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# USING THE JUVENILE OFFENDER PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE (JOPQ) AS A RISK AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## A Prospective Study

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*This study is an investigation of the potential utility of a parent self-report instrument, the Juvenile Offender Parent Questionnaire (JOPQ). Based on the ecological model of child development, this instrument is designed to measure several parental constructs related to child behavior problems and delinquency. Findings suggest that specific parenting profiles are related to subsequent greater likelihood of recidivism and to specific offenses. Furthermore, the use of the JOPQ as an instrument to assess the needs of parents and the prevention of recidivism is supported.*

**Keywords:** *juvenile offenders; assessment; delinquency; parenting*

In response to growing concerns, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) issued a request for proposals that addressed the problems associated with high recidivism rates for repeat juvenile offenders (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996). An OJJDP administrator wrote,

One of our biggest challenges in the juvenile justice system is to prevent juveniles from re-offending and being re-incarcerated following their release from secure confinement. As arrests for juveniles for violent crime continue to rise, rates of incarceration will also rise unless we are successful in this task. (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996, pp. iii)

The OJJDP (1996) reported the most effective sanctions are those that (a) address pertinent areas of risk in the youth's life, (b) seek to strengthen the protective factors that contribute to

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positive adolescent development, (c) provide adequate supervision and support, and (d) offer youths a long-term investment in the community. The focus of the current study was on the goal of strengthening protective factors through providing juvenile courts with an instrument designed to effectively identify risk and parental needs so that support and remedial services may be either offered or mandated.

Assessment is an important approach to classification and diagnosis of antisocial behavior and/or parent-child relational problems (Glaser, Calhoun, Bradshaw, Bates, & Socherman, 2001). Moreover, counseling and assessment are often appropriate vehicles for change. Today's juvenile justice system confronts negative influences on youths (e.g., media, violence, gangs, poverty, drugs), which produces a growing number of more serious and violent juvenile offenders. Of particular concern is the dramatic rise in violent offenses committed by adolescents (OJJDP, 1998). For instance, the rate of violent juvenile crime increased by 67% between 1986 and 1995, and the rate of homicides committed by juveniles increased by 90% during this same time period (OJJDP, 1998).

The goal of prevention or treatment efforts is to decrease the number of risk factors while increasing the protective factors (Sanjuan & Langenbucher, 1999). Although risk and protective factors can exert their effects in a variety of ways that are not completely understood at this time, there are some general characteristics that have been consistently identified across studies (Padina, 1996). Risk and protective factors vary across cultural and socioeconomic groups, as well as geographic location of the offender. Greater pretreatment severity of drug use, criminal history, educational failure, low perception of family independence, and high perception of family control are all risk factors and have been shown to predict poor treatment outcome. Factors that operate during treatment that predict better outcome may be designated as protective factors and often include (a) motivation, (b) perceived choice in seeking treatment, (c) rapport with clinician or staff, (d) special services (education, vocational training, relaxation training, recreation), and (e) parental involvement (Catalano, Hawkins, Wells, Miller, & Brewer, 1991).

Research with respect to the characteristics of antisocial behavior and juvenile offenders exists in vast quantities. In contrast, the amount of research is considerably minute regarding the parents of juvenile offenders and parental factors. The tendency of researchers has been to collect copious amounts of information from parents of juvenile offenders concerning all aspects of the child's behavior while little has been done to assess the role and influence that parents play in the development or prevention of the delinquency. This is particularly curious given the fact that parenting has been found to be a significant contributor to antisocial behavior. The research that has been done is often circumscribed to variables such as marital status and family configuration.

Many of the behaviors committed and reported by juveniles appearing in court can be characterized as antisocial that, in turn, challenges researchers to delineate the specific needs for prevention, assessment, and intervention. A thorough review of the empirical literature strongly supports a social-ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) perception of antisocial behavior in which it is multidetermined by the interplay of characteristics of the youths and the salient social systems in which the youths are embedded (i.e., family, peer, school, neighborhood).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social-ecological model hypothesizes the individual and his or her patterns of behavior are formed by and a part of larger systems of influence. These systems begin with one's family and then extend to include, to name a few, peer groups, school systems, and neighborhoods. Evidence of the multidetermined and social-ecological

origins of child and adolescent antisocial behavior may be derived from research that directly examines the cross-sectional correlates and longitudinal predictors of child and adolescent antisocial behavior. Causal models (Calhoun, Glaser, & Bartolomucci, 2001; Henggeler & Schoenwald, 1998; Horne, 1993; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989) have been developed that are multidimensional and define and distinguish these essential correlates and longitudinal predictors.

In 1989, Patterson et al. produced a developmental model of antisocial behavior. They established antisocial behavior as a developmental trait that manifests during early childhood and often continues into an individual's adolescent and adult years (Patterson et al., 1989). These researchers found that the antecedents of antisocial development exist in the home, and parents or guardians of children who are antisocial are characterized by inappropriate discipline, diminished positive parent-child interaction, and poor parental monitoring (Patterson et al. 1989). They further discussed how children are unconsciously trained to behave antisocially through improper parental modeling, supervision, discipline, reinforcement, coercion, and exposure.

In most cases, other contextual variables exist that contribute to the child's antisocial so-called training. These include contexts of low socioeconomic status, ethnicity, deviant peer groups; lack of employment and education opportunities (for child and parent); marital conflict and/or divorce; and other significant contextual stressors. Horne's (1993) research produced similar results and led to the presentation of a model on the developmental progression of juvenile delinquency that distinguishes several familial aspects (e.g., exposure to abusive interactions, divorce, poverty, unemployment, single parenthood, family stressors) that play an integral role in characterizing the etiology to adolescent antisocial behavior.

In 1994, the Juvenile Counseling and Assessment Program (JCAP) was developed in an effort to examine and address the psychological, emotional, and educational needs of court-referred youth and their families through a collaborative partnership among the local juvenile court, the State Department of Juvenile Justice, a regional youth detention center, the Department of Counseling and Human Services Development in the College of Education, and the local southeastern community (Calhoun et al., 2001). In response to growing concerns regarding juvenile antisocial behavior and/or delinquency, the JCAP developed a model based on the integration of an etiological understanding, service delivery, student training, and data collection and analysis. The mission of the JCAP team is to draw together services, research, and training in a collaborative and facilitative manner to best protect juvenile clients and meet their needs. Its goal is to intervene in the lives of youths before the patterns of crime are ingrained, and before these youths develop a lifestyle of criminality requiring more expensive correction efforts (Calhoun et al., 2001).

The JCAP model of the antisocial and delinquent behavior of adolescents distinguishes five variables that must be assessed for effective prevention or intervention. These ecological and predictive variables include the child, school, neighborhood, peers, and family. This model is influenced by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecology model and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. Bronfenbrenner's model focuses on the developing person, the environment, and the evolving interaction between the person and the environment. Bronfenbrenner (1986) expanded to a family focus that analyzes the "external influences that affect the capacity of families to foster the healthy development of their children" (p. 723).

Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning emphasizes how people learn from one another and how modeling is a major process to this social learning. Hence, Bandura's the-

ory has far-reaching implications in the study of youth who engage in offending and antisocial behavior. An example of this exists in Patterson et al.'s (1989) depiction of their developmental model and parents' unconscious training (modeling) of antisocial behavior. Moreover, Horne, Norsworthy, Forehand, and Frame (1990) offered a conceptual explanation for how serious conduct disorders in children evolve. Their work also provided a conceptual framework for prevention, assessment, and/or treatment of antisocial behavior in children and adolescents as they addressed the environmental, systemic factors existing in youths, parents, families, schools, teachers, and peer groups that are key in either reinforcing or extinguishing antisocial behavior.

In light of the significant role parenting plays in juvenile delinquency, proponents of the JCAP model developed the Juvenile Offender Parent Questionnaire (JOPQ; Rose, Glaser, Calhoun, & Bates, 2004). The JOPQ is an instrument designed, in part, to serve as a vehicle for prevention and intervention in providing juvenile courts with an assessment instrument designed to effectively measure risk levels of reoffense and to identify parental needs so that support and remedial services may be either offered or mandated. In essence, the overarching goal of the JOPQ is to assist juvenile courts and youth corrections agencies in the rather daunting task of curtailing recidivism and antisocial behavior through strengthening protective parenting factors.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted and good validity and internal consistency were established. In determining the quality of the JOPQ, the reliability coefficient, alpha, was examined. The method selected was Cronbach's alpha, which is one method used for estimating internal consistency. The goal for the items, which made up each of the seven scales (factors) was that each scale would have item homogeneity or would denote that respondents performed consistently across items on the scale and that the items that make up each scale are all measuring the same thing. All scales fell within the good (.70 to .80) to very good range for (.80 to .90) recommended for Cronbach's alphas. Moreover, the total scale reliability fell within the good range. The data for the JOPQ were very encouraging and suggested that the instrument was theoretically and psychometrically sound (Rose et al., 2004).

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the JOPQ's potential utility. Does the JOPQ reach beyond the mere measurement of parental beliefs and concerns? If indeed parenting has the potential of contributing to or facilitating antisocial behavior and/or delinquency, can the JOPQ provide juvenile courts with an effective, albeit supplementary risk and needs assessment?

For the purposes of the current study, *recidivism* was defined as any adjudicated criminal offense that occurred after the initial adjudication of a prior criminal offense. For each JOPQ completed, the child's interaction with the juvenile court was examined for a period of 12 months following adjudication and the completion of the JOPQ(s). Following a designation of no recidivism or recidivism and a determination regarding the severity of the offense, JOPQ profiles were assembled by resulting groups: no recidivism, dependency offenses (e.g., neglect, runaway), status, offenses, drug offenses, public order offenses, and property offenses. If the JOPQ profiles were found to differentiate among subsequent offender groups, the instrument's practical utility would be supported. In addition, the current study examined the categorical levels of recidivism as they related to each parenting variable (e.g., exasperation, mistrust, shame, monitoring, fear, or environment).

## Method

### *Instrument—JOPQ*

The JOPQ (Rose et al., 2004) is a 115-item, parent self-report instrument utilizing a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *completely false* = 1 to *completely true* = 4. A Lie/Infrequency scale ensures that parents are not randomly responding to items. Exploratory factor analysis resulted in the following six scales, which are related to parent agency. Coefficient alphas for the scales ranged from .71 (Shame) to .92 (Exasperation).

*Parental hopelessness (Exasperation)*. This 13-item scale measures the level of parental resignation and hopelessness with regard to the child's future and the parent's ability to positively influence the child. This scale provides an indication of how exasperated the parent is with the child's behavior. It has been referred to as the "end of the rope" scale.

*Mistrust of the juvenile justice system (Mistrust)*. This 13-item subscale measures whether parents perceived the justice system as working for or against their child. This scale shows promise in measuring parents' concern that the system will be inappropriately punitive while failing to provide their child with the extrafamilial help that they believe their child needs (alpha = .82).

*Shame over lack of parenting efficacy (Shame)*. This eight-item subscale measures parents' view of their ability or efficacy to parent this child. Parents high on this dimension view themselves in a critical, self-blaming manner, and may be enabling or inadvertently reinforcing their child's antisocial child behavior. Consequently, high scores on this dimension may be indicative of a coercive cycle of interactions between the parent and youth (Patterson, 1982).

*Parental monitoring of the child (Monitoring)*. This eight-item subscale reflects a parent's view of his or her ability to engage in behaviors that allow for "attention to and tracking of the child's whereabouts, activities, and adaptations" (Dishion & McMahon, 1998, p. 61) as compared to being "out of sight, out of mind" (alpha = .83).

*Fear of the child (Fear)*. This 13-item subscale measures parent fear of the child. Many parents of juvenile offenders have reason to fear their children. Although not widely researched, the literature suggests that 10% of all children between ages 3 and 18 years have attacked their parents (Harbin & Madden, 1979). Patterson (1982) identified the mother as the typical victim in aggressive attacks perpetrated by their children. The reported rates of parent abuse range from 5% (Evans & Warren-Solberg, 1988) to 21% (Kratcoski, 1985). A 1995 pilot study found that when it comes to an assault charge against an adult family member, juveniles accounted for 8.6% and 23.8% of those charged with aggravated assault and simple assault respectively (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.).

*Youth's exposure to violence (Environment)*. This four-item scale measures the parents' reports of the degree to which their child has been exposed to violence in the home and community, as well as through the media (television, movies, computer, and video games).

*Description of the Sample*

The 87 participants were parents or guardians of juveniles between ages 14 to 17 years. The gender of these parents and guardians was 83% women and 17% men, and their ages ranged from 21 to 67 years ( $M = 39.43$ ). Moreover, 42% of the youths whose parents and/or guardians completed JOPQs were women. Participants' variability with respect to race was 38% Black, 49% White, and 1% Other (12% of the sample did not indicate race). Of those completing the instrument, 70% were the mother of the child. According to a general demographics information form completed by the parents and/or guardians prior to completing the JOPQ, households consisted of 35% two-parent, 55% single-parent, and 10% other (e.g., legal and/or foster caregiver). Of the respondents' occupations, 35% fell within a general labor category. The average household income was 18.5% below U.S. \$4,999, 13.6% between \$5,000 and \$9,999, 14.0% between \$10,000 and \$14,999, 9.9% between \$15,000 and \$19,999, 6.0% between \$20,000 and \$29,999, 4.0% between \$25,000 and \$29,999, 5.0% between \$30,000 and \$34,999, and 13.2% above \$35,000. Of the sample, 64% had a 12th-grade education or lower (29% had a 12th-grade education; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998). The charges brought against the youths whose parents were completing questionnaires were as follows: 16.5% delinquent, 15.2% truant, 15.2% unruly (un-governable), 4.9% criminal trespassing, 5.3% battery, 10.7% shoplifting, 6.2% possession of marijuana, and 14.0% other. Of the sample, 11.9% did not respond to the question concerning their child's charge.

Of the sample, 45% reported having a problem with their child at home, and 44% reported having a problem with their child at school. Moreover, 40% of the adolescents of the parents completing questionnaires met criteria for the diagnosis of oppositional defiant and/or conduct disorder (in checklist format). Finally, 33.3% of the sample endorsed having in the past or present another child involved with the juvenile court.

*Procedure*

This prospective research was conducted within the juvenile court setting of a southeastern city with a population of approximately 100,000. The participants were present at the courthouse while waiting for their child's arraignment hearing. The parents and guardians were provided with an Institutional Review Board-approved informed consent form and then asked to complete the JOPQ as well as extensive demographic information. One year later, legal histories were retrieved from the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice database so as to provide an account of the subsequent 12-month period of juvenile court interactions of all children of the parents who completed the JOPQ. Each youth was then classified into one of the following categories: no-recidivism, dependency, status, drug, public order, property, and/or person offenses (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996). Each youth was coded only once and only for the adjudicated offense of greatest severity found in his or her legal histories.

*No-recidivism youths* remained within jurisdiction but received no further charges and had no interaction with the juvenile court and/or law enforcement during the subsequent 12 months.

*Dependency offenses* include actions that come to the attention of a juvenile court involving neglect or inadequate care of minors on the part of the parents or guardians, such as abandonment, abuse, or inadequate conditions in the home.

*Status offenses* include offenses committed by juveniles that can be adjudicated only by a juvenile court. Status offenses often vary from one state to another; however, for the purposes of the current study, runaway, truancy, ungovernability, curfew, alcohol, and probationary offenses were classified as status offenses.

*Drug offenses* not only include drug use but also are broader in that it is also inclusive of unlawful sale, purchase, distribution, manufacture, transport, and possession of any prohibited substance or drug or paraphernalia, or attempt to commit these acts. This category also includes unlawful use of uncontrolled substances such as glue, paint, gasoline, and other inhalants.

*Public order offenses* are inclusive of all nonstatus offenses and include offenses against public order such as weapons offenses, nonviolent sex offenses, disorderly conduct, obstruction of justice, and other offenses such as false fire alarms, immigration, or hitchhiking.

*Property offenses* are crimes against property including all nonviolent thefts (e.g., burglary, larceny, motor vehicle, and shoplifting), arson, destruction of property, stolen property offenses, trespassing, and all fraud offenses.

*Person offenses*, the most serious offense for which the youth was referred to the juvenile court, were acts or attempts to commit homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated or simple assault, kidnapping, and other offenses against person.

## Results

The current study attempted to identify the relationship between the antisocial behavior of youths and the specific profile types for parenting factors using the JOPQ. Table 1 shows the standard score means and standard errors of measurement on the JOPQ scales for the parents ( $N = 87$ ) of those youths who did not recidivate ( $n = 28$ ), dependency cases ( $n = 8$ ), and those youths adjudicated for status ( $n = 16$ ), property ( $n = 12$ ), or person ( $n = 18$ ) offenses during a 12-month postadjudication period. The two remaining offense categories (drug,  $n = 1$  and public order,  $n = 4$ ) were too small to include in the study. Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of the JOPQ profiles for all 12-month post hoc groups. The standard error of measurement (*SEM*), applicable to all standard score means, is presented for each of the JOPQ scales (Exasperation, Mistrust, Shame, Monitoring, Fear of Child, and Environment). In each case, the *SEM* is demonstrative of the range in which the mean of the parents' true scores on each subscale of the JOPQ can be determined with some confidence.

Differences in standard score means for all six scales, although subtle, were found to be significant between parents of youths who reoffended and the standard score means of JOPQs completed by parents of youths who did not reoffend. All parents fall fairly close together with regard to exasperation, although ordinarily the no-recidivism group was at the bottom and person and status groups were at the top. Property and dependency groups showed the most distrust of the juvenile system, in contrast with the no-recidivism group,  $t = -2.87, p < .01$ . This pattern repeated itself for Shame; that is, the dependency and property parents were unhappy with their parenting, while the no-recidivism group showed the least amount of shame about their parenting self-efficacy. With regard to Fear of the Child, it is clear that parents who subsequently formed the dependency group most feared their children while the status group fell in sharp contrast  $t = -2.61, p < .025$ . The other three groups fell at the mean. With regard to Environment, all groups except the no-recidivism group fell above a *T*-score of 50. In summary, it appears as if there is a distinct pattern for



TABLE 1  
Standard Score Means and Standard Errors of Measurement on the  
Juvenile Offender Parent Questionnaire Subscales for Recidivism Variables

Offense variable	Juvenile Offender Parent Questionnaire Subscale Standard Scores					
	Exasp	Mistrust	Shame	Monitor	Fear	Environ
No recidivism	51.5	46.3	46.8	48.0	51.2	48.2
Dependency cases	52.1	54.1	53.4	49.0	57.9	52.6
Status offense	54.8	49.9	49.0	44.4	47.5	51.2
Property offense	53.4	55.4	51.6	47.1	50.0	53.3
Person offense	54.6	50.2	49.8	47.3	51.9	52.4
SEM	2.8	4.2	5.4	4.1	2.8	4.2

NOTE: Exasp = Parental hopelessness and exasperation with child; Mistrust = Mistrust of the juvenile justice system; Shame = Shame over lack of parenting-efficacy; Monitor = Parental monitoring of the child; Fear = Fear of child; Environ = Parent's perceptions of the youth's environment and exposure to violence.

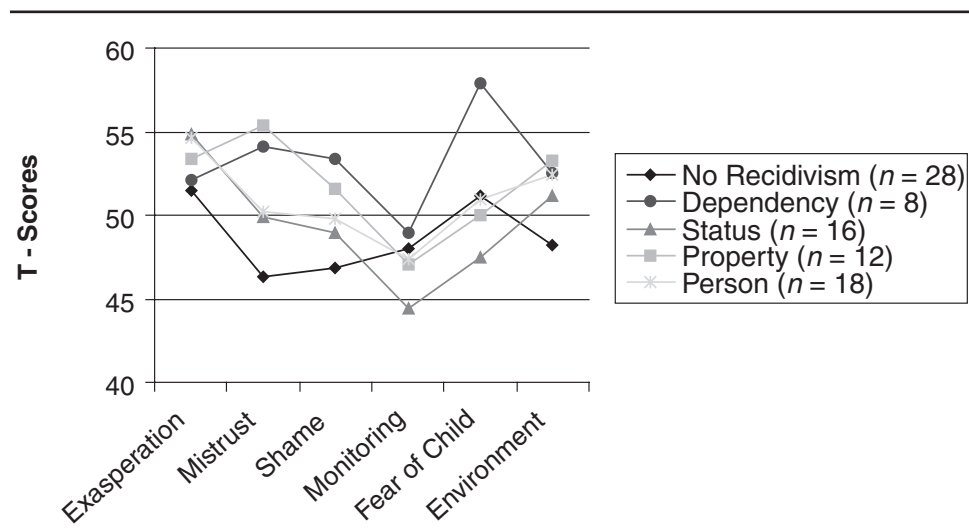


Figure 1. Graphical Depiction of Juvenile Offender Parent Questionnaire Subscale Profiles of Groups of Juvenile Offenders Classified 12 Months Following the Administration of the Instrument

each group, and that the no-recidivism group appears to present the healthiest profile relative to other parents of juvenile offenders.

**Discussion**

Most ecological models (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) include parental and family influences as proximal factors in adolescent development of antisocial behavior. How-

ever, much of the research has focused specifically on the child's behavior as opposed to other components or areas of the child's ecological system. The current study attempted to extend the literature by examining parental perceptions as they relate to antisocial behavior and its continuance.

The findings of the current study allow us to construct a profile of home environments and parenting perceptions and practices as they relate to their child's antisocial behavior. Moreover, a much flatter profile (i.e., spikes are less severe) was found with the parents of children who did not reoffend. Parents of youths behaving antisocially and reoffending reported feelings of hopelessness with regard to their children, difficulty in monitoring their children's behavior, fear of physical harm from their children, lower parenting self-efficacy, greater mistrust of law enforcement and the juvenile justice system, and perceptions that their children had been exposed to more violence than the parents of children who did not recidivate.

Scores for Exasperation were highest, and scores for Monitoring were the lowest for parents of children with status reoffense. A qualitative review of the children's legal histories reflected the majority of status offenses as probation violations. If a youth is on probation, there is a very good chance his or her curfews, check-ins, appointments, drug testing, school attendance, and movement throughout the community are being monitored by the juvenile court. In other words, when a child is placed on probation the juvenile court assumes *in loco parentis* (i.e., the principle of the state performing parental functions—acting in place of the parents). Hence, it is not surprising that exasperated parents of children on probation are more apt to abandon parental monitoring responsibilities.

In addition, the parents of children involved in dependency cases or property offense charges perceived the juvenile court as working against their children and held relatively high degrees of mistrust for the justice system. It was likely, then, that these beliefs and behaviors were being modeled and maintained for these children. Profiles from the current study support the Patterson et al. (1989) notion that the antecedents of antisocial behavior continue to exist in the homes of youths who reoffend and that their parents continue to maintain inappropriate discipline, diminished positive parent-child interaction, and poor parental monitoring.

There are several limitations to the current study. The JOPQ is a self-report measure, and no external validators were used (e.g., self-report data from the youths or data from other observers). Some of the youths may be misidentified. Some research has suggested that parents may overendorse or globalize their report as a cry for help or as an indication of exasperation with the youth's behavior (Bradshaw, Glaser, Calhoun, & Bates, in press). By contrast, present information regarding such behavior is based on youth's self-report, which may also include some error or misrepresentation. Further research may include comparing parental report with youth's self-report and/or the use of other external validators.

The implications of the current investigation suggest there is a link between parenting factors and the antisocial behavior of children. There appears to be a distinct JOPQ profile for youths who reoffend. This profile identifies an increase in risk of recidivism and potential areas for clinical intervention. Although the parents' perceptions of their individual parenting style, home environment, and their child's antisocial behavior are often overlooked, research by Patterson (1982) suggests that the parents' responses and reactions to their child's behavior are instrumental in either making or breaking the coercive and destructive cycle (Reid, Patterson, & Snyder, 2002). Clinically, then, a systemic approach to

this coercive cycle might be most beneficial in improving family relations and reducing levels of conflict in the home (Glaser, Sayger, & Horne, 1993).

Conflict resolution and problem-solving approaches could be useful in reducing verbal and physical violence in the home. Community resources (e.g., subsidized day care, mentoring, college and/or university-based family programming) could also be tapped to alleviate some of the situational demands on parents and to increase parenting competencies. Intervention and preventive measures should be employed from a collective body of programs and institutions (e.g., juvenile courts, social services, corrections, law enforcement, education, and community) dedicated to assisting parents of identified need (i.e., JOPQ), in adapting their parenting strategies to their environment and their child's special needs.

The findings of the current study support future research to further examine the psychometric properties of the JOPQ perhaps through processes of cross-validation with other empirically supported parent and self-report instruments. Moreover, the findings of the current study suggest the JOPQ enjoys considerable clinical significance and has the potential of identifying those parents in need of parent-training skills, anger management training, and/or support for what they are going through with their children. Thus, the instrument could be used to assess areas of parental concern and an ecological intervention, one that targets the youth, the environment, and other parental factors, may be most effective at ameliorating the behavior of adolescents who have demonstrated antisocial tendencies (Calhoun et al., 2001).

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