

## Relationship Between Drugs and Crime in Adolescence: Influence of Gender and Victimization Experiences

**Rightly or wrongly, juvenile delinquency is often blamed on psychoactive substance (PAS) use. The relationships between psychoactive substances and delinquency are of diverse natures and depend on various factors, including the user having been physically or sexually abused. This study compares the severity of PAS use according to severity of delinquency in 726 adolescents in treatment for addiction problems and taking into account their victimization experiences.**

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### Issue and Objective

Generally, the relationship between PAS use and juvenile delinquency is directly proportional: the more adolescents use PAS, the more they are involved in delinquency. Yet, the nature of this relationship depends on several factors, including frequency and severity of PAS use. The goal of this study is to compare severity of PAS use among boys and girls in treatment for addiction problems, according to severity of their delinquency. In this study, the variance related to these youths' victimization experiences is controlled, given that the literature shows that this variable is related to both delinquency and addiction.

### Methodology

The sample is composed of 726 youths presenting severe addictions when they registered in an addiction rehabilitation centre in the Québec City area between March 1999 and March 2003. Data were collected using the Teen Addiction Severity Index (T-ASI). This instrument, whose validity is well established, assesses a youth's ability to function in 11 spheres of life. The adolescents were divided into two groups—low delinquency and high delinquency—according to their self-reported delinquency on the «socio-judicial system» scale. The adolescents were considered to have severe delinquency problems if they had committed at least two different types of crimes.

### Highlights

- Adolescents reporting severe delinquency problems have been arrested and found guilty of a delinquent act more often, and have more frequently been the subject of a court order or placement order. There are also more boys than girls in this group. However, this group does not differ from the low-delinquency group in terms of age, education level and victimization experiences (physical or sexual abuse).
- A greater number of adolescents living with only one of their biological parents were highly delinquent, whereas fewer of these more delinquent youth lived in an institution.
- The high-delinquency group also presented more severe PAS use profiles. This result confirms the strong association between severity of PAS use and delinquency.
- Girls being treated for addiction present more severe substance use profiles than boys treated for the same problem, except for cannabis use, for which there is no significant difference.
- No interaction effect was found between gender and level of delinquency.
- A history of sexual abuse is one of the variables associated with severity of PAS use.



## Conclusion

This study has shown that the more delinquent adolescents report more severe addictions, even when controlling for history of physical and sexual abuse. These results support the hypothesis of a directly proportional relationship between evolution of PAS use trajectories and delinquency trajectories. However, no causal relationship can be inferred from this study due to the absence of longitudinal measures. No interaction effect was found between gender and severity of delinquency in association with severity of addiction. Therefore it does not appear that the degree of delinquency plays a different role by gender in terms of its relationships with the severity of addiction. However, the effects of gender and severity of delinquency are cumulative since highly delinquent girls show higher levels of PAS addiction. These results support the notion that PAS use and delinquency in adolescence are part of an amalgamation of behaviours that are manifestations of a deviant lifestyle, especially when there is greater severity of both behaviours. In sum, it is important that the subject of delinquency not be ignored in early addiction intervention and rehabilitation among youths since these two elements are often closely related.

## Keywords

- / Addiction;
- / Adolescence;
- / Delinquency;
- / Sexual and physical abuse;
- / Treatment.

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## More information

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