

African American Male Court-Involved Youth: How Father Absence and Family Dysfunction Predict Behavioral Outcomes

¹ Myla Johnson, ¹ Dr. Christopher Bishop, ²Dr. Charla McKinzie

¹Department of Psychology, Trinity Washington University,

²Department of Behavioral Sciences, Bowie State University

INTRODUCTION

Background:

- Black youth are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system with cases twice as much than other races/ethnicities (OJJDP, 2024).
- Father absenteeism is associated with problems in externalizing and internalizing behaviors (Kim & Glasgow, 2018).
- Father absence is related to child behavioral problems and juvenile crime and incarceration (Slaughter et al., 2019).
- Family dysfunction is consistently linked with childhood behavioral concerns, and poor communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills (Gao et al., 2019).

Purpose: To explore the relationship between father absence and delinquent propensity in African American boys.

Research question: What is the impact of father absence and family dysfunction on African American male youth?

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Archival data from the psychological assessments of 371 African American boys awaiting trial in Washington DC from 2007 to 2011 was obtained by trained graduate and undergraduate students.

Demographic Data

Severity of Crime:

Minor crimes (i.e., truancy; vandalism) = 28 (7.5%)
Moderate crimes (i.e., burglary) = 164 (44.2%)
Serious crime (i.e., assault, rape) = 173 (46.6%)

Behavioral Problems prior to age 12:

No = 116 (31.3%)
Yes = 145 (39.1%)
Missing = 110 (29.6%) information was not found in the report

History of Suspension:

No = 59 (11.2%)
Yes = 388 (73.8%)
Missing = 55 (10.3%)

History of Fighting:

No = 69 (18.6%)
Yes = 224 (60.4%)
Missing = 78 (21.0%)

Difficulties During Utero Development:

No = 288 (54.8%)
Yes = 101 (19.2%)
Missing = 89 (16.9%)

Measures

Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory (MACI) data was collected on 31 subscales of measuring psychological functioning; future analysis will use the Unruly, Childhood Abuse, Social Insensitivity, and Juvenile Predisposition subscales.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics	CHI-SQUARE	INTERPRETATION
Father Involved: No = 184 (49.6%) Yes = 151 (40.7%) Missing = 36 (9.7%)	Father Involvement x Household Composition $\chi^2 (7) = 25.938$, $p < .001$	When the father was involved, youth were more likely to come from two-parent home.
Age at First Offense: M = 14.45 year (SD = 1.81)	Father Involvement x Utero Difficulties $\chi^2 (1) = 7.079$, $p = .008$	When the father was involved, there was less chance of utero problems.
Number of Current Charges: M = 1.77 (SD = 1.22)	Father Involvement x History of Fighting $\chi^2 (4) = 5.190$, $p = .023$	When the father was involved, there was a reduced chance of history of fighting.
Household Structure: Disorganized = 77 (21%) Organized = 267 (72%) Missing = 27 (7.2%)		

Regression Analysis

Table 1: Predictors of Juvenile Delinquency (MACI)							
	R^2	ΔR^2	B	$SE\ B$	β	t	p
Step 1:	0.25 ^c	0.24 ^c					
Father Absence			0.39	0.05	0.49	8.29	<.001
Family Discord (MACI)			1.77	1.97	0.05	0.90	0.37
Step 2:	0.31 ^c	0.29 ^c					
Father Absence			0.36	0.05	0.46	7.97	<.001
Family Discord			1.66	1.92	0.05	0.86	0.39
Number of Charges			1.55	1.04	0.09	1.49	0.14
Age at 1 st Offense			-1.73	0.34	-0.19	-3.20	<.001
Behavioral Issues < 12			2.01	2.02	0.06	0.99	0.32
History of Suspense			2.41	2.56	0.06	0.94	0.56
Note: ^a $p < .05$, ^b $p < .01$, ^c $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.305$; $F(6, 212) = 15.489$, $p < .001$							

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show the following:

- Father involvement increased the likelihood of a two-parent home, decreased likelihood of prenatal difficulties, and decreased the likelihood of a history of fighting.
- Father absence along with the other variables tested were the most significant predictors of juvenile delinquency.
- The interaction between father absence and age at first arrest was significant for juvenile propensity.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

- Using archival data made this study less time consuming yet limited the ability to explore the extent of father involvement
- Homogeneity of this sample contributes to internal validity and generalizability.
- The large amount of missing data could affect the significance of the results.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study prompts an exploration into the nature and extent of father involvement, as well as inter-parental relationships and how that impacts the child’s socioemotional development.

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