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PATHWAYS PERSONNEL

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ny longitudinal study which is done well, has at its core a group of field staff who are committed to the project and work hard toward its success. We'd like to take some time to introduce you to a few such individuals.

Sylvia DeJohn has been a full time interviewer with the project since November 2001. She was born in Paris, France, but moved to Barcelona, Spain when she was a teen. Her adventurous spirit led her to Australia and then back to Barcelona where she worked as a purchasing and export manager for an internationally known company. Ultimately she made it to the United State where she taught English as a second language to migrant workers and their children. It goes without saying, then, that Sylvia is more than bi-lingual; indeed she has good oral and written command of English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Sylvia's extensive experience with people from other countries has given her a solid

understanding of cross-cultural issues and strong business sense, but it is her heart for the troubled and disadvantaged that has held her here in this position. Indeed, she reports that one of her most memorable experiences was when one of her Hispanic



Sylvia DeJohn

participants sought her out to proudly display his G.E.D. diploma (which he received while incarcerated in the juvenile division of an adult jail). Her ability to relate with individuals from all walks of life makes her a very valuable member of the team.

When she is not interviewing, Sylvia is continuing her education while maintaining two homes, one here in Phoenix and one in Winslow, Arizona. There, she enjoys the two loves of her life, her husband and her beautiful 230 pound Spanish Mastiff (i.e., a dog--a very large dog).

Also a full time member of the RPD interviewing staff, Angela Chicci's recent claim to fame is that she has been working on the project since data collection began. A native

of the state of Michigan, Angela received her Bachelor's Degree in psychology from Arizona State University. During her college career, Angela worked on several research projects that involved collecting psycho-physiological data (e.g., heart rate, respiration, and skin conductance measures) from young children at risk for the development of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems. She is pleased to be working with a sample of adolescent and young-adult offenders in that it has given her an opportunity to think developmentally about "what hap-

pens to at-risk kids when their symptoms are left untreated". When asked why she stays with the project, Angela reports that it is "most rewarding to see how well some kids develop even in the midst of some of the most adverse circumstances." She says that the hardest thing about her job is



Angela Chicci

when she discovers (more often than she would like) that some of her participants have relapsed (with respect to substance abuse) or re-offended and are then suffering the consequences of their behavior. However, Angela is ever the optimist and predicts that most of her kids will find their way out of the criminal lifestyle.

When Angela is not working she is enjoying her husband who is a high school science teacher and her 4 cats. Her passions include spending time with her family and friends.

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Serious Juvenile Offender Continued from page 1

the baseline interview. Seventeen percent were enrolled in a GED program or have completed their GED. Being enrolled, of course, does not mean that these adolescents were attending school regularly. It just means that they are still connected officially with the school system.

- One quarter of the sample (26%) reports having a job at the time of their baseline interview, most often in traditional teen-age slots such as fast food service/counter help and manual labor (e.g. grass cutting)
- About one in ten (9%) of the sample report having at least one child of their own. A larger proportion of the female subjects had children (13% vs. 8%)
- Serious offenders associate almost exclusively with other offenders.
- About half of the youth (46%) said that one of their four closest friends had been arrested. Of those friends that were arrested, 63% had been detained or jailed as well.
- For nearly all self-reported crimes, the vast majority of participants reported that someone was with them the last time they committed that crime. The only exceptions to this were "forcing someone to have sex" and "paid for sex".
- Less than one-fifth of the subjects (17%) report being members of a gang at the time of enrollment into the study, and the majority (70%) of these gang members did not consider themselves gang leaders. Of those who were not currently in a gang, 6% report being a member of a gang in the past. The average age at which they joined a gang was 13. Of those who say they belong to a gang currently, most felt the gang was only "a little important" to them, even though all but a few of their friends were also gang members.
- ► All serious offenders have a long history of offending and getting into trouble.
- Two-thirds of the sample had at least one prior petition to court; one-third did not.
- The mean age at first petition to court for the whole sample was 13.9 yrs
- Not surprisingly, 18 year-olds in the sample admit having done a wider range of antisocial acts and having done these acts more frequently than any other age group. By 18, the youth in this sample report committing an average of 1.5 times as many types of antisocial acts as the 14 years olds, and they are committing these acts at an average frequency which is more than double that of the 14 year olds. However, the 15 and 16 years olds commit double the aver age number of aggressive acts than any other age group in the sample.
- About three-fourths (76%) of the subjects reported trouble before age 11 in at least one of the following categories: cheating, disturbing class, being drunk or stoned, stealing or fighting. The most commonly endorsed problems were for fighting and disturbing the class. The least common was being drunk or stoned.

• About half (51%) of the adolescents report using a gun to commit an antisocial act (like robbery) in the past.

- Serious offenders all come from dysfunctional families.
- Only about one in six of these youths (15%) have parents who are currently married to each other. In about half of the cases (47%), the youth's parents were never married to each
- About four out of five of these adolescents (82%) are still with at least one of their biological parents. About threequarters of these adolescents (73%) live in a home with their biological mother. About a quarter (23%) have their biological father in the home.
- The subjects indicate that they think that their parents generally do monitor their behavior. On a rating scale about how much their parent's know of their activities, the average for the group was only slightly less than the mid-point.
- The subjects were also asked to rate the warmth and hostility in their relationship with their mother and their father. Warmth for both parents hovered around the mid point, with mothers achieving a score slightly over the midpoint and fathers' scores generally slightly below the mid point. Hostility in the relationship with both parents was rated at a low level (less than 2 on a 5-point scale).
- The majority (78%) of these youth report at least one relative that was arrested. Of those, a birth relative was listed 93% of the time and the biological father was listed as one of the relatives arrested 21% of the time.
- 14% had at least one family member hospitalized in a psychiatric facility. In nearly all of the cases (96%), the person hospitalized was a birth relative, most often the biological mother.
- 14% of the sample lived in three or more locations in the six months between the baseline and first follow up
- > Serious offenders have a whole host of other problems, not just criminal offending.
- A high proportion of these offenders have drug and alcohol problems. Thirty-nine percent of the males and 35% of the females in the study met clinical criteria on a validated, structured instrument for a substance use diagnosis in the past year. This rate is much higher than that seen in community samples, where only about 5 to 9% of this age group met clinical diagnostic criteria.
- A vast majority (85% of the males in the study and 88% of the females) have used marijuana in their lifetime, about double the rate for community samples of this age.
- Considering both substance use and some select mental health disorders, 44% of the sample meet clinical criteria on a validated, structured instrument for at least one diagnosis of some sort in the past year. One in ten of these adolescents have a mental health diagnosis without a substance use problem (PTSD, mania, depression or panic

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disorder) and about one in six (16%) have a co-occurring substance use disorder and one of the selected mental health disorders.

- The average IQ for this sample is 85, about one standard deviation below the norm.
- Thirteen percent of the sample have received services from a special teacher, program or school.

This quick summary of the characteristics of the sample of serious adolescent offenders involved with the Pathways study suggests that many of the conventional images of this group are not entirely wrong. These adolescents have done serious antisocial acts, do have significant drug and alcohol problems, and do offend with other adolescents most of the time. What is striking, however, is that there is also considerable variability on many of the personal characteristics of these offenders. Many of these adolescents are still in school, live in homes with their biological mother, and report that their parents range in their monitoring and warmth. Like many other groups of individuals linked only by a common experience, these adolescents show considerable variability on a number of dimensions. It seems simplistic to think of all serious adolescent offenders as cut from the same cloth.

A Note from the Coordinating Center

In this issue we have attempted to provide a description of the serious offenders in our sample, considering attributes beyond the demographics reported in prior issues of the newsletter. We have relied on some common perceptions about this group to guide our portrayal. Our hope is that the reader will come away with an appreciation of the many dimensions of an adolescent's life that might be examined, and an understanding that this group of serious offenders are in many ways alike, but also sometimes quite different. Regarding many characteristics and experiences, these offenders range considerably beyond their common difficulties with the law. Finding the differences that are real and that really matter is our future challenge.



RESEARCH IN REVIEW

Life-course Desisters? Trajectories of Crime Among Delinquent Boys Followed to Age 70

Robert J. Sampson and John H. Laub, Criminology, Vol. 41(3), January 2004

One of the most prominent ideas within criminological theory is that there is a sub-group of chronic offenders who begin offending early and fail to desist from a criminal lifestyle. Recently, developmental theorists have argued that these life-course persistent offenders differ from other types offenders with respect to key childhood risk factors. The idea that it may be possible to identify serious and chronic offenders at an early age has captured the attention of both researchers and policy makers. There is a body of research, however, that challenges the existence of career criminals. Instead, desistance is viewed as a universal process which does not vary by age.

Using the largest longitudinal study of crime to date, Sampson and Laub empirically tested whether a distinct group of chronic offenders could be identified in a sample of 500 male delinquents (ages 7 to 70). They also tested whether key childhood risk factors were able to predict long term offending patterns. The authors employed a variety of longitudinal data analysis techniques in order to answer these questions.

While they were able to identify subgroups of offenders using latent class models, it was clear that aging out of crime was the norm for all offender groups. Importantly, a group of chronic offenders could not be identified. All groups of offenders eventually desisted: these results were not impacted by subject mortality or incapacitation time. In addition, it was not possible to identify life-course persistent offenders prospectively using childhood and adolescent risk factors. The findings from this study strongly suggest that a general desistance process is at work for all offenders, where even the most serious delinquents desist. Moreover, while childhood risk factors were found to be reasonably accurate at predicting levels of crime, they were unable to assist in identifying groupings of kids who were prospectively at risk for a distinct offending trajectory. Sampson and Laub conclude that there are important differences within adult criminal trajectories that can not be predicted from childhood: put simply, adult trajectories of offending are not simply a product of their past.

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ontinuity of interviewers is one of the cornerstones for success in this study and Brooke Jordan is a great example of consistency. Brooke has ✓ been a full-time interviewer in Philadelphia since the RPD study began and has carried many of her subjects from baseline to 36-month without ever seeing another interviewer. Brooke came to the RPD study with plenty of experience working with kids as a Unit Director for the South Troy Boys and Girls Club in New York. Brooke likes her co-workers and being part of a study that will one day make a difference in the lives of youth and help them change for the better. In her free time, Brooke likes to play basketball, which has filled a major role in her life since her school days in Albany, New York. (She even married a basketball player!)

Deb Murray is a full-time interviewer, but with a special angle; Deb lives in her hometown of Pittsburgh and conducts interviews for the staff in Philadelphia when the subjects are in a juvenile facility or treatment facility on the western side of the state. The time Deb saves in tracking kids she makes up in driving because the facilities she visits are all over Western PA. She says that as a result of her work on the study, she now knows where all the

state troopers hide! When Deb is not cruising the Pennsylvania countryside in quest of an interview, she likes to read (anything but romance!) and spend time with her 5-year-old grandchild.

Margo Gardner works part-time as an interviewer for the RPD study while she simultaneously pursues her Ph.D. in Psychology at Temple University. Margo hales from rural Vienna, West Virginia, but assures us that she was not raised on roadkill. She received a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Duquesne University and worked as a counselor at a residential facility for delinquent girls before coming to Temple. Margo believes that if everyone could see what she and the other interviewers see when they glimpse the lives of the kids in our study, society would view juvenile offenders in a different light and with greater understanding.

Nora Sullivan, a native of snowy Buffalo, New York, is the court liaison between the RPD study and the Philadelphia Family Court. She also manages the Philadelphia court data. Although she dislikes the one-way streets of Philly, Nora loves the camaraderie among her co-workers and knowing that her work is going into a

project that will make a difference. After work, Nora still finds time to help out at her boyfriend's restaurant. (He must think she's a big help because they recently got engaged!). Nora believes that you can never have too many shoes or purses. (We wonder if her fiancé knows they are going to need very big closets).

DATA COLLECTION at-a-glance

- 1354 valid subject baseline interviews (90% with a collateral informant)
- 1.280 6-month interviews completed
- 1.269 12-month interviews completed (91% with a collateral informant)
- 1.134 18-month interviews completed
- 715 24-month interviews completed (93% with a collateral informant)

- SDOTLIGHT
- **Philadelphia**

Here at the Temple site, four staff members have been with the RPD study since the beginning.



As of 12/30/03

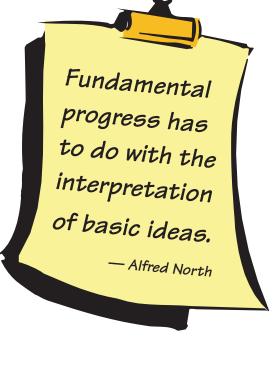
- 365 30-month interviews completed
- 66 36-month interviews completed
- 95% retention rate at the 6-month. 12-month and 18-month interview point: 93% retention rate at the 24-month interview; 96% at 30-month
- 20 subjects have dropped out of the **study (1%)**
- 15 subjects have died since the beginning of the study

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Fall/Winter Issue

Volume 5

A Portrait of the Serious Juvenile Offender: **More Complicated Than Often Portrayed**

In the 1980's and early 1990's, many predicted the coming of a new breed of young criminals - the super-predator. The super-predator was to be the epitome of the worst delinquents seen so far; youth for whom violence was not merely a means to an end, but a way of life. The fear was heightened by population statistics indicating that the teenage population would increase through 2010, producing larger numbers of this feared prototype. This image lurked behind much of the legislation aimed at stiffening juvenile penalties which was passed in these decades.

Currently, nearly all observers of juvenile crime agree that the super-predator has not emerged as predicted. But if the adolescents committing serious crime are not the heartless, violent types once feared, then who exactly are they? Despite much research on patterns of adolescent crime and the development of delinquent careers, there is still not a comprehensive picture of the characteristics of serious offenders.

The Pathways sample of approximately 1,300 adolescents provides an opportunity to paint a portrait of this group of youthful offenders. The sample consists of serious offenders from two metropolitan areas who have all have been adjudicated on a felony-level offense or, for a small number (less than 6% of the sample) a level one misdemeanor weapons or sex offense. Participants in the study are, on average, 16 years old and have had two prior petitions in juvenile court. Twelve percent of the cases were processed in the adult system as the result of their presenting offense. Because one of the primary goals of the research was to see what happens to a variety of serious offenders, the sample was restricted regarding the inclusion of drug offenders; the percentage of drug offenders in the sample was not allowed to exceed 15%. Without this limitation, the high number of drug cases in metropolitan areas would have produced a sample of largely drug offenders. A look at this sample across a number of different dimensions allows us to think more broadly about what the juvenile offenders at the "deep end" of the system might really look like, if we now accept that they are not all the superpredators once feared. Some conventional lore about this group can serve as orientation points for this examination.

Very few serious crimes are committed by females

- While the vast majority of those committing serious offenses are males, there are a growing number of females who are committing serious crime. This is evident in the Pathways sample. Of the 10,460 youth petitioned on a serious offense in Philadelphia and Phoenix between October, 2000 and January, 2003, nearly 1,900 (18%) were female. Of the 3,797 youth adjudicated of a serious offense in this time period, 10% were female. Females are getting charged with serious crimes at a substantial rate, but apparently not adjudicated at the same
- Serious juvenile offenders are not engaged in the typical roles of other adolescents their age.
- Nearly three quarters (72%) of the sample was enrolled in school at the time of

Research on Pathways to Desistance



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