

Delinquent Peer Affiliation and Sexting Among Youth with Conduct Problems

Audrey Mariamo¹, Olivia Crescenzi¹, Marie-Emma Gagné¹, Olivia Gunther¹, Alexa Martin-Storey², Caroline Temcheff¹ & Michèle Déry²

¹Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University

²Department of Psychoeducation, Université de Sherbrooke, Québec, Canada

Introduction

- Conduct problems (CP) are a set of externalizing behaviors that include rule violation, aggression and property destruction¹.
 - Characterized by impulsivity, hostility and callous-unemotional traits¹
 - Children with CP at-risk of negative developmental trajectories, including persistent patterns of maladaptive lifestyles and high stress, which may result in multiple problems in the transition to adulthood²
- CP is associated with risky sexual behavior and has been specifically linked with sexting, particularly among girls³.
 - Necessary to examine the association between CP and different forms of sexting longitudinally, in order to help identify youth in need of targeted interventions to prevent legally and emotionally-harmful behaviors
- Affiliation with deviant peers consistently associated with development and maintenance of CP⁴.
 - Higher propensity for delinquent peer associations among youth with CP⁴
 - May have consequences for adolescent's social environment that help explain the link between CP and sexting
- Youth with CP are more likely to associate with older and more deviant peers, who may engage in higher levels of sexting and sexual activity (increase with age)⁵.
- Potential gender-specific function of sexting in youth with CP
 - Girls with CP at higher risk for risky sexual behavior than boys⁶
 - Link between engaging with deviant peers X vulnerability for sexual harassment stronger among girls⁷

- Deviant peer association has been shown to predict sexting in normative samples.^{8,9}

- However, effect of deviant peers on CP X sexting remains unclear



Objective

- To investigate whether the link between CP and sexting is influenced by association with delinquent peers among adolescent boys & girls.

Methodology

Participants & Procedures

- N = 628; Mean age = 17.4 years old (SD = 0.98).
- Ongoing longitudinal study of boys (53.7%) and girls with and without childhood conduct problems. Recruited from 155 schools across four regions in Quebec, Canada between 2008 & 2010.
- Participation rate 84.4%

Measures

Early CP

- Assessed at study inception.
- Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA).¹⁰
- Parent-report Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL).
- Teacher Report Form (TRF).
- Clinical cut-off (T ≥ 70) were deemed to have CP.

Delinquent Peers

- Assessed 6 years after study inception.
- Single item from the Teacher Ratings of Peers and Social Skills.¹¹
- Number of friends that behaved badly & did not follow rules.

Sexting

- Assessed 9 years after study inception.
- Items adapted from the Sex and Tech survey¹² to assess four behaviors:
 - Sending a sexually suggestive message
 - Receiving a sexually suggestive message
 - Had a sexually suggestive message that was originally private forwarded to them.

Analysis

- Logistic regressions. Models stratified by sex.
- Predictors: CP, Peer Association & CP x Delinquent peer association
- Outcomes: Sexting behaviors
- Covariates: age, household income, and parental education.

Results

Table 1: Logistic regression results for sexting predicted by CP & Peer Association for girls (N = 291)

	Sending OR (95%)	Receiving OR (95%)	Being Forwarded OR (95%)
CP	2.11** (1.25-3.58)	2.72** (1.56-4.75)	2.22* (0.65-7.95)
Peer Association	1.12 (0.84-1.49)	0.96 (0.71-1.30)	0.95 (0.70-1.28)
Age	1.61** (1.21-2.13)	1.58** (1.19-2.10)	1.16 (0.87-1.56)
Income	1.03 (0.94-1.12)	1.06 (0.98-1.16)	1.04 (0.95-1.13)
Parental Education	0.64 (0.36-1.14)	0.73 (0.44-1.31)	0.98 (0.53-1.81)
CP x Peer Association	0.90 (0.49-1.68)	0.73 (0.40-1.34)	1.00 (0.46-2.18)

Table 2: Logistic regression results for sexting predicted by CP & Peer Association for boys (N = 337)

	Sending OR (95%)	Receiving OR (95%)	Being Forwarded OR (95%)
CP	0.86 (0.53-1.39)	1.33 (0.83-2.13)	1.05 (0.63-1.77)
Peer Association	1.18 (0.95-1.46)	1.12 (0.92-1.37)	1.00 (0.78-1.27)
Age	1.59*** (1.25-2.03)	1.24 (0.99-1.56)	1.15 (0.90-1.46)
Income	1.04 (0.96-1.12)	1.05 (0.98-1.12)	0.99 (0.91-1.07)
Parental Education	0.81 (0.48-1.36)	0.93 (0.56-1.53)	1.65 (0.94-2.92)
CP x Peer Association	0.90 (0.59-1.36)	1.09 (0.72-1.63)	0.95 (0.59-1.52)

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Discussion

- CP significantly associated with a higher probability of receiving sexts for girls.
- CP x delinquent peer association interaction was not statistically significant, indicating that associating with delinquent peers did not influence the link between CP & sexting in the current sample.
- This may be due to our measure.
- Reporting of behavior that differs by context. Multiple raters would be ideal.^{13,14}
- Single item only captures one facet of deviant peer association and does not pertain to peer sexting behaviors.
- Identifying youth at risk for sexting & the mechanisms at play in the association between CP & sexting may be important for:
 - Preventing adverse psychosocial health outcomes & health risk behaviors associated with sexting;
 - Decreasing prevalence of perpetration & victimization of non-consensual sexting;
 - Informing the development of preventative & educational strategies focused on safe sexting.

Limitations & Recommendations

- Limited generalizability due to over-selection of youth with CP.
- Limited information about context surrounding measured sexting behaviors.
 - Future research including contextual factors in sexting, including elements of consent, may be helpful.
- Measure for delinquent peers consists of one teacher-reported item.
 - Future research should consider implementing different measures for delinquent peer association.
- Findings suggest the importance of focusing preventative and educational strategies to specific groups of individuals (i.e., girls with CP) based on their propensity to engage in sexting behaviors.
- Girls with CP may benefit from programs designed to prevent victimization and to foster the development of healthy relationships. These programs may focus on teaching.
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Emotional awareness
 - Effective decision making

References

- Murphy, B. C., Kathan, A. B., & Olweid, T. H. (Eds.). (2010). *Clinical handbook of assessing and treating conduct problems in youth*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Bentivenga, L., Hise, D., Barker, E. D., & Viner, R. (2018). Conduct problems trajectories and psychosocial outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *European child & adolescent psychiatry*, 27(10), 1289-1299.
- Kim, S., Martin Storey, A., Drossos, A., Barbosa, S., & Georgiades, K. (2020). Prevalence and correlates of sexting behaviors in a provincially representative sample of adolescents. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 65(6), 401-408.
- Deater-Deckard, K. (2001). Association. Recent research examining the role of peer relationships in the development of psychopathology. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and allied Disciplines*, 42(6), 665-679.
- Günzer-Gradic, M., & de Saint-Jean, P. (2015). "Two peas in a pod": Longitudinal predictors of sexting among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 60(5), 608-614.
- Persson, D. M., John Horwood, L., & Ridder, E. M. (2000). Show me the child at seven: the consequences of conduct problems in childhood for psychosocial functioning in adulthood. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, 41(5), 837-849.
- Tillyer, M. S., Wilcox, P., & Glasopson, B. M. (2010). Adolescent school-based sexual victimization: Exploring the role of opportunity in a gender-specific multilevel analysis. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(3), 1071-1081.
- Ricketts, M. L., Maloney, C., Maroun, C. D., & Higgins, G. E. (2015). The effect of internet related problems on the sexting behaviors of juveniles. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(2), 275-284.
- Maroun, C. D., Higgins, G. E., & Ricketts, M. L. (2014). Sexting behaviors among adolescents in rural North Carolina: A theoretical examination of the role of self-control and deviant peer association. *International Journal of Cyber Crime Assessment*, 8(2), 68.
- Achenbach, T. M., & Rescorla, L. A. (2013). *The Achenbach system of empirically based assessment (ASEBA): Applications in forensic contexts*. In Forensic uses of clinical assessment instruments (pp. 327-361). Routledge.
- Chen, T. J., & Kavanagh, K. (2002). Intervening in adolescent problem behavior: A family-centered approach. Guilford Press.
- National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. (2008). Sex and tech: Results from a survey of teens and young adults.
- Simoneff, E., Pickles, A., Hewitt, J., Silberg, J., Rutter, M., Loeber, R., & Eaves, L. (1995). Multiple raters of disruptive child behavior: Using a genetic strategy to examine shared and non-shared influences. *Behavior Genetics*, 25(4), 311-326.
- Bauman, K. E., & Smart, S. T. (1980). On the importance of peer influence for adolescent drug use: Commonly neglected considerations. *Addiction*, 71(2), 185-198.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by grants from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (Grant NRF 82694).
Image credit: Unsplash