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Predictors of Police Contact Among Midwestern Homeless and Runaway Youth

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Research has substantiated that homeless and runaway youth are at high risk for offending and deviant behavior. Although gender, abuse, and deviant peers have been implicated in arrests among homeless youth, we know less about whether these precursors operate similarly for police harassment as well as for postrunaway arrest. In a study of 361 Midwestern homeless and runaway youth, several differences were noted between the predictors of arrest and police harassment. First, path-analytic techniques demonstrated that having deviant friends promoted harassment but not arrest. Second, substance use was the impetus for police harassment, whereas age at first runaway was consequential for arrest. Third, physically abused youth encountered more harassment, yet minor delinquent behavior increased the risk of arrest.

Keywords: *homeless and runaway adolescents; arrest; police harassment*

The pathways to deviant survival strategies and criminal street behavior have been fleshed out in the homeless and runaway literature. However, we know less about the linkages that result in actual police contact. For instance, few studies have evaluated the precursors to police harassment and postrunaway arrest. The purpose of this article is to assess whether police harassment and arrest are affected more by dysfunctional home lives and minor delinquency rather than by more proximate risky street behavior.

Runaway behavior increases the likelihood of juvenile arrest. By examining official arrest records, Kaufman and Spatz-Widom (1999) reported that running away multiple times prior to 15 years of age increased the odds of juvenile arrest by 3:1. The primary focus in the homeless and runaway literature has been externalizing behaviors, barring a few

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studies that explored criminal charges (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997), incarceration (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992a), and arrest (Chapple, Johnson, & Whitbeck, 2004; Kaufman & Spatz-Widom, 1999; Yoder, Munoz, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & McMorris, 2005). For instance, assaulting behavior (Baron & Hartnagel, 1998); deviant subsistence strategies, such as stealing, burglary, shoplifting, and prostitution to get money or food (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999); involvement in violent crime, drug selling, and serious theft (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997); and drug use (Chen, Tyler, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2004) are well-known among street youth.

There are some interesting contrasts while comparing self-reported offending and police contact. For instance, the number of days living independent of one's family has proven to be a risk factor for deviant subsistence strategies (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999) but not for postrunaway arrest (Chapple et al., 2004). Living on the street as opposed to living in a shelter and the number of weeks in that environment had independent effects on incarceration among homeless youth (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992a).

In addition, there is no conclusive evidence whether familial abuse has a direct or indirect impact on police contact and offending. For example, abuse/neglect increased the odds of juvenile arrest after controlling for runaway behavior (Kaufman & Spatz-Widom, 1999). Alternatively, Hagan and McCarthy (1992) contend that street life is an intervening variable between coercive parental practices and serious theft. Whitbeck and Hoyt (1999) illustrate that deviant friends are the missing link between familial physical/sexual abuse and deviant subsistence strategies to get money or food.

In sum, this study will explore the pathways to police harassment and arrest, unraveling similarities and differences. Because the avenues to police contact are not well developed in the studies reviewed, this article fills a gap in the literature by simultaneously evaluating the sequence of life events that culminates in police harassment and postrunaway arrest. In addition, less is known about whether physical abuse and minor delinquent behavior will have direct effects on police harassment or if amplification is due to close ties with street deviants and street drug use. By analyzing data from the Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents, this study aims to untangle the effects of physical abuse, delinquent behavior, age at first runaway, and situational characteristics of homelessness (e.g., deviant peers and substance use) on police harassment and postrunaway arrest.

Predictors of Police Contact

Most studies exploring the connection between homelessness and police contact have targeted the adult population. Providing evidence that violence was not a by-product of homelessness, a classic study of criminality among Texas males in the mid-1980s estimated that homeless men were arrested for only 1% of violent crimes despite being arrested for more than 50% of alcohol-related offenses (Snow, Baker, & Anderson, 1989). Regarding Midwestern homeless adult males, 30% reported a felony conviction, and 40% reported incarceration (Simons & Whitbeck, 1991). One explanation offered for the arrest rates among homeless adults is criminalization of routine activities. For instance, carrying backpacks and possessing cardboard cutters have resulted in arrests for squatting and carrying concealed weapons, respectively (Aulette & Aulette, 1987).

Police Contact Among Homeless Adolescents

Police contact was rather common for Midwestern homeless adolescents, with 44% reporting an arrest (Thrane, 2003). Among Northeastern runaways, one third of boys and more than one fifth (21%) of girls reported an arrest in the past 3 months (Cauce et al., 2000). Although 50% of runaways acknowledged police harassment (Thrane, 2003), nearly two thirds (61%) of homeless boys (vs. 39% for girls) were hassled by police (Cauce et al., 2000). Furthermore, gender differences were illustrated in a group of postrunaway arrestees. After running away from home, females reported 2.45 mean arrests compared with 3.67 for males (Chapple et al., 2004). Homelessness in and of itself was a critical risk factor for incarceration among Canadian street youth (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992a).

Even less attention has been paid to homeless youths' perception of the police. Auerswald and Eyre (2002) conducted participant observation and interviews with 20 San Francisco homeless youth. Youth reported distrustful and fearful attitudes toward the police. One 18-year-old male stated, "If you find a place where the cops won't harass you, then you're set" (p. 1502). In qualitative accounts, Hagan and McCarthy (1997) emphasized that street youth involved in drug dealing trained new recruits to identify undercover police officers. The uninitiated were oblivious to the fact that plainclothes officers were surveilling drug-dealing youth, but with mentoring they gained considerable skill in recognizing law enforcement.

Individual Risk Factors

Runaway behavior is often symptomatic of a dysfunctional family system and other problem behaviors and increases the risk of negative developmental outcomes. More than two thirds (70%) of homeless youth cited physical or sexual abuse (Jencks, 1994). Running away is often a rationale to escape neglect and abuse (Thrane, Hoyt, Whitbeck, & Yoder, 2006). Utilizing official arrest data and substantiated cases of abuse and neglect, nearly half of child abuse/neglect victims had been arrested as juveniles or adults compared with only 38% of a control group (Maxfield & Spatz-Widom, 1996). Among a Midwestern sample, neglect and physical abuse were not predictive of postrunaway arrests (Chapple et al., 2004). In contrast, childhood victimization (e.g., abuse/neglect) increased the likelihood of a juvenile arrest after accounting for runaway behavior (Kaufman & Spatz-Widom, 1999).

The length of time being homeless is a risk factor for a host of poor adolescent outcomes. Among Midwestern homeless adolescents, Simons and Whitbeck (1991) reported that the number of episodes of runaway behavior led to stronger involvement with seriously delinquent peers (e.g., selling drugs, prostitution, assault, etc.). As the chronicity of homelessness increased, youth were at a greater risk of alcohol and drug abuse (Kipke, Montgomery, Simon, & Iverson, 1997).

Delinquent behavior at home was a risk factor for street criminality among Canadian homeless youth (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). More than half (53%) of homeless youth met criteria for disruptive behavior disorders (e.g., conduct and oppositional defiant disorders) as assessed by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, third edition, revised (*DSM-III-R*) criteria. With regard to behavioral disorders, 17% met criteria for clinical intervention. Boys and youth between 13 and 15 years of age reported higher levels of

externalizing behavior (Cauce et al., 2000). Individual propensity for deviant behavior is amplified in the street subculture. Runaways become entangled in a deviant trajectory as they become exposed to deviant street friends and lack legitimate means for survival. Many turn to antisocial street peers, drug use, and deviance to survive (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999).

Street Risk Factors

Deviant social ties share a robust association with delinquency (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Among homeless male adolescents, criminal peers led to higher levels of self-reported property and violent crime (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997) and assault (Baron & Hartnagel, 1998). Canadian homeless youth estimated that between two and five of their friends had been arrested (McCarthy & Hagan 1992b). Friendships with antisocial peers increased the use of deviant subsistence strategies (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). Deviant peer relationships exerted a strong influence on self-reported arrests, although a higher degree of criminality among friends boosted arrests for homeless adolescent males (Chapple et al., 2004).

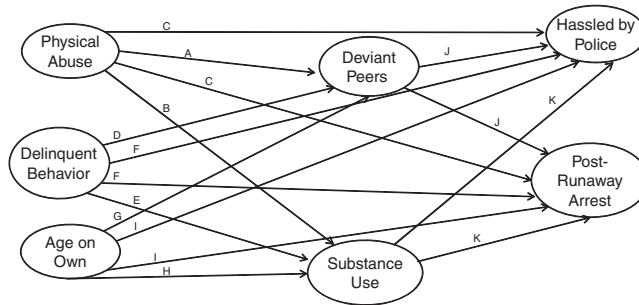
Studies have reported that street life is conducive to drug and alcohol use (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Kipke et al., 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Yates, MacKenzie, Pennbridge, & Cohen, 1988; Zimet et al., 1995). The rate of drug abuse has been reported as 57% among runaways in Los Angeles, California (Yates et al., 1988). If classified by *DSM-III* criteria, nearly three quarters (71%) of homeless youth had a substance-related disorder (Kipke et al., 1997). Roughly one third (30%) of homeless youth in Cleveland, Ohio, consumed alcohol on a weekly basis, whereas about one quarter (26%) used marijuana on a monthly basis (Zimet et al., 1995). Among homeless and runaway youth, substance use contributed to theft, burglary, shoplifting (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999), delinquency (Inciardi, Horowitz, & Pottieger, 1993), and being hassled by police and being arrested (Thrane, 2003).

Theoretical Model

Whitbeck and Hoyt (1999) fused developmental and social interaction theories (Patterson, 1982) into a risk amplification model for homeless and runaway youth arguing that parental criminality and physical abuse have the net effect of pushing youth into early independence and deviance, similar to the trajectory of the life-course persistent offender (Moffitt, 1993). Runaways often exchange an abusive familial relationship for an exploitive deviant peer network, reflecting the same coercive strategies and reinforcing their “basic training” in the home. Deviant social networks also place youth at elevated risk of alcohol and substance use and high-risk survival strategies that generally coincide with justice system contact.

Figure 1 provides a concrete representation of the hypothesized model and the pathways from home and risky street behavior to police harassment and arrest for homeless and runaway youth. It was predicted that physical abuse was an impetus for deviant street behavior as well as harassment and arrest. A well-established finding is a positive association between abuse and attachment to deviant peers (Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989;

Figure 1
Hypothesized Model



Note: Gender and age are controlled in this model.

Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). We predicted higher levels of physical abuse to correspond with stronger ties to deviants (Figure 1, Arrow A). Several studies report a link between abuse and drug use (Baron, 1999; Chen et al., 2004; Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Drug use may function as a coping strategy to ease emotional distress (Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Direct effects were tested between physical abuse and substance use (Arrow B). Consonant with our hypothesized relationship (Arrows C), the consequences of abuse and neglect are far-reaching and place youth at an elevated risk of several poor developmental outcomes including arrest (Chapple et al., 2004; Kaufman & Spatz Widom, 1999) and deviant street behavior (Hier & Korboot, 1990; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990).

Midwestern adolescents who repeatedly ran away were at a much greater risk of developing friendships with deviants (Simons & Whitbeck, 1991). We hypothesize a direct relationship (Arrow G) that will in turn lead to harassment and arrest (Arrows J). Youth who were exposed to longer periods of homelessness were at an elevated risk of alcohol and drug abuse disorders (Kipke et al., 1997). Therefore, we estimate a direct effect between age at first runaway and substance use (Arrow H), because running away at an early age often results in longer street exposure and is an indicator of earlier serious problem behaviors (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). We expect that longer periods of street visibility will lead to police apprehension (Arrows I).

Because antisocial behavior is likely to be magnified on the street (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt), we hypothesize that minor delinquent behavior will lead to association with deviant street peers (Arrow D) and substance use (Arrow E). Our premise is that self-reported minor delinquent activities and drug use increases the odds of police harassment and arrest (Arrows F and K) either purely because of chance (Hood & Sparks, 1970) or because the number of incidents increases the probability of police detection (Dunford & Elliott, 1984). Although alcohol/drug use is illegal for homeless and runaway adolescents, it is prevalent (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999) and predictive of theft, burglary, and shoplifting (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). A direct effect is tested between substance use as well as harassment and arrest (Arrows K).

Gender and age were controlled in the model. Because scholars have generally agreed that males have higher rates of delinquency and criminal involvement (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), we expect that males would exhibit higher levels of maladaptive street behavior and report police harassment and arrest. We anticipate the highest rates of deviant behavior during this life stage and a subsequent decline with the emergence of young adulthood (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Measurement

Sample

In the Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents, 428 (187 males and 241 females) homeless youth were interviewed directly on the streets and in shelters in 8 Midwestern cities (St. Louis, Kansas City, Omaha, Lincoln, Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, and Wichita). Adolescents ranged in age from 16 to 19 years, with an average age of 17.4 years (standard deviation [*SD*] = 1.04). The following analysis was limited to 361 adolescents who were not arrested before running away from home so that we would not confound delinquent behavior with the amplification of street risk factors resulting in police contact.

Procedures

We designed a sampling strategy for the current study that incorporated sampling units of fixed and natural sites similar to the design used by Kipke in her Los Angeles study of homeless youth (Kipke et al., 1997) with a year-long window of sampling. Research has demonstrated that a sampling design that involves multiple points of entry to homeless populations is most effective in generating a diverse sample (Burt, 1996; Koegel, Burnam, & Morton, 1996). All participants met the study's criteria for homelessness. Homelessness was defined as residing in a shelter, on the street, or living independently (e.g., friends, transitional living, etc.), because they had run away, been pushed out, or drifted out of their families of origin.

Adolescents were informed that this was a longitudinal study. First, the study was explained, and informed consent was obtained from the adolescent. Second, all adolescents were asked if their parents could be contacted. If permission was granted, parents were contacted, informed consent was obtained, and they were asked to participate in an interview. If the adolescent was sheltered, we followed the shelter policies of parental permission for placement and the guidelines for granting permission. These policies were always based on state laws. In the few cases where the adolescents were under 18 years, not sheltered, and refused permission to contact parents, the adolescents were treated as emancipated minors in accord with National Institute of Health guidelines (Title 45, Part 46, Code of Federal Regulations; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). A National Institute of Mental Health Certificate of Confidentiality was obtained to protect the respondent's statement regarding potentially illegal activities (e.g., drug use).

Based on interviewer reports, approximately 90% of the adolescents who were approached for an initial interview and who met study criteria agreed to participate in the study. Of the 455 respondents who completed the first interview, 94.3% ($n = 428$) completed the second baseline interview. The respondents were paid \$25 for the first interview and \$25 for the second.

Measures

Physical abuse. Physical abuse was an indicator of parental/caretaker abuse. A mean of seven items (e.g., thrown something, hit with an object, pushed or shoved, slapped in the face, beaten up, threatened, and wounded with a weapon) adapted from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus & Gelles, 1990) was calculated. Unstandardized Cronbach's α for the seven items was .83. The mean value was 1.31 ($SD = 0.76$). Higher values of this measure are suggestive of higher rates of physical abuse.

Delinquent behavior. Delinquent behavior is the sum of seven items. Drawn from the youth self-report delinquent subscale (Achenbach, 1991), youth reported on things such as lying, feeling guilty, setting fires, stealing at home or other places, using dirty language or swearing, and cutting classes. Response categories for individual items ranged from 0 (*false*) to 2 (*always true*). Values ranged from 0 to 14 for the instrument ($Mean = 5.09$; $SD = 2.34$). This construct had a reliability coefficient (unstandardized Cronbach α) of .60. Higher scores are indicative of higher levels of delinquent behavior.

Age on own. Age on own was a continuous measure, constructed from the age that adolescents reported they had first run away. Adolescents indicated that they had run away for the first time when they were 13 years on average. Because a histogram indicated that the variable was negatively skewed, the measure was reflected (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). To reduce skewness, a log transformation was applied. As a result, the interpretation of age on own was reversed. As age on own increases, adolescents run away earlier in life, not later.

Deviant peers. Deviant peers were constructed of six items. Respondents were asked if any of their close friends had ever engaged in delinquent activities. This measure is commonly applied in samples of homeless and runaway youth to tap association with seriously deviant street friends (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). The largest factor loadings were for assaulting (.82) or threatening (.78) someone with a weapon. Breaking in and taking things (.66) and severely beating someone up (.61) had moderate factor loadings. Selling sexual favors (.58) and taking money from someone (.55) had slightly lower factor loadings. Higher scale values are suggestive of stronger ties to delinquent friends.

Substance use. Substance use was a factor scale constructed from three items. Respondents reported how often they had used a list of substances in the past 12 months. Drinking beer (.86) and hard liquor (.85) as well as smoking marijuana (.70) had robust factor loadings. Higher scale values indicate higher levels of substance use.

Table 1
Correlation Matrix ($n = 354$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Female	—								
2. Age	-.22**	—							
3. Physical abuse	.01	.13*	—						
4. Delinquent behavior	-.22**	.06	.15**	—					
5. Age on own (log) ^a	-.09	-.09	.24**	.13*	—				
6. Deviant peers	-.10	.16**	.21**	.33**	.22**	—			
7. Substance use	-.15**	.11*	.09	.38**	.07	.28**	—		
8. Hassled by police	-.24**	.13*	.16**	.23**	.13*	.26**	.27**	—	
9. Postrunaway arrest	-.20**	.14**	.11*	.31**	.25**	.22**	.18**	.12*	—
Mean	.59	17.37	1.31	5.09	.80	.00	.00	.45	.55
Standard deviation	.49	1.06	.76	2.34	.19	1.00	1.00	.50	.50

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

a. Measure is reflected.

Postrunaway arrest and police harassment. Postrunaway arrest was a dichotomous construct that measured self-reported arrest after running away from home the first time. Overall, 55% of respondents ($n = 200$) reported that they were arrested. Respondents were also asked if they had been hassled by the police in the past 12 months, but not arrested. Hassled by police was dichotomized (0 = no; 1 = yes) with 45% ($n = 161$) citing negative police encounters.

Age and gender were controlled for in the model. Age ranged from 16 to 19 years (mean = 17.4). Gender was coded 0 = males and 1 = females.

Results

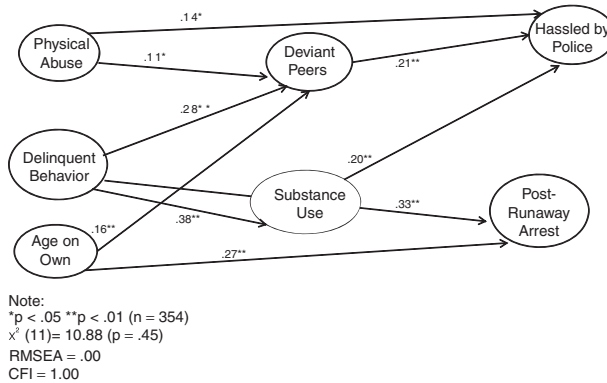
Intercorrelations

The correlation matrix and descriptive statistics of all the variables are presented in Table 1. Police harassment and arrest were reported more often by males ($r = -.24$; $r = -.20$, respectively) and older adolescents ($r = .13$; $r = .14$). Physical abuse and, to a greater extent, minor delinquent behavior were correlated with being hassled by police and arrest. Being hassled ($r = .13$) and arrested ($r = .25$) were reported more often by younger runaways. The formation of deviant social ties was linked to both outcomes. Police harassment ($r = .27$) and postrunaway arrest ($r = .18$) were more common for those who were heavy substance users.

Path Model of Predictors of Police Contact

First, we fitted the hypothesized theoretical model (Figure 1). To obtain a more parsimonious path model, a few nested models were then tested, with each constraining certain

Figure 2
Path Model for Adolescent Contact With the Police



Note: Gender and age are controlled in this model.

nonsignificant paths to zero. The reduced model is presented in Figure 2 with beta coefficients. Because the outcome variables were dichotomous, the weighted least squares estimation technique was applied in Mplus 4.1 (Muthen & Muthen, 2006). The path model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 10.88$; $df = 11$; $p = .45$). The comparative fit index was 1.00 and the root mean square error of approximation was zero and confirmed that the reduced model accurately reproduced the relationships among the variables. The path model explained about one quarter (22%) of the variance in police harassment and 26% of the variation in arrest.

In Figure 1, arrows connect a predictor variable on the left (physical abuse, delinquent behavior, and age at first runaway) with dependent variables conducive to street risk (deviant peers and substance use) or police contact. Direct effects are indicated by an arrow that connects a predictor variable with a dependent variable without passing through any other intervening variables (e.g., Arrow C). In contrast, by passing through another variable, an indirect effect connects a predictor variable with police harassment or arrest. For example, the indirect effect of delinquent behavior on arrest is represented by Arrows D and J.

Physical abuse was an important determinant of street risk factors and police intervention. At higher levels of physical abuse, adolescents had stronger ties to deviants ($\beta = .11$), and it exerted a direct effect on police harassment ($\beta = .14$). Delinquent behavior was also connected to drug use and deviant friendships as well as risk of arrest. Adolescents who were bent on delinquent activity were involved with deviant peers ($\beta = .28$) and substance use ($\beta = .38$). A higher rate of delinquent activity increased the chances of an arrest ($\beta = .33$). Youth who ran away earlier reported stronger association with deviant peers ($\beta = .16$) and had a higher risk of postrunaway arrest ($\beta = .27$). In terms of situational aspects of homelessness, deviant peer contact set the stage for police harassment ($\beta = .21$). It did not influence the likelihood of arrest, but substance use contributed to police harassment ($\beta = .20$).

Roughly 15% of the influence of physical abuse on police harassment was through stronger affiliation with deviant peers (not shown). Conversely, the effect of delinquent behavior on police harassment (.14) was totally through the amplification of risky street

behavior. For example, substance use contributed a bit more to police harassment than deviant friends did (.08 vs. .06). Age at first runaway increased affiliation with deviant peers and the likelihood of police harassment. For the most part, risk of arrest due to delinquent behavior was unchanged by risky street behaviors.

After controlling for the effects of gender and age (not shown), males were more likely to be arrested and harassed by the police. However, association with deviant friends and substance use did not differ by gender. With regard to age, older adolescents had more deviant peers and were arrested more often. Age did not influence substance use or police harassment.

Discussion

This study found that postrunaway arrest was 55% compared with 44% of a sample of Midwestern runaway and homeless youth. Although police harassment was slightly lower, we found that 45% of youth reported police harassment compared with 50% of homeless adolescents (Thrane, 2003).

Evidence of the risk amplification model was apparent as street risk factors strengthened the relationship between physical abuse and police harassment. Family victimization intensifies the tendency to develop friendships with street deviants and to attract negative police attention in the form of harassment, which extends Whitbeck and Hoyt's (1999) finding of the mediating effect of delinquent peers on the relationship between abuse and use of deviant subsistence strategies.

Consistent with expectations, physical abuse also has a direct impact on being hassled by police. The fact that abuse increases police harassment may be due to a behavioral style learned in dysfunctional families that translates into engaging authority figures with confrontational strategies and perceiving a hostile response where none was intended. Homeless, abused youth may have behavioral and attitudinal characteristics that raise red flags for the police and promote scrutiny. Contrary to predictions, physical abuse does not precipitate an official arrest label. Perhaps, arrests are conditioned by more proximate and contextual circumstances (Browning, Cullen, Cao, Kopache, & Stevenson, 1994). Police officers not only evaluate a suspect's demeanor but also witness testimony and other evidence.

Although there are similarities to other studies, our analysis also reflects some interesting differences in the predictors of police contact. Younger runaways were more likely to associate with deviant peers and to report an arrest. The latter finding is supported by a marginal relationship between age at first runaway and arrest for serious offenses (Yoder et al., 2005). However, previous research found no relationship between the length of time that adolescents were living on their own and arrest (Chapple et al., 2004).

Minor delinquent activity had an association with the deviant street culture, particularly deviant peers. Criminal friends in turn predicted police harassment but added nothing to the risk of arrest. Police may perceive that the immersion in a deviant network leaves fewer legitimate options to exit street life. However, taking part in the illegitimate economy increases adolescents' risks of police suspicion and questioning. Deviant peers also provide youth with protection from predators and access to illicit resources. Previous research has

supported a linkage between deviant peers and number of arrests (Chapple et al., 2004). Although our results are supportive of a bivariate association, this effect fades away when modeling the simultaneous precursors of arrest and harassment.

It was predicted that substance use would be positively associated with police harassment and arrest. Studies have shown that drug use is integral to street life (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) and that it facilitates acceptance into the street community. In most instances, engaging in illicit behavior such as drug use will promote scrutiny by law enforcement. Being an insider in the street culture further alienates youth from mainstream society and solidifies a deviant trajectory. Deviating from our hypothesis, drug use did not lead to arrest. In this context, police officers may hassle adolescents to discourage substance use but may not pursue an arrest unless it is a flagrant violation. In this case, our measure only tapped relatively minor substance use (e.g., marijuana and alcohol use).

Limitations of this study are sampling technique, cross-sectional data, and single-reporter accounts. Agencies serving these youth are naturally under time constraints that reinforced a selection bias. The majority of the adolescents in this sample were shelter youth, although they were not immune to living on streets. This sample was drawn from the Midwest, which restricts the nature of generalizing to youth in other regions of the country. Although the model may fit well and be theoretically defensible, it does not imply causality. Longitudinal data are needed to make draw causal inferences.

In addition, all measures are based on self-report, and the measure of police harassment may be open to perceptual bias. For instance, police harassment could be perceived as surveilling homeless youth as well as stopping and questioning them about their involvement in selling drugs. Furthermore, it could be that youths' contact with police is the result of community policing. In encounters perceived by youth as harassment, police officers may be providing services to homeless and runaway youth, such as offering them information and referrals to youth agencies.

In sum, we find support for distinctive pathways to harassment and arrest. Among youth who reported police harassment, physical abuse proved consequential in and of itself. Street risk factors also strengthened individual-level vulnerabilities. Victimization by caretakers steered youth toward friendships with deviants and increased their risk of harassment. Deviant peers and drug use led to police harassment.

In contrast to police harassment, penalties accrued in different ways for youth who were arrested. Precocious independence only hastened official contact with the justice system. As expected, minor delinquency was a direct route to street arrest and the trajectory of the life-course persistent offender. Perhaps, a higher risk of arrest results from a combination of delinquent activity and aggressive interpersonal characteristics used to engage police officers. This study concludes that the paths to harassment and arrest are mainly divergent and that the amplification of street factors is more pronounced for police harassment.

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