



RESEARCH BRIEF

The Global Risks and Needs of Youth With An Incarcerated Parent

Problem Statement: With some variation by geographical location, somewhere between 10-15% of all court-involved assessed through use of the Global Risk Assessment Device (GRAD) report having an incarcerated parent.

Research Question

How do the risks and needs of youth who have an incarcerated parent compare to other court-involved youth not facing this potentially devastating family situation?

Methods: A sample of 2092 youth coming into contact with five juvenile county courts in Ohio was used in this empirical inquiry. Information on these youth was gathered through use of the Global Risk Assessment Device (GRAD: Gavazzi et al., 2003). The GRAD assesses potential threats to the numerous developmental needs of adolescents who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. This tool taps into eleven domains of risk/needs: prior offenses, family/parenting issues, peer relationships, substance abuse, traumatic events, mental health issues, psychopathy, sexual activity and other health-related risks, leisure activities, accountability, and education/work issues. For present purposes, GRAD scores from a sample of youth identified as having an incarcerated biological parent were compared to GRAD scores from an at-large sample of court-involved youth without this transitional risk factor.

Sample: The sample of youth with an incarcerated parent was comprised of 276 youth (106 females and 170 males) with an average age of 14.6 years. Sixty-nine percent of the sample was African American, and 31% was White, non-Hispanic. The comparison sample of youth was comprised of 1816 youth (653 females and 1163 males) with an average age of 15.01 years. Fifty-six percent of this sample was African American, and 44% White, non-Hispanic.

Analysis of demographics: A greater percentage of African-American youth (69%) than White youth (31%) experienced the incarceration of a biological parent, a difference that was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 62.99, p < .001$). A slightly greater but non-significant percentage of females (14%) than males (13%) experienced the incarceration of a biological parent.

Analysis of GRAD scores: To determine the comparability of the groups, a 2 (ethnicity: African-American and White, non-Hispanic) X 2 (risk factor: experienced parental incarceration vs. no such experience) MANOVA was computed with the GRAD domains as the dependent variables. Results revealed significant multivariate main effects (based on Wilks' Lambda) for both ethnicity [$F(11, 2078) = 4.81, p < .001$] and risk factor of parental incarceration [$F(11, 2078) = 13.27, p < .001$]. Subsequent analyses were conducted in order to identify the source of the significant multivariate effects regarding ethnicity and the parental incarceration risk factor. Youth who had experienced the incarceration of a biological parent scored significantly higher than the comparison sample on all 11 GRAD domains. In turn, African American youth scored significantly higher than White, non-Hispanic youth on 6 out of the 11 GRAD domains, including psychopathy, substance abuse, peer relationships, prior offenses, leisure time activities, and health-related risks.

Analysis of other risk factors: Youth experiencing the incarceration of a biological parent were significantly more likely to be subjected to a wide range of other difficulties, including change of schools (47.8% versus 13.8%, $\chi^2 = 27.35, p < .001$), residential move (41.3% versus 25.9%, $\chi^2 = 28.09, p < .001$), and placement in child protective services (23.2% versus 12.9%, $\chi^2 = 20.82, p < .001$).

Summary:

In comparison to the at-large group of court-involved youth adolescents, youth experiencing the incarceration of a biological parent display significantly greater risks and needs across a variety of indicators.

The development of an instrument known as the Global Risk Assessment Device (GRAD) was initiated in order to assist juvenile justice professionals in making recommendations and referrals that are based on reliable and valid information about risk factors in a wide variety of relevant domains. Currently, there are six publications that discuss the conceptual and empirical development of the GRAD. They are:

Gavazzi, S. M., Yarcheck, C. M., & Lim, J. Y. (in press). Global Risk Indicators and the Role of Gender in a Juvenile Detention Sample. **Criminal Justice and Behavior**.

Gavazzi, S. M., Yarcheck, C. M., & Lim, J. Y. (in press). Ethnicity, gender, and global risk indicators in the lives of status offenders coming to the attention of the juvenile court. **International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology**.

Gavazzi, S. M., Novak, M., Yarcheck, C. M., & Distefano, L. T. (2004). Assessing and Tracking Youthful Offenders with the Web-Based Global Risk Assessment Device. **Corrections Today**, 64-67.

Gavazzi, S. M., & Lim, J. Y. (2003). Advances in measurement of global risk indicators in lives of court-involved youth: brief evidence for concurrent validity. **Psychological Reports**, 93, 750-752.

Gavazzi, S. M., Lim, J. Y., Yarcheck, C. M., & Eyre, E. L. (2003). A brief report regarding predictive validity evidence of global risk indicators in the lives of court-involved youth. **Psychological Reports**, 93, 1239-1242.

Gavazzi, S. M., Slade, D., Buettner, C. K., Partridge, C., Yarcheck, C. M., & Andrews, D.W. (2003). Toward conceptual development and empirical measurement of global risk indicators in the lives of court-involved youth. **Psychological Reports**, 92, 599-615.