

Are antisocial youth cognitively impaired?

–Is the teen who would steal your car the same kind of person as the teen who would physically attack you in the street?

Yes, says traditional psychological, psychiatric and criminological views.

No, says a group of researchers the University of Montreal in Canada, Rutgers University in the USA, and the King's College Institute of Psychiatry in London.

The international team recently examined the development of physical violence and theft in a sample of 698 men followed between the ages of 12 and 31. These researchers also examined how violence and theft related to the men's intellectual functioning in late adolescence/early adulthood.

What they found was that only 1 in 10 of the men became more physically violent during adolescence, whereas 1 in 2 men became more involved in thievery during the same period. They also found that the men doing the stealing were significantly smarter than those committing acts of violence.

What's important about these findings is that standard clinical diagnoses commonly classify violent and non-violent children and adolescents into the same diagnostic category: Conduct Disorder. Conduct Disorder essentially covers four different types of antisocial behavior: violence towards people and animals, deceitfulness and theft, destruction of property, and serious violations of rules.

By presupposing that a child who is aggressive towards people is the same kind of person as a child who is deceitful and engaging in theft, conventional practice may offer these very different children the same interventions — which are modestly effective at best. This new research challenges these assumptions by suggesting that researchers and clinicians may have been mixing apples and oranges by offering the same diagnoses and interventions to developmentally and intellectually different problem youth. This research increases the possibility of finding more effective and efficient interventions for each type of person.

Reference: Barker, E. D., Séguin, J. R., Raskin White, H., Bates, M. E., Lacourse, É., Carbonneau, R., Tremblay, R. E. (2007). Developmental Trajectories of Male Physical Violence and Theft. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 64, 592-599.

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