



Two Developmental Pathways among Male Forensic Patients

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WHAT DID WE DO & WHY?

Understanding how people develop into criminal offenders, and the different pathways they take, can help identify risk factors and causes of criminal offending. Most research in this area studies adolescents, and there is very little work on the developmental pathways of forensic patients, who are admitted to psychiatric hospitals because of their involvement with the criminal justice system. In 2001, Waypoint researchers identified two developmental pathways. One began with childhood problems that may have led to impaired brain functioning and mental illness. The other involved disruptive and antisocial behavior that emerged before adolescence. The antisocial pathway seemed to have less to do with physical or mental illness (pathology). This has implications for whether such men should be considered mentally ill. We studied these pathways in a new generation of 628 men admitted to our forensic assessment program.

OUR FINDINGS

We confirmed two pathways — neuro-developmental problems and antisociality — replicating the older study. We then found that these paths were related to adult health indicators. Patients on the path of neuro-developmental problems had poorer health as adults (obesity, higher blood pressure), and patients on the antisociality path had better health (fewer health problems, youthful appearance). That is, less evidence of physical or mental illness. This finding is consistent with antisociality being a non-pathological condition (i.e., not a disease or mental disorder).

WHAT'S NEXT?

We did not find a relation between pathways and problems within the hospital (aggression or symptoms of mental disorder). Our measures of these problems were limited, and we recommend future studies of other clinically relevant events (e.g., treatment compliance, seclusion). Clinicians could use the results of the present study to assess patients and identify their paths. This could aid in early identification of adult offenders prone to poor physical health.

KEY MESSAGES

- Two developmental pathways were confirmed in a new generation of forensic patients
- Findings support antisociality being a non-pathological condition
- Pathways could help clinicians identify patients prone to poor physical health

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