Gender and the relationship between childhood abuse and criminal recidivism in a sample of adolescent offenders: Testing the mediated effects of peers and internalizing disorders

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

Feminist scholars have long argued that childhood abuse plays a central role in the onset and maintenance of criminal behaviour among female offenders. In contrast, gender-neutral scholars have downplayed the importance of childhood abuse. The objective of the current study was to: (1) examine if childhood abuse increases the likelihood of criminal recidivism in a sample of adolescent offenders through two potential mediators—criminal peers and internalizing disorders (i.e., anxiety, depression), and (2) determine if these relationships are moderated by gender. To test these relationships, a prospective research design was used with a sample of male and female adolescent offenders from several youth justice facilities in eastern Ontario. Official provincial recidivism data were collected over a 2-year period (August 2010 to February 1st, 2012). All participants were recruited from a probation office in Eastern Ontario, custody facilities in central and Eastern Ontario (open and closed), and the Child, Youth and Family Program within the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

\textbf{METHODS}

\textbf{Participants}
- Sample included 332 participants, 219 (66.0%) males and 113 (34.0%) females.
- The mean age of the entire sample was 17.28 (SD = 1.24), with no gender differences: M = 17.36, females: M = 17.13.
- For males, 35.2% (n = 77) were White and 35.6% (n = 78) were Black; For females, 61.1% (n = 69) were White and 17.7% (n = 20) were Black.

\textbf{Measures}
- \textbf{Predictor Variables}
  - \textbf{Child Abuse} - 3 items from Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI)
  - \textbf{Criminal Peers} - Peer relations subscale from the Youth Level of Service and Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI)
  - \textbf{Internalizing Disorders} - Achenbach Youth Self Report Inventory (YSR): internalizing subscale

\textbf{RESULTS}

\textbf{Research Question 1:} Will gender moderate the relationship between abuse and criminal recidivism?
- Results indicate that the moderation effect did not explain any additional variance to Block 1 ($R^2_{\text{change}} = .001$, $F_{\text{change}} = 235 = .216$, $p = .642$).

\textbf{Research Question 2:} Does gender moderate the mediating effect of internalizing disorders in the relationship between abuse and criminal recidivism?
- Conditional indirect effect was non-significant for both the males (95% CI = -.1029 to .6588) and females (95% CI = -.1364 to .7057)

\textbf{Research Question 3:} Does gender moderate the mediating effect of criminal peers in the relationship between abuse and criminal recidivism?
- Conditional indirect effect significant for males (ab = 1721, 95% CI = .0749 to .3472) but not for females (ab = .0021, 95% CI = -.1418 to .1544).

\textbf{DISCUSSION}

- Possibility that past research may have overstated the predictive power of abuse on recidivism—although abuse may contribute to the onset of criminal conduct it may not contribute to its maintenance.
- Results suggest an integrated approach of combining gender-neutral and gender-specific theories of criminal behaviour (Blanchette & Brown, 2006).

\textbf{LIMITATIONS}
- Recidivism data was only based on provincially recorded information from Ontario.
- Widom (1989) suggests that one methodological weakness in studies investigating the abuse/crime link is the focus on self-report victimization data.
- Using a single measure which does not include severity or length of the related factors such as childhood adversity (e.g., parental criminality).

\textbf{FUTURE RESEARCH}
- Additional mediators need to be tested—such as leisure activity, substance use, school and employment, and antisocial personality.

\textbf{REFERENCES}


Additional moderated mediation hypotheses: Theory, methods, and prescriptions. Multivariate Behavioral Research, 42, 185-207