

Understanding children's and youth's delinquent behaviors: does exposure to community violence matter? Evidence from the SUCCEED Project

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Exposure to community violence, alongside other individual, familiar, and contextual factors, has been associated with several children and youth's social, emotional, and behavioral problems, including the development of aggressive, violent, and delinquent behaviors. This study sought to expand previous research by exploring how direct and indirect exposure to community violence might influence the development of children and youth's delinquent behaviors. Furthermore, it sought to analyze the potential influence that individual (i.e., sex, age, substance use, peer delinquency, peer prosocial and antisocial activities, and effortful control) and contextual (i.e., perceptions on physical

and social disorders, social cohesion, informal social control and neighborhood attachment) features exert in this relationship.

Using a national community sample ($n = 1007$) of Portuguese middle-school children and youth attending the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades, with an average age of 13.58 ($SD = 1.1$), this study followed a quantitative approach, using a computer-assisted self-report survey, directed at the participating children. The results revealed that direct exposure to community violence, peer delinquency, and peer antisocial activities predicted higher levels of delinquency. On the contrary, substance use was associated with less delinquent behaviors. Furthermore, it was found that the majority of individual and contextual features explored partially mediated the relationships between direct and indirect exposure to community violence and delinquent behaviors, the only exceptions being informal social control, substance use, and peer prosocial activities. No full mediation effects were found. Finally, no moderation effects were found, suggesting that the relationships between exposure to community violence and delinquent behaviors remain regardless of the participants' sex and age. This paper seeks to discuss the results of the current study in light of previous research and to explore its implications for theory and practice.