

PREDICTING ADOLESCENT/ADULT VIOLENCE

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Several characteristics are associated with future violent behavior among adolescents. The findings, which appear in the American Journal of Public Health (April, 2000), could help shape violence prevention programs.

These researchers studied data from a 5-year longitudinal survey of more than 4,300 high school seniors and dropouts from California and Oregon. The researchers analyzed seventh-grade factors for their ability to predict different types of violent behavior 5 years later.

The team found that adolescents who acted out by stealing or getting in trouble at school in grade 7 were significantly more likely to be violent 5 years later than those who did not. If these adolescents also had poor grades, This combination predicted relational and predatory violence, as well as overall violence.

The researchers also found that children who did not develop any strong bonds during their elementary school years were more likely than others to engage in overall and relational violence as older teens were. Bad schools, where cigarette and marijuana use were comparatively high, also fostered violence in older adolescents, they found.

Several factors seemed to affect boys and girls differently. For example, girls in grade 7 who had low self-esteem were more prone to relational violence 5 years later, as were girls who went to schools in poor neighborhoods. Neither of these variables was significant for boys, the researchers noted.

These results suggest that violence prevention programs aimed at younger adolescents should include efforts to prevent or reduce troublesome behavior in school and poor academic performance. It is also recommend that these programs begin in elementary school as deviant behavior and poor academic orientation started at least as early as grade 6 and probably earlier. Finally, they suggest that programs aimed at preventing drug use may yield an added violence-reduction bonus."