

Mitigating the risk of assaultive misconduct by juvenile offenders: Determinants and protective factors.

Identification of determinants of institutional misconduct by juvenile offenders carries promise for enhancement of behavioural management strategies employed in juvenile correctional settings. While there is a large volume of research on predictors of institutional misconduct by adults there is little research on the institutional adjustment of delinquent youths within correctional facilities. This is unfortunate as it can be argued that juvenile offenders are potentially more amenable and responsive to effective rehabilitation. In this cross-sectional quasi-experimental study we investigated a range of determinants of actual assaultive misconduct by incarcerated juvenile offenders. These determinants included the issue of whether gang membership increases likelihood of misconduct over and above the impact of background factors measured by the SAVRY (the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth; a commonly used risk assessment tool). The participant group comprised 135 male youths admitted to the Singapore Boys' Home (SBH) and the Singapore Boys' Hostel (SBHL) between 2010 and 2011. In broad terms, the results of hierarchical logistic regression indicated that measured protective factors and actual gang status of the offenders added incremental value to the SAVRY risk factors in predicting assaultive misconduct. Moreover, measured protective factors such as Strong Social Support and Resilient Personality Traits were negatively correlated with assaultive misconduct (correlations significant at $p < .05$ and at $p < .01$, respectively). While research on juvenile offenders has traditionally focused on the study of risk factors, this study highlights the importance of assessing and tapping in to the protective factors and strengths of this population in order to enhance risk assessment and to guide development of more effective prevention and intervention programs.