome. This could be due to the fact that most mainstream research on parenting practices limit their evolutions to samples of white two parent homes. To date positive parenting research has not been done among African American or Latino American families. Thus, children in white families are viewed as privileged, though these "benefits" have never been evaluated among other races.

The same study has suggested that white homes use less physical punishment than African American homes; the practice of spanking is normative within African American homes. Physical discipline was correlated, within a study, with externalizing behavior among white students but not African American. Though, the mother's use of spanking within African American homes was found to increase the behavior problems of the afflicted children.

Authoritative parenting has been found to reduce drug use, depression, smoking, and higher academic achievement among all races positively correlating with good self-esteem. All forms of parental monitoring have been found to reduce chronic school absenteeism among whites and African Americans. Studies across the board show regardless of race, if the parent(s) are involved with their children's lives, provide encouragement, show affection, and monitor school progress children are able to succeed (Amato, Fowler, 2002).

Recent data shows repeatedly that a substantial overrepresentation of low-IQ and school performance exists in juvenile delinquents. The higher a student scores on standardized testing the less likely that child is to be a juvenile delinquent. A difference of eight points on an IQ test is found between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquents. Youths with a lower IQ score have a harder time at school; this can be a predictor for frustration within the classroom leading to deviant behavior and chronic school absenteeism. One study found that fifty to seventy five percent of juvenile delinquents have a learning disability. As school failure prevails, inappropriate classroom behavior succeeds leading to suspension, expulsion, or dropping out. Recent court statistics found that of the current juvenile offenders in a sample of one hundred and four children, 43% were two years behind grade level, 70% were barely passing or failing, 23% were in special education, 45% had been held back, and 55% had been suspended up to twenty times (Finn, Stott, Zarichny, 1988). This research illuminates the fact that delinquency in the classroom is nothing more than a cry for help that is never met and is replaced with time in the juvenile court system.

Educational risks in juvenile justice populations

Chronic school absenteeism has reached an all time high within the United States and for many students it is a better alternative than academic failure; thus chronic school absenteeism is a gateway to placing delinquent teens in the pathway for criminal activity outside of school. A report compiled by the Las Angeles County Office of Education found that chronic school absenteeism is the strongest predictor of juvenile delinquency involving drugs, alcohol, and violence. One California deputy was quoted as saying, "I've never seen a gang member who wasn't chronically absent first." Police in Van Nuys, California conducted a three week chronic school absenteeism sweep and lifting arrests fell by 60% with purse snatching dropping by 50% (Garry, 1996). Chronic school absenteeism serves as the most accurate predictor to later time spent in the juvenile court system, leaving the challenge of reduction of juvenile offenders not up to the courts, but up to the schools and their polices and preventive measures against chronic school absenteeism.

A major contributor to the increase of juvenile cases is the increase of child abuse, child neglect, and unstable family life. This startling fact caused researchers to begin searching for a solution beyond the individual and including the family. Due to the fact that negative family factors are viewed as one of the strongest roots to delinquent behavior leading youth to the juvenile justice system, family-focused interventions were created. Family focused interventions have demonstrated positive long-term effects in preventing recidivism. Research also indicates that siblings of delinquent youth are less likely to display delinquent behavior following family-focused interventions. Families with delinquent children experience high and long standing levels of family conflict, especially related to discipline. Families with delinquent children lack differentiation and

have a sense of confusion in relation to decision making and conversational direction. Family interactions of delinquents are almost always coercive for all involved with little positive interaction with communication often misperceived and aggressive.

Working with families of juvenile delinquents serves as a positive predictor of preventing recidivism for several reasons. Working with the families places the behavior of the delinquent in an interaction context to begin to open communication. It also places an emphasis on second order change attempting to make the changes more permanent, this is accomplished by enriching family strengths and functional family development. This model has been found successful because it does not place blame, but instead tries to understand the family as a working unit. While delicately balancing the emotions of the family, an emphasis is placed on the value and uniqueness of each juvenile delinquent to ensure their success (Hinton, Sheperis, Sims, 2003). By rebuilding dysfunctional families of juvenile delinquents into a functional family system, the root of so many juvenile delinquents (negative family functioning) is uprooted, redesigned, and replanted for optimal positive growth for all involved.

Chronic school absenteeism and delinquency

A significant relationship between school absenteeism and delinquency also has been identified (Reimer & Smink, 2005). Most often, delinquency is linked with lower education attainment, which in turn is related to chronic school absenteeism (McCray, 2006). Also, research has shown that chronically absent students are referred for disciplinary actions that result in delinquency charges in greater numbers than non-chronically absent students (Sommer and Nagel, 1991, 1991). Further, students with low academic performance are twice as likely as high academically performing peers to

engage in delinquent behaviors (Maguin & Loeber, 1996). Hence, it has been argued that poor school performance is related to both the onset and development of delinquency (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998).

The Global Risk Assessment Device Project

The Global Risk Assessment Device (GRAD) was created by researchers (Gavazzi, Slade et al., 2003) at The Ohio State University in order to assess risk factors among youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. The GRAD is a secure Internet-based assessment tool that allows professionals to make accurate service recommendations based on the youth's risks and needs identified through the assessment process. The GRAD generates reliable and valid information in eleven domains of risks and needs: prior offenses, family/parenting issues, deviant peer relationships, substance abuse, traumatic events, mental health issues, psychopathic, sexual activity and other health-related risks, leisure activities, accountability, and education/work issues. For present purpose, this research will utilize data generated by the GRAD in order to examine disruptive family processes as measured through the family/parenting domain items, and both chronic school absenteeism and disruptive classroom behavior as identified through the education/work domain.

The GRAD has been used in several studies that have generated initial evidence of its reliability and validity. For instance, preliminary empirical work with the GRAD has been conducted that reports excellent psychometric properties, including a solid factor structure and high internal reliability coefficients (Gavazzi, Slade, Buettner, Partridge, Yarcheck, & Andrews, 2003), concurrent validity evidence with other well-established measures of risks and needs (Gavazzi & Lim, 2003), and predictive validity

evidence supporting this tool's use in referring youth to the most appropriate level of care (Gavazzi, Lim, Yarcheck, & Eyre, 2003).

More recently, the GRAD has been used to examine both gender and race/ethnicity differences in the risks and needs of youthful offenders. For instance, gender differences have been examined in both detention (Gavazzi, Yarcheck, & Chesney-Lind, 2006) and status offender (Gavazzi, Yarcheck, & Lim, 2005) populations. Also, the particular combination of both gender and race/ethnicity generates a complex picture of youth risks and needs regarding the family environments of African American and Caucasian males and females (Gavazzi, 2006). In sum, the research evidence suggests an important bottom line: the GRAD items measure what they are supposed to measure, they do so in consistent fashion, and the resulting information can presage the need for direct services that are related to the global risks and needs measured by this assessment tool with sensitivity to gender and race differences.

More recently, the educational risk items have been further examined in two studies using the GRAD with court-involved youth. In the first study research was done on recidivistic activity on the part of juvenile offenders. Recidivism was defined in the study as a new delinquent adjustment within twelve months after the youth's completed conference. This research had never been fully explored until the development of GRAD. The study used 5,154 youth, with an average age of 14.8 years of age, with 35% of the participants being African American, and 65% of the participants being non-Hispanic or white. Part of the diversion program was to avoid formal court involvement for the participating youth. In this study GRAD used the educational risk items by placing it into two categories: education with family and education or family. The study

found that both domains evidenced that education with family and education or family did not correlate in the same manner (Gavazzi, Yarcheck, Sullivan, Jones, and Khurana, XXXX). By showing that differences occur between how family and education/ family or education are linked together GRAD enabled research to broaden it's horizons in assessing court involved youth under the educational risk domains.

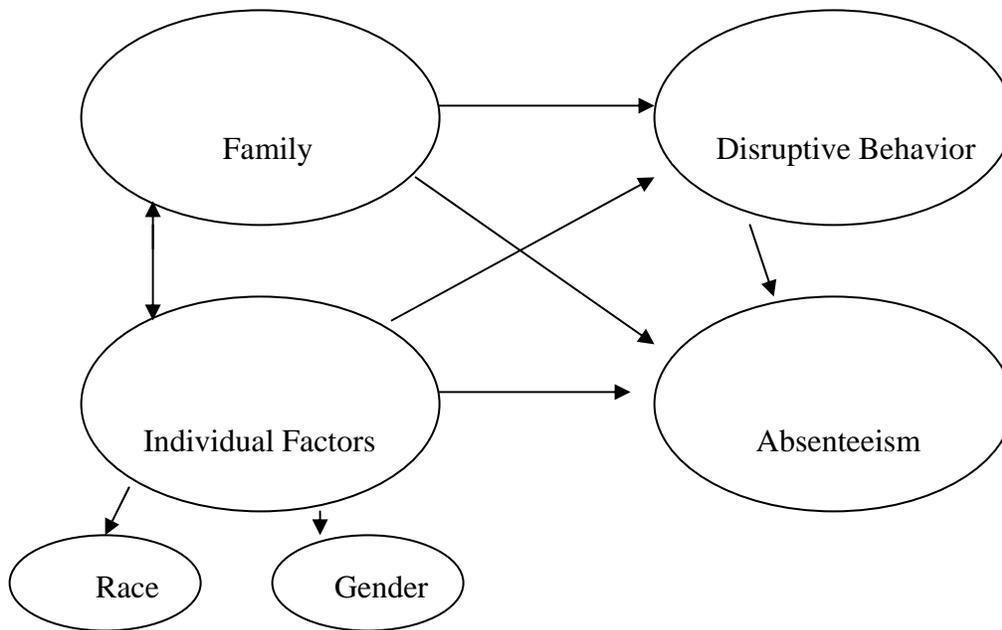
In the second study, court involved African American males were researched under the educational risk domain. Within the educational risk domain the influence of family processes, delinquent peer association, and mental health issues were analyzed. This study is one of the first studies to use GRAD to isolate a group by race and gender. The study investigated education risks alongside global risks as applied to African American males coming into contact with the court system. An analysis of the education risk items was used to find possible sub-dimensions of school based difficulties alongside family, peer, and mental health variables. The study found that higher scores on the classroom behavior factor was significantly associated with more disruptive family processes, higher delinquent peer associations, and great mental health issues. These findings gave an important insight between educational risks, race/gender, and court involved youth (Gavazzi and Russell, 2007).

The present study

Current research has illuminated how interconnected negative family factors, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism are. This study will use the GRAD database to examine those interconnected factors in a sample of court-involved youth. To date, the relationship between the disruptive family processes domain and both disruptive behavior and chronic school absenteeism has never been examined. It

is thought that such a linkage will not only advance the current research literature, but also will prove to be beneficial to potential interventions targeting court-involved youth and their families.

In sum, chronic school absenteeism, problematic family situations, and classroom behaviors combine together to create a complex diagram in which each topic spills into the next. Each topic discussed above will be further evaluated in five hypotheses that are measured by the GRAD domain.



While this study is not designed to prove causality, it is asserted that causality among the factors displayed above drives the maladaptive behaviors of disruptive behavior as well as engagement in absenteeism. Family lies at the beginning of the model as it is asserted that family factors directly cause or prevent disruptive behavior and absenteeism. Furthermore, individual factors are also driven by family factors and individuals can either positively develop per their family or negatively develop leading to

disruptive behavior and absenteeism. No portion of this study will further develop these assertions though it is important upon analyzing the research that it is believed that family is the foundation to individual factors (gender and race), disruptive behavior, and absenteeism.

1. Educational risks measured by the GRAD domain of class behavior factors will be significantly related to school absenteeism as measured by the GRAD truancy item. Here, greater levels of disruptive classroom behavior will be associated with more absenteeism.

Recent studies show students who are chronically absent are involved with the following disruptive classroom behaviors in the current percentiles; 29% are bullies/bullied, 19% have disrespect for teacher, 19% are affiliated with gangs, and 13% verbally abuse teachers (Reimer & Smink, 2005). School absenteeism is often defined with delinquency because the chronically absent students have deviant delinquent patterns. Professionals see school absenteeism as a result of low scholastic achievement, lack of school success, and low self-esteem, and more chronically absent students than non-chronically absent students are referred to for disciplinary action (Sommer and Nagel, 1991, 1991).

School factors that cause disruptiveness are teacher prejudice, teachers who are unwilling to modify the curriculum for individuals, limited resources, lack of appropriate programs, and school violence (Johnson, 1997). Chronically absent students within the public school system have strained and conflict ridden relationships with their educators. Other chronically absent students claim school curriculum is not stimulating which causes boredom that leads to disruptions. Chronically absent students typically have low self-esteem and social incompetence

in the classroom causing disruptive behavior (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998). School absenteeism itself is often an early risk factor for delinquent behavior and continues to be linked as school absenteeism and delinquency continues (Kurdek, Fine, Sinclair, 1995).

2. Problematic family situations as measured by the GRAD disrupted family processes domain will be significantly related to school absenteeism as measured by the GRAD truancy item. Here, greater levels of disrupted family processes will be associated with more absenteeism.

Two British studies (Fogelman, Tibbenham, and Lambert, 1980) studied 12,000 chronically absent students and found chronically absent students come from larger, poor families with inadequate child-rearing pattern (Sommer and Nagel, 1991, 1991). At times school absenteeism takes a different form known as school refusal. School refusal, put simply, is term that is used to describe school absenteeism with the accompanying feature that a child misses school with the full knowledge of their parent(s). There are two types of school refusal. Type one is a well adjusted home that realizes their mistake and accepts treatment. Type two is when families have discordant parents with poor communication patterns and lack of cooperation. Children that come from type two refusal families tend to be extremely connected to their mothers, with their mothers being less controlling yet more hostile (Hansen, Sanders, Massaro, & Last, 1998).

Family factors such as familial discord, martial status, and difficulties with the family environment are associated with higher levels of school absenteeism. It was found that lower levels SES families have higher levels of school absenteeism

because of increased financial strain on the family. The degree in which a family is oriented toward social and recreational activities is predictive of school absenteeism (Hansen, Sanders, Massaro, & Last, 1998). Families of chronically absent students have unhealthy family relationships, are less accepting, ineffective in discipline, and have greater levels of conflict (Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995).

Many states recognize the role that families play in chronic school absenteeism and have developed programs designed to help chronically absent students within a family-centered perspective. For instance, in Neosho County, Kansas a program was developed to involve families of chronically absent students. In Atlantic County, New Jersey Project Helping Hand was created as an early intervention program for chronically absent children that involve the families. In Kern County, California a chronic school absenteeism reduction program helps neglected children stay in school utilizing police officers who make home visits. In Arizona there is a Save Kids Partnership statewide in ten cities and fifteen schools. After any child has three unexcused absences the parents are contacted and a plan is made.

The above programs are just a sample of programs that exist for chronically absent children and their families in America. Each program reinforces the fact the monitoring and counseling should be provided for families to strengthen chronically absent students and families relations to reduce chronic school absenteeism (Garry, 1996). The programs discussed above show that every family system should be targeted to prevent and correct chronic school absenteeism. Every family, of any structure is unique and needs to be judged and approached accordingly (Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995).

3.) Problematic family situations as measured by the GRAD disrupted family processes domain will be significantly related to educational risks as measured by the GRAD domain of class behavior factors. Here, greater levels of disrupted family processes will be associated with greater levels of disruptive classroom behavior.

In one study conducted by Johnson (1997), inner-city teachers rated family factors as moderately to strongly contributing to the probability of disruptiveness. In this study, problematic family situations were evaluated in terms of parental substance abuse, criminal behavior, family violence, lack of parental support, and lack of parental supervision. Interestingly, the teachers rated lack of parental supervision as most likely contributing to increased likelihood of disruptiveness. Classroom disruptiveness also positively correlates with family transitions (i.e. divorce, etc.) (Kurdek, Fine, and Sinclair, 1995). Here, it is believed that the disruptive behavior comes out of the lack of adjustment to these transitions. Family conflict is also a significant predictor of behavior disruptions. Lack of family guidance and structure can also cause disruptive behavior in the classroom. Thus, a variety of family factors are thought to mediate classroom disruptive behavior (Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995). In another recent study, classroom delinquency was found to be caused by fear of harm in the home, fear of victimization in the home, abuse at home, problems with schoolwork, substance abuse, and mental health problem (Reimer & Smink, 2005). Also, as noted above, disruptive students experience low cohesion in the family, lack of parental acceptance, and lack of positive discipline (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, Dalicandro, 1998). Thus, a variety of family factors are thought to mediate classroom disruptive behavior (Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995).

- 4.) Potential gender differences in the first three hypotheses will be explored. In general, it is hypothesized that males will report significantly more disruptive classroom behavior and females will report significantly more disruptive family processes. While there is no literature to support a directional hypothesis for chronic school absenteeism and gender, potential differences between male and female youth also will be explored.**

Disruptive classroom behavior is often evaluated to assess the damages to the learning process as well as if it stands as a predictor for more acts of delinquency. Disruptive classroom behavior when defined is students being late for class, cutting class, leaving their seats, speaking without permission, refusing to follow directions, not completing assignments, and cheating. One study found that the tendency of physical aggression is one of the biggest predictors of non-compliance in the classroom. In this same study males were found to have physical aggression than females as well as a higher rate of disruptive classroom behavior (Finn, Fish, Scott, 2008). Another study found aggressive behavior places children at risk for future and continued aggression creating conduct problems within the classroom and a lack of social skills predominantly in males (Teisl, 2007).

Another predictor of disruptive classroom behavior that can be analyzed by gender is persistent lying. Lying at a young age in both genders leads to behavior problems down the line. Lying can be positively correlated with aggressive behavior and classroom delinquency in both genders; however males are found to lie more often than females. While lying can lead to disruptive behavior, teachers place more blame on males for dishonesty creating common atmospheres where males feel unsafe and not trusted leading to delinquency. Teachers also consistently rate males as more disruptive in the classroom than females. Researchers believe this is because

often teachers place the halo effect over females while consistently distrusting disruptive males. The reason behind this is females are more thoroughly evaluated for underlying causes when displaying disruptive behavior. Disruptive males are written off as deviant (Gervais, Tremblay, Desmarais, Gervais, Vitaro, 2002).

To better understand deviant females it is important to examine the psychosocial context of their behavior. A current assumption is that the family interactions of female delinquents are more dysfunctional than those of male delinquents. It seems possible that female delinquents are more involved in family discord than male delinquents. This can be supported by one study where teachers of delinquent students reported that disturbed family relationships strongly predicted delinquency among females.

A study found several differences between males and females in regard to negative family factors. The study found that more mother-adolescent conflict and hostility existed for female delinquents. The study also found that fathers of female delinquents were more neurotic than the fathers of male delinquents. A final finding in the study is that female delinquents had considerably more conflict and paternal emotional disturbance than male delinquents (Henggeler, Edwards, Bordwin, 1987).

When further studying gender differences, truancy is an area to be explored when looking to develop prevention in a more detailed and personal manner. Several facts in a recent study have arose about gender truancy and discipline. A current study found that before any intervention for chronically absent males and females occurred both males and females had the same numbers of in school suspension. In the same study, after intervention females exceeded males in school suspension. The

study found that chronically absent males are more likely to have decreased delinquency six months after intervention, while females engaged in more delinquency six months after intervention. Chronically absent females are linked to negative family factors while chronically absent boys are linked to gang activity. Research has found chronically absent females often feel pressure from family and friends which can lead to chronically absent behavior per social and emotional pressure. Research has also found that chronically absent males are often chronically absent to avoid conflict with teachers and peers (National Center for School Engagement, 2005).

5.) Potential race differences in the first three hypotheses also will be explored. In general, it is hypothesized that African American youth will report significantly more disruptive classroom behavior, significantly more chronic school absenteeism, and significantly more disruptive family processes.

To evaluate race and disruptive classroom behavior it is consequential to remember where the evaluations of disruptive classroom behavior derive from: the teachers, teachers who have personal biases. Teachers who are African American view students who are African American more favorably than white teachers, on the latter half white teachers do not always report more favorably toward white students. Researchers believe that white teachers simply misread cultural differences of African American students as disobedience. This misreading of cultural differences causes, across the board, African American students to be rated as poorer classroom citizens than white peers. Following in suite, white teachers report that African American students exhibit more externalizing behavior problems than white peers (Downey, Pribesh, 2004).

Outside of classroom biases towards race and negative classroom behavior little research is surfacing to debunk race differences in truant youth. To date, no national truancy research exists, though recent research on race and truancy has begun to surface in large cities. Within this surfacing research, a distinct relationship between race and truancy has not yet been established. Current truancy data is surfacing in the juvenile court system of large cities revealing whites as being under-represented with truancy statistics with African American and Latino youth over-represented among truancy statistics (Eric Development Team, 2005).

While current truancy statistics are vague among the topic of race, research on the family process and it's evaluation on disruptive tendencies has long been researched among race. To date the majority of mainstream research on parenting practices are based on a two parent, white home, with children in these families viewed as privileged. The vast majority of researchers view African American homes as more negative for whites. This is due to the fact African American's use more physical punishment than white families as it is normative in African American communities. Yet this physical discipline only correlated positively with externalizing behavior problems among white youth. Also, on average African American homes are found to be less involved with positive interaction than white families. Yet one study found that for African Americans positive family involvement was not applicable to school performance among African Americans. In contrast, another study suggests that positive, involved parenting reduces drug use, depression, smoking, and increases higher academic achievements among all races. As a whole studies that research positive home life for African American youth are far and few between. However, many studies have been conducted that have found if

parents are involved with their children's lives as a positive influence, provide encouragement, show affection, and monitor school that their children will prevail (Amato, Fouler, 2002).

Summary

School absenteeism/truancy, negative family factors, and disruptive classroom behavior need to be at the forefront of current research. In previous studies each factor has been studied independently or at a surface level when connected. In finding the reasons and solutions to each problem each topic needs to be jointly studied and evaluated. One factor does not exist without the other as measured in the GRAD domain and current research needs to push forward to continue to link the three discussed topics.

Method

Participants

Data was collected from 318 youth from the four Ohio counties of Cuyahoga, Erie, Licking, and Summit. From Cuyahoga 124 youth participated, from Erie 73 youth participated, from Licking 73 youth participated, and from Summit 48 youth participated. Of the 318 youth that participated, 149 were females and 169 were males. In regards to ethnicity 168 of the participants were white and 150 were African American. Divided by school charges 172 of the participants had previously displayed disruptive behavior in the classroom and 146 of the participants had been chronically absent.

Measures

The data collection instrument used was the 132-item of the GRAD (Gavazzi, Slade et al., 2003). On average it takes twenty five minutes to complete the GRAD. Respondents are asked to respond to the items by indicating on a scale of 0 to 2 (0=

no/never, 1 = yes/a couple times, and 2 = yes/a lot) in regards to how much an item applies to their life. Item scores are then totaled to compute a risk score for each domain.

Procedure

Juvenile justice professionals completed six hours of training prior to their participation in the data collection process. The youth in the present study were assessed by line staff working in the county's detention services department. During a three month pilot staff members were asked to conduct at least one assessment per week. Sixteen professionals took part in the collection of data for this study. Each of these professionals was in contact with his/her GRAD trainers as well as face to face consultation with the detention center administration officer as part of a quality control effort designed to ensure competence of administration.

Results

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted for each of the first three hypotheses, and t -test analysis procedures were conducted for the remaining two hypotheses. As predicted, the correlations procedures generated support for each of the first three hypotheses. More specifically regarding the first hypothesis, disruptive behavior in the classroom scores were significantly related to chronic school absenteeism ($r = .33, p < .001$). Regarding the second hypothesis, disruptive family processes were significantly related to chronic school absenteeism ($r = .27, p < .001$). Regarding the third hypothesis, disruptive family processes were significantly related to disruptive behavior in the classroom ($r = .35, p < .001$). Regarding hypothesis four, and contrary to expectations, there were no significant gender differences regarding disruptive behavior in the classroom ($t = -1.39, ns$). However, as expected there were significant gender

differences regarding disruptive family processes ($t = 2.42, p < .01$), with females reporting higher scores on this factor. In addition, the exploratory analyses found no significant gender differences regarding chronic school absenteeism ($t = 1.62, ns$). Finally, regarding the fifth hypothesis, and again contrary to expectations, there were no race/ethnicity differences on scores related to disruptive behavior in the classroom ($t = -1.63, ns$), disruptive family processes ($t = -0.35, ns$), and chronic school absenteeism ($t = 1.15, ns$).

Discussion

Overview

The purpose of the present study was to test the magnitude of relationships among factors related to disruptive family processes, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism in a sample of court-involved youth, as well as to investigate whether or not there were race and gender differences on these factors. The overall goal of the present study was to find possible causes concerning which our youth involved in the juvenile justice system were struggling and ultimately to find root causes leading to their involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Limitations

The limitations in the present study derived from several sources. The first limitation on the present study was the sample. The sample included only court-involved youth causing a lack of generalizability to non-court-involved youth. Furthermore, the sample was also limited in the sense it was only gathered from the four Ohio counties of Cuyahoga, Erie, Licking, and Summit. By only studying court-involved youth within these four counties, there was the potential that the information gathered from these four

counties did not reflect the larger population of delinquents that have not yet entered the juvenile justice system. The final limitation on the present study was the use of cross-sectional data. By using data that explored the participants by their own gender and race and not by gender by race group analyses were not able to be made. While the present study did encounter the limitations of an exclusive sample of court-involved youth from four Ohio counties as well as the use of cross-sectional data, a complete study was conducted that found significant results.

Review of Findings

The Pearson correlation analysis was conducted for the first three hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that educational risks measured by the GRAD domain of class behavior factors would be significantly related to school absenteeism as measured by the GRAD truancy item. Here, greater levels of disruptive classroom behavior would be associated with more absenteeism. The Pearson correlation evidenced that within the sample the first hypothesis was supported, finding that disruptive behavior in the classroom was significantly related to chronic absenteeism. The Pearson correlation findings were supported by previous research done on disruptive classroom behavior and chronic school absenteeism. Previous studies found that chronically absent students blamed their lack of attendance on non-stimulating curriculum within the classroom. Within the same study it was found that boredom in the classroom was one of the leading causes of disruptive behavior. It was also found that low self-esteem and social incompetence in the classroom led to disruptive behavior that could then lead to students feeling out of place and ultimately opting to skip class and commit truancy (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998). Past literature also concurred that delinquent

behavior in the classroom predicted an early risk factor for chronic school absenteeism (Kurdek, Fine, Sinclair, 1995).

The second hypothesis analyzed was that problematic family situations as measured by the GRAD disrupted family processes domain would be significantly related to school absenteeism as measured by the GRAD truancy item. Here, greater levels of disrupted family processes would be associated with more absenteeism. For the second hypothesis the Pearson correlation evidenced that within the sample disruptive family processes were significantly related to chronic school absenteeism. As with the first hypothesis, past studies and literature correlated with the second hypothesis studied on the link between negative family processes and chronic school absenteeism. One particular study found that family factors such as familial discord, marital status, and difficulties with the family environment were associated with higher levels of school absenteeism and that the degree in which a family was oriented toward social and recreational activities was predictive of school absenteeism (Hansen, Sanders, Massaro, & Last, 1998). Another study also found that children with unhealthy family relationships that were less accepting and ineffective in discipline and had higher levels of conflict were more likely to become chronically absent (Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995). As an increasing number of studies were conducted to test the link between negative family factors and chronic school absenteeism, states began taking notice. Various programs were created to reinforce that monitoring and counseling should be provided for families of chronically absent students to reduce chronic school absenteeism (Garry, 1996).

The third hypothesis being studied was that problematic family situations as measured by the GRAD disrupted family processes domain would be significantly related to educational risks as measured by the GRAD domain of class behavior factors. Here, greater levels of disrupted family processes would be associated with greater levels of disruptive classroom behavior. In regards to the third hypothesis the Pearson correlation evidenced that within the sample disruptive family processes were significantly related to disruptive behavior in the classroom. As with hypotheses one and two, hypothesis three was also supported by past studies and literature. Previous literature found that family conflict was a tremendous predictor of behavior disruptions. This was found to be due to the fact that family conflict and lack of family guidance and structure could lead to disruptive behavior in the classroom, and thus various family factors were thought to be predictors of poor behavior within the classroom (Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995).

T-test analyses were then used to test the remaining two hypotheses, the first being that potential gender differences in the first three hypotheses would be explored. In general, it was hypothesized that males would report significantly more disruptive classroom behavior and females would report significantly more disruptive family processes. While there was no literature to support a directional hypothesis for chronic school absenteeism and gender, potential differences between male and female youth also would be explored. In regards to the first part of hypothesis four, the opposite of expectations was demonstrated. There were no significant findings of gender differences in the classroom and chronic school absenteeism. However, there was a significant difference in regards to gender and disruptive family processes with females reporting more problems with disruptive family processes. Unlike hypotheses one, two, and three,

the results of hypothesis four were not entirely supported by the literature. The literature reviewed for this study predicted that males would be more disruptive within the classroom and were rated as more deviant than females (Gervais, Tremblay, Desmarais, Gervais, Vitaro, 2002). The literature reviewed also predicted that females were reported to have higher rates of absenteeism due to higher rates of negative family factors (National Center for School Engagement, 2005). While the hypothesis tested did not prove any gender differences under the truancy item, it did find that females had a higher rate of negative family factors than males. A study that supported that females had higher rates of negative family factors than males found that more mother-adolescent conflict and hostility occurred for female delinquents and that female delinquents had considerably more conflict and paternal emotional disturbances than male delinquents (Henggeler, Edwards, Bordwin, 1987).

The fifth and final hypothesis was that potential race differences in the first three hypotheses also would be explored. In general, it was hypothesized that African American youth would report significantly more disruptive classroom behavior, significantly more chronic school absenteeism, and significantly more disruptive family processes. In regards to hypothesis five, and contrary to expectations, there were no significant race differences in regard to disruptive behavior in the classroom, disruptive family processes, and chronic school absenteeism. Literature and research for this study did not correlate positively with the findings of the study as it was predicted that African American youth would have higher rates of disruptive classroom behavior, chronic school absenteeism, and disruptive family processes. One study found that African Americans were more disruptive in the classroom due to the misreading of cultural

difference by non-African American teachers (Downey, Pribesh, 2004). Another study found that African Americans would display higher truancy rates due to whites being under-represented and African Americans being over-represented in relation to truancy statistics (Eric Development Team, 2005). A final study reported that African American homes were more negative than white homes due to the fact African Americans used more physical punishment than white families and tended to be less involved with positive family interaction than white families. However, in the same study it was stated that research on positive family interactions in African American homes was under-represented and that if parents were involved with their children in a positive way, were supportive and affectionate, and monitored school, children would prevail regardless of their race (Amato, Fouler, 2002).

Implications

The purpose of this study was to find if disruptive family processes, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism related to each other in a sample of court-involved youth. The findings of each hypothesis showed that each of these factors significantly related to one another.

Finding that each of these three factors contributes to our youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system demonstrates that a certain responsibility needs to be taken. From this study we now know that disruptive classroom behavior is a predictor of chronic school absenteeism. Knowing that how a child behaves in the classroom affects his or her rate of truancy raises awareness about predictive factors of truancy that occur in the school. Additionally, knowing that disruptive behavior in the classroom can lead to

truancy places a responsibility on school systems to work with disruptive children early before the disruption reaches a level that causes truancy. Next, finding that negative family factors predict disruptive classroom behavior and chronic school absenteeism places an extreme emphasis on the role of families in relation to the success of their children and prevention of time spent in the juvenile justice system. Knowing how detrimental negative family factors are among deviant and truant youth leads to the conclusion that awareness should be raised to help prevent or heal negative family factors in order to lower the rate of youth in the juvenile justice system.

This study also highlighted what populations are most at risk in the realms of negative family factors, displaying disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism. Identifying that females report having more negative family factors than males allows programs targeted towards preventing and healing negative family factors to focus on families of females over males involved in the juvenile justice system. Finally, this study has illuminated that it is not the race of the youth within the juvenile justice system that defines their involvement in the system, but their individual circumstances of negative family factors, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism.

As researchers it is our job to find the cause of certain phenomenons. Once a cause is found and supported by data, it is then our responsibility to take action concerning each factor that contributes to that phenomenon. It is also our responsibility as researchers to establish awareness of the implications of disruptive family processes, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism and their relationship to our youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system. Beyond creating awareness,

there is an additional responsibility to create activism towards preventive measures for youth who are at risk in the realms of home life, school involvement, and school attendance to reduce the number of youth in the juvenile justice system. By targeting disruptive family processes, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism, a reduction in the number of youth in our juvenile justice system will result.

Future Direction

As stated above, there were certain limitations in conducting this study, including the use of a sample only involving court-involved youth from four Ohio counties and using cross-sectional data. A more extensive study could be created using a different sample including disruptive youth outside the juvenile justice system. This could be used to further test the relationships in linking negative family factors, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism as predictors to youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system. Also, if data was analyzed beyond cross-sectional data and placed into categories of African American males, African American females, white males, and white females significant results may result in the hypotheses regarding gender and race.

Beyond establishing a more extensive study, research could be conducted that is more in-depth on the individual relationships that disruptive family processes, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism have in court-involved youth in regards to causality. The domains of disruptive family processes, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism could be examined in seeing if a chain reaction exists in casualty leading to youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system. By being able to define causality among the factors of family, disruptive behavior, chronic

absenteeism, and court-involvement prevention programs would be able to target how each domain causes the next to occur. Therefore a higher chance would exist in creating preventive programs at the root cause of youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system.

The purpose of future research is to further prove the significance in the relationships between negative family factors, disruptive classroom behavior, chronic school absenteeism, and court-involvement. Beyond further proving the results of this study on a larger scale, a further study could also go into further analyses of gender and race. Aside from going further into gender and race, a future study could have begin to look beyond the relationships of negative family factors, disruptive classroom behavior, and chronic school absenteeism in court involved youth and instead look at the causality among the factors. In summary, the direction of future research should be to evaluate the research and findings of the present study and create more specific studies to further evaluate what drives our youth into the juvenile justice system.

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