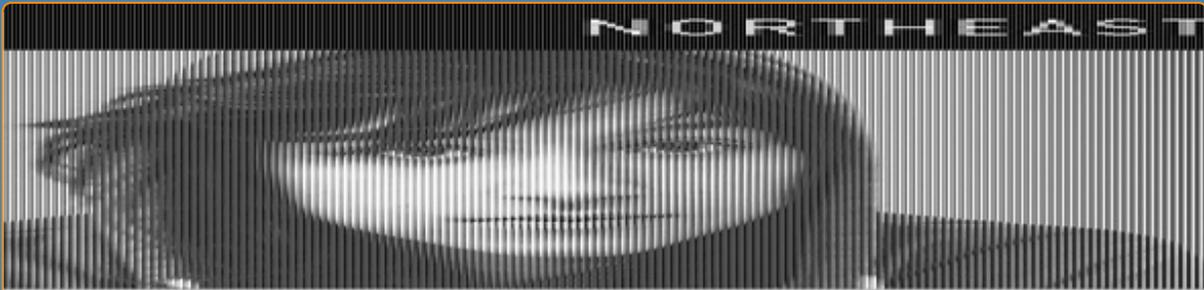


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Dear Colleague:

For this month, the NEARI Press newsletter article explored the prevalence of protective factors in adolescent males and their relationship to both risk level and future offending behaviors. **The study results found that the presence of protective factors does encourage criminal desistance, especially with lower and moderate risk adolescent offenders.** The results also provide a hopeful message suggesting that the presence of one SAVRY protective factor may lead to the development of other protective factors.

We hope you find this newsletter compelling as much as we do in writing it. As always, if you have any other questions or suggestions for future newsletter topics, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick
NEARI Press

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The Relationship of Protective Factors with Recidivism

by David S. Prescott and Joan Tabachnick

Authors

Stephanie Shepherd, Stefan Luebbers, and James Ogloff

The Question

What is the impact of introducing protective factors with high-risk adolescents?

The Research

Recognizing the focus of most risk assessment tools on exploring the factors contributing to anti-social behavior, Stephanie Shepherd, Stephan Luebbers, and James Ogloff explored the prevalence of protective factors and their relationship to both risk level and future offending. Past studies have found that the magnitude of protective factors is inversely related to violence recidivism, but given the limited number of studies, there is a strong call for further research and exploration.

Protective factors are the attributes and strengths that promote desistance and reduce the risk of offending. Resnick (2000) discussed these factors as the interaction of extra-familial environmental factors (e.g., community and peer groups), family factors (e.g., parenting dynamics),

self-system factors (e.g., connectedness and social responsibility), and individual characteristics (e.g., psychosocial and cognitive development). For this study, the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) instrument was used to identify these protective factors for adolescents in Australian detention programs. The protective factors explored were the ones associated with a lower risk of violence in young people: school engagement and achievement, family connection, non-delinquent peers, low propensity for risk taking, and pro-social attitudes.

Overall, the mean number of protective factors in this sample of 177 adolescents was extremely low (under two) with higher risk clients averaging less than one current protective factor. Lower risk young offenders had significantly more protective factors than higher risk young offenders. As expected, the presence of several protective factors in lower risk young offenders was associated with lower recidivism. However, the patterns of re-offense for high-risk young offenders were unaffected by how many protective factors were identified.

Of the various protective factors measured, it appeared that pro-social involvement and school engagement had the strongest associations with desistance from further offending. Engagement in school does in fact offer the most opportunities in adolescence for pro-social involvement as well as the development of positive relationships with authority figures and a critical self-belief in one's ability and capacity for change and growth. The results also provide a hopeful message suggesting that the presence of one SAVRY protective factor may lead to the development of other protective factors.

Bottom Line: The presence of protective factors does encourage criminal desistance, especially with lower and moderate risk adolescent offenders.

Implications for Professionals

Although risk assessments have traditionally focused on anti-social behaviors, attitudes and circumstances, many professionals and programs working with adolescents have augmented this focus to also build on client strengths, assets, and other positive attributes. This research highlights the importance of active attention in this area. Further, this study offers guidance in areas for balancing and sequencing components in treatment (e.g., addressing criminogenic needs first, especially with high risk clients with violent and/or criminal histories and then building protective factors). More importantly, it offers ideas for which protective factors are particularly meaningful.

Implications for the Field

A crucial implication of this research for the field is that professionals can and should speak out against policies that interfere with or impede desistance, resilience, and the development of protective factors. In particular, this study shows the importance of focusing attention and resources that allow adolescents to access pro-social involvement and education. It is clear that based on these two factors alone it is more effective in the long run to keep lower risk adolescents in the community and oriented towards healthy and normative activities to the greatest extent possible. This research also speaks to the importance of high-quality assessments to identify truly high-risk adolescents, especially when one considers that the rate of criminal offending amongst adolescents can be considerably higher than those of adults. Ultimately, attention to these factors can improve the quality of life of these adolescents at the same time as it improves community safety.

Abstract

This study sought to ascertain the prevalence of protective factors and association with client risk level and future offending in a sample of 177 Australian youth in detention. The Protective Domain on the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) instrument was utilized to identify protective items in the cohort. The mean number of protective factors for the entire sample

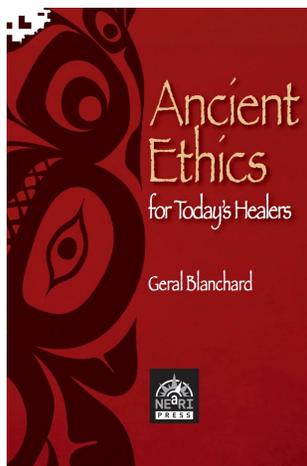
was low (under two) with higher risk clients averaging less than one current protective item. Although the number of protective factors engendered criminal desistance, this effect did not extend to the highest risk young offenders. Clients who re-offended were significantly less likely to present with five out of the six SAVRY protective items. In addition, pro-social involvement and school engagement had the strongest associations with non re-offense. Clinical implications for client risk management are discussed.

Citation

Shephard, S.M., Luebbers, S., & Ogloff, J.R.P. (2016). The role of protective factors and the relationship with recidivism for high-risk young people in detention. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 43, 863–878.

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by GERAL BLANCHARD

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