Research Question

- Is there a relationship between verbal abuse of children and later delinquency and incarceration?
- Does an individual's self-esteem moderate the association between verbal abuse and incarceration?

Why Incarceration?

- According to the Children’s Defense Fund, approximately 76,000 children are placed within the adult criminal justice system each year.
- The combination of compromised social support, economic need, mental health, and substance abuse problems interact to compromise parents’ abilities to effectively parent their children (Lopez 2009).
- In 2015, 48,043 children were incarcerated on an average night; and every 30 seconds a child was arrested (Children’s Defense Fund 2019).

Hypotheses

- Children who report being verbally abused will be more likely to be incarcerated as an adult.
- Self-esteem with moderate the relationship between verbal abuse as a child and incarceration in later life.

Data Base

- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health
- Waves 1 and 4
- In-home surveys of adolescents.
- Public-use data.

Independent Variable

Verbal Abuse

“Before your 18th birthday how often did a parent or other adult caregiver say things that really hurt your feelings or made you feel not wanted or loved?”

Dependent Variable

Incarceration

“What do you agree or disagree with the statement... You like yourself just the way you are?”

Moderator Variable

Self-esteem

“Do you agree or disagree with the following statement... You like yourself just the way you are?”

Summary of Findings

- There is a positive association between verbal abuse and later incarceration.
- Self-esteem happened to be a strong moderator for those who reported being abused 1-2 times and 10+ times.
- Self-esteem protected those individuals from incarceration.

Limitations and Future Directions

- A limitation is that ADD Health is a school-based sample and those who are most likely to be incarcerated may have already dropped out.
- Future research could examine whether verbal abuse is associated with incarceration in juvenile versus adult facilities.

Resources