Some people never change…or do they?
Testing the stability of a gender-informed typology of adolescent offenders
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ABSTRACT

Generating typologies for criminal behaviour can inform the development of treatment programs designed to tackle the unique amalgamation of risk/need factors present for various subtypes of offenders. However, typological research to date has typically classified offenders on the basis of factors purported to be gender-neutral, despite theory and evidence to suggest that females may have unique treatment profiles. Further, offender typologies developed with the aim of examining qualitative differences among offenders have typically been generated at a single time point: however, a dynamic typology would be a useful tool to understand how clusters of risk/need factors change as a result of treatment or simply the passage of time. As such, the purpose of this study was to 1) generate a gender-informed typology of offenders by merging two prominent theories of crime (i.e., CIC R and the Feminist Pathways Paradigm) and b) to test the stability of this typology across three time points using archival data provided by the Pathways to Desistance Project (Mulvey. 2013), a longitudinal study that followed 1,354 adjudicated serious juvenile offenders (184 female, 1170 male) from adolescence to young adulthood. Using a series of latent profile analyses to generate typologies, a 3-class solution best fit the data at T-12 and T-24 months, while 4 classes emerged at T-36 Months. These results suggest that the heterogeneity of adolescent offenders may increase over time.

INTRODUCTION

While some quantitative typological work has begun to study female offenders (e.g., Brennan et al., 2012; Jones, et al., 2013), few studies have examined combined samples of males and females to discuss if there are truly gender differences in how risk/need factors cluster together.

Further complicating matters is that previous typological work has been informed by mainstream correctional perspectives (e.g., CIC R & Andrews & Bonta, 2010). However, a consideration of factors deemed important by the feminist pathways paradigm is essential as there is mounting evidence that:

1. Different types of female offenders do exist (e.g., Brennan et al., 2012; Holfreter & Morash, 2003-Jones, et al., 2013: Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2008; Simpson et al., 2009):
   - Neutral, despite theory and evidence to suggest that females may have unique treatment profiles.
2. Gender-neutral risk assessment tools may work differently for these various subtypes of offenders (Reiss, Holfreter, & Morash, 2006): and,
3. Responsiveness to programs may only be effective for certain types of offenders who present gender-risk/needs factors (i.e., trauma & mental health; Dav. Zahn, Tichavsky, 2013).

Megargee (1997) suggests that in order to better inform treatment, a typology should be dynamic. However, the majority of typological studies have utilized cross-sectional data. From a case management perspective, understanding the qualitative differences across time as they relate to risk/need profiles is equally important.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to create a theoretically integrated typology of adolescent offenders, and to test the stability of the resultant typology over time using multi-wave data.

METHODS

DATA

This study used archival data provided by the Pathways to Desistance project, and followed 1,354 adjudicated serious juvenile offenders from adolescence to young adulthood in Phoenix, Arizona and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, between 2000 and 2010. Youth were between the ages of 14 and 18 at the time of their index offence, and were found guilty of a variety of serious offences. The current study used waves 2, 4, and 6 (T-12, T-24, T-36-month follow-ups) to test the stability of profiles over time.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T-12</th>
<th>T-24</th>
<th>T-36</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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MEASURES

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

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<th>Class 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 124</td>
<td>N = 112</td>
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CRIMINAL PEERS: The Antisocial Behaviour subscale of the Peer Delinquent Behaviour scale (Thornberry et al., 1994) was used to assess criminal peer association.

CRIMINAL ATTITUDES: Two subscales from the Procedural Justice Inventory (Casper et al., 1988; Tyler, 1990; Strode, 1955; Sampson & Burtch, 1999) were selected to represent antisocial attitudes including the legitimacy subscale and the legal cynicism subscale.

ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY: The Impulsive/behavioural subscale of the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (Andershed et al., 2002) was used as a proxy measure of criminal personality.

EMPLOYMENT/EDUCATION: A dichotomous categorical variable was created to collate whether the response to the employment/education scale.

ANALYSES

Table 1. Relative Fit Statistics for 2-, 3-, and 4-class Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
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<th>BIC</th>
<th>SBIC</th>
<th>Entropy</th>
<th>LMPr</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>T-36</td>
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DISCUSSION

Overall, these results suggest that the heterogeneity of adolescent offenders increases over time. Specifically, a 3-class solution emerged at T-12 and T-24: however, a 4-class solution fit the data best at T-36.

Interestingly, three relatively comparable profiles consistently emerged across each wave:

1. a minimal needs group with low needs in all domains
2. a complex needs class that was primarily characterized by mental health deficits, but also had a number of traditional treatment needs
3. a comprehensive needs class that was high across all domains with the exception of internalizing mental health disorders.

A fourth class, characterized primarily by substance abuse emerged at T-36. This group had few other needs, however, they had a larger proportion in this 4-class solution (n = 308). These results suggest that substance use may be a more enduring end that requires more intensive treatment to change.

Unlike previous studies that have found evidence for a gendered pathway (i.e., a true amalgamation of factors is present for females within a mixed-gender sample), this study found more similarities than differences.

Notably, there was a larger proportion of females who fell into the complex needs class at T-36 suggesting that this profile, characterized primarily by mental health needs, may be more stable for females.

Given the novel analytical approach used in this study, future research should examine if similar profiles would emerge over time using diverse data.

Key References


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