JUVENILE COPING AND GENERAL STRAIN THEORY

THESIS

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to quantitatively assess the impact of victimization on behavioral and emotional outcomes among a sample of adolescents detained within the juvenile justice system. Specifically, the study focuses on understanding the relationship between reports of victimization (e.g., being beaten up or threatened) and maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as involvement in fighting. To do so, Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory (GST) and the Pains of Imprisonment are adopted as frameworks for understanding the role of strain or stressors in prompting deviant behavior as a coping mechanism. This study uses secondary data from the Northwestern Juvenile Project (NJP), involving 1,829 youth from the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (CCJTDC). The analysis utilizes follow-up data collected 16 years after the initial interviews to explore how victimization experiences during detention influence perceptions of safety and subsequent coping behaviors. Results indicate that victimization is significantly associated with both lower perceptions of safety and an increase in maladaptive coping behaviors. However, perceptions of safety did not mediate the relationship between victimization and maladaptive coping. These findings underscore the importance of directly addressing victimization and safety concerns in juvenile detention settings, offering insights for interventions aimed at improving the well-being of incarcerated youth.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

GST General Strain Theory

NJP Northwestern Juvenile Project

CCJTDC Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center

BK Baron and Kenny approach

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INTRODUCTION

The experiences of youth in detention facilities have garnered significant attention in recent years. According to a report by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2021), approximately 7.1% of adjudicated youth reported experiencing victimization; among this, 1.9% reported youth on youth victimization, and 5.8% reported staff sexual misconduct (Smith & Stroop, 2019). While incarceration presents an opportunity and physical space for rehabilitation, these institutions also expose youth to violence and trauma (Piper & Berle, 2019).

Carceral settings are characterized by victimization, social isolation, and unaddressed health and educational needs. Compared to adults, juveniles are more sensitive to the effects of incarceration (Kiessl & Wurger, 2002) because they are in earlier stages of physical and psychological development (DeLisi et al., 2010). They are also particularly vulnerable to victimization (Wang et al., 2021). Research has shown that the likelihood of juvenile victimization is based on factors such as a supportive environment (Lambie & Randall, 2013). Some research shows that prior victimization experiences, records of violent delinquency, and visitation can have an impact on victimization in detention (Wang et al., 2021). This observation is consistent with Sykes' (1958) pain of imprisonment framework, which refers to the various deprivations and frustrations experienced by individuals who are incarcerated.

Incarceration conditions are shown to have criminogenic and adverse effects on

individuals (Cook & Haynes, 2021). For juveniles, these conditions can impact health and behaviors through the deprivations of everyday social interactions and developmental opportunities (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020), leading to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The detention conditions can be better understood through Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory (GST), which considers the importance of strain and maladaptive coping, specifically providing a theoretical illustration of how strain contributes to criminal or deviant behavior. Put simply, in the absence of healthy coping mechanisms, individuals who experience strain and subsequent negative emotionality will be pressured into coping maladaptively, including crime (Agnew, 2013).

GST can help explain how in-detention experiences may be related to subsequent offending, poor mental health, and deviant behaviors. For instance, among a sample of incarcerated adults experiencing severe strain (e.g., physical assaults and threats), Zweig and colleagues' (2014) found study participants to be more likely to have heightened negative emotions, which is shown to increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviors after their release. These findings are similar for juveniles; increased experiences of abuse increase posttraumatic stress reactions, depressive symptoms, and continued criminal involvement (Dierkhising et al., 2014). A limited number of studies have examined increased or new strains of victimization (e.g., see Cook & Haynes, 2020; Luke et al., 2021) that juveniles experience during incarceration.

As research on the environment of correctional institutions increases, the research on emotions through perceptions of the safety of juveniles in detention is understudied (e.g., see Piquero & Sealock, 2006; Zweig et al., 2014). GST argues that strain leads to negative emotions and in turn

negative emotion leads to criminal behavior (Ganem et al., 2010), making it an important factor to consider when examining juveniles' emotions. By understanding the emotional reactions of those detained and the contributing factors, researchers can develop more promising rehabilitation programs and a more positive prison environment (Valentine et al., 2019). Considering the role of a juvenile's emotional experiences while incarcerated allows an exploration of methods of coping with the harsh punishment and abuse they are subject to while incarcerated (Cook & Haynes, 2021; McGrath et al., 2011). Arguably, these pains of imprisonment may negatively impact the emotional and behavioral health of youthful offenders. In terms of GST, no study has examined the negative emotionality of fear of juvenile incarceration. Most studies have primarily tested certain negative emotions (e.g., depression, anger, frustration) while rarely examining how fear impacts behavioral outcomes among adolescents, especially those who are involved in the juvenile justice system. Thus, this study proposes to assess how experiences with victimization during juvenile detention can impact perceptions of safety and deviant behaviors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiences of Juvenile Detention

Juvenile detention centers are fraught with numerous challenges that significantly influence the mental and physical well-being of adolescents (De Lisi et al., 2011), often shaping their emotional and behavioral responses long after release (Wang et al., 2021). Research has shown that the environment within juvenile detention facilities is characterized by strict control (Mueller et al., 2019), violence (Reid & Listwan, 2018), and lack of supportive relationships (Lambie & Randall, 2011), which can exacerbate negative emotions like anxiety, depression, and anger. These adverse emotional states are often associated with poor coping strategies, as detained youth may lack the resources and skills necessary to manage stress effectively (Mueller et al., 2019). Furthermore, experiences of victimization in detention settings, whether through direct or indirect victimization or institutional practices (Reid & Listwan, 2018), can lead to adopting negative behaviors that can result in adverse outcomes (Craig et al., 2023). Adolescent detention can have several consequences including shifts in behaviors, experiences with victimization, and psychological distress, all of which influence the overall well-being of juveniles.

Experiences in juvenile detention can have strong effects on the behaviors and well-being of young individuals involved in the justice system through exposure to antisocial peers and a

decrease in contact with prosocial peers (Lambie & Randall, 2011). Incarceration disrupts peer networks surrounded by supportive relationships (Alward et al., 2020), and limits opportunities for reinforcing societal norms and practicing adaptive interpersonal skills (Maschi et al., 2015). During incarceration, individuals may face a range of harmful and unpredictable events, such as physical assault, sexual assault, and isolation, all of which can increase psychological distress and aggressive behaviors (Luke et al., 2020). Juvenile offenders represent a high-risk population influenced by a complex interplay of environmental and individual factors contributing to behaviors related to misconduct (Lambie & Randall, 2013; Wang et al., 2021). Although it is possible to achieve positive rehabilitation in detention settings, the nature of the environment itself, characterized by victimization, social isolation, and unmet mental health needs, can often limit its ability to have a rehabilitative effect, exacerbating aggressive behavior or unwanted behavior as a result.

Victimization within detention facilities is a primary concern, where juveniles may face physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from peers or staff members. Scholars have defined victimization as "a relationship problem characterized by an imbalance of power whereby a more powerful individual repeatedly causes harm to a weaker individual" (Volk et al., 2005, p. 1). There are several types of victimization, such as physical or sexual violence (Zweig et al., 2014) and threats of physical harm (Guo et al., 2024). Each form of victimization is related to different emotional and behavioral outcomes, especially for vulnerable populations, such as people with mental illnesses or those developmentally delayed, young people, or those considered sexually vulnerable (Cloud et al., 2015). Throughout detention, individuals can be subjected to bullying or victimization by peers or staff. Listwan and colleagues' (2013) study using a sample of

incarcerated adults, found that experiences of victimization through perceived mistreatment from corrections officers and a hostile prison environment are strong predictors of recidivism. Their study also found that those with prior victimization view the prison environment to be negative, violent, and threatening. To understand the negative effects of victimization among juveniles, Hay & Evans (2005) conducted a study on violent victimization and delinquency using a longitudinal sample of children and their families, finding that forms of violent victimization (e.g., experiences of physical force or being threatened) are shown to significantly increase anger and future involvement in delinquency significantly. Therefore, the consequences of juvenile victimization are important as they influence future behavior and well-being.

One of the consequences of juvenile victimization is physiological distress, which can manifest as increased levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), impacting the overall well-being and future behavior of the individual (Iratzoqui, 2015). Many juveniles are confronted with a range of harmful and unpredictable events during their incarceration, such as physical assault, sexual assault, and isolation, which can all lead to increased psychological distress among inmates (Luke et al., 2020). Psychological distress among inmates can have long-lasting effects, including an increased risk of mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, as well as difficulties with social functioning (Lyu et al., 2015), which can affect reintegration into society after release from detention. Developing effective coping mechanisms while in detention can help mitigate the long-lasting effects of psychological distress (Shulman & Cauffman, 2011). Therefore, it is important to provide juvenile offenders with the tools they need to manage their mental health better and navigate the challenges of reintegration into society.

The negative outcomes of victimization among juveniles include physical and mental health issues, behavioral changes, and an increased vulnerability to revictimization (Iratzoqui, 2018), which are all strong predictors of poor adult health (Radford et al., 2013) and future criminal behavior (Zweig et al., 2013). The emotional (e.g., depression, anxiety, anger, or fear, McGrath et al., 2013) and behavioral (e.g., violent, aggressive, or deviant behaviors, Carson et al., 2008) outcomes related to victimization differ based on the victims' coping mechanisms, and these differences can also be influenced by age or gender. Sinha and Latha's (2018) research on gender differences in coping strategies among young adults (ages 19-20) finds that females use emotion-based coping strategies (e.g., distancing, exercising self-control, seeking social support, avoidance, and positive reappraisal). In contrast, males use problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., confronting, accepting responsibility, and taking control). They argue that problem-focused behavior is healthy and beneficial. In contrast, emotion-focused therapy has short-term benefits, but in the long term, it is a form of maladaptive behavior because it does not deal with core issues (Sinha & Latha, 2018). Research on avoidant coping styles among incarcerated male youth found that those who are younger, sex offenders, or newer to the facility used more avoidant coping. In contrast, gang members and those actively engaged in misconduct used more aggressive techniques (Reid & Listwan, 2018). This suggests that those who employ aggressive coping techniques may face additional consequences, such as disciplinary actions or conflicts with others in their environment. Therefore, it is important to consider individual circumstances when assessing inmates' coping strategies.

Pains of Imprisonment and Juveniles

The experience of incarceration is a stressful and strain-inducing situation for most

individuals. For instance, criminologists have coined the term ‘pains of imprisonment’ to describe the deleterious consequences of incarceration (Aranda-Hughes et al., 2021; Blevins, 2010; Cook & Haynes, 2022; Listwan et al., 2013; Sykes, 1958). Through his research in a men’s maximum-security prison, Sykes (1958; 2007) identified five core pains of imprisonment: (1) the deprivation of liberty; (2) the deprivation of goods and services; (3) the frustration of sexual desire; (4) the deprivation of autonomy or restricted ability to make choices; (5) the deprivation of security. Several other researchers have studied the pains of imprisonment, referring to them as prison hardships, prison stresses, or strains (Aranda-Hughes et al., 2021; Blevins, 2010; Rocheleau, 2013).

Research on the pains of imprisonment employs two core frameworks to explain inmates’ behaviors: deprivation and importation (Sykes, 1958). The deprivation model hypothesizes that the behaviors of those experiencing incarceration will adapt to the pains of imprisonment. Put simply, behavior is a response to the strains (e.g., harsh conditions of confinement) an individual experiences while incarcerated. The importation model, however, argues that behaviors are shaped by experiences prior to incarceration, specifically through their characteristics and lifestyle (DeLisi et al., 2004). Typically, these models differ based on whether individuals experiencing incarceration bring their tendencies toward violence and misconduct into prison or whether the harsh conditions of confinement induce the use of prison violence for safety reasons (Rocheleau, 2013). Using the deprivation and importation models, Blevins and colleagues (2010) identified five categories of incarcerated-related strain that are likely to infringe on the lives of many of those experiencing incarceration. These categories include the loss of autonomy (e.g., inability to make choices, conforming to strict rules, schedules, and disciplinary measures),

material goods and services (e.g., lack of access to quality food, adequate health care and recreation opportunities), heterosexual relations (e.g., separation from romantic partners, family, and friends), freedom and privacy (e.g., restrictions on movement, privacy, and decision making authority), and unrestricted interactions with family friends. The way an individual experiencing incarceration responds to stressors stemming from being incarcerated is based upon a variety of situational and personal variables (Blevins et al., 2010).

Under the theoretical model of importation, research shows that individuals with histories of violence or incarceration, and those who are gang members are more likely to bring their pre-existing behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs into detention (DeList et al., 2011; Tasca et al., 2010). For instance, Trulson's (2007) study among institutional misconduct of juveniles, found that gang members, those with gang-related family members, and those with histories of delinquency are more likely to engage in institutional violent misconduct. Tasca et al. (2010) also find support for this, revealing that victimized juveniles use violence to resolve conflicts. Moreover, the study highlights the complex interplay between individual predispositions and environmental factors, suggesting that both personal characteristics and the prison environment contribute to the use of violence among inmates. Thus, it is evident that the environment in which an individual is placed can significantly influence their behavior and decisions. Using the deprivation model, we can understand how the harsh conditions inside detention can promote delinquent behaviors.

A study by Dierkhising and colleagues (2014) found that 96.8% of detained youth experience some abuse (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse, denial of food, and excessive stays in solitary confinement) resulting in posttraumatic stress reactions, depressive symptoms, and continued delinquency. Research on juvenile’s experience in detention finds that they also lack

imperative resources such as education, recreation, and social interactions with friends and family (Lambie & Randle, 2013). According to Blomberg and colleagues (2011), incarcerated youth receive a more fragmented and inferior education in comparison to their peers in their community, and this lack of education results in a lack of rehabilitation and decreased involvement in delinquency. Another study by Wang and colleagues (2021) finds in a study among a sample of juveniles in a Chinese facility that those who lack interactions with friends and family through visitation are more likely to experience victimization, emphasizing the importance of social support and resources in detention. These findings raise significant implications for the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders, as research finds that experiences of trauma and victimization result in poor mental health, which, in turn, increases their likelihood of engaging in institutional misconduct (Craig et al., 2023)

General Strain Theory

Like the pains of imprisonment, Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory (GST) emphasizes that stressful circumstances pressure individuals into crime. Put simply, in the absence of healthy coping mechanisms, individuals who experience strain and subsequent negative emotionality will maladaptively cope. Agnew conceptualizes strain as the (a) failure to reach positively valued goals, (b) loss of positively valued stimuli, or (c) presence of harmful or noxious stimuli, all of which increase adverse effects resulting in an engagement in corrective action to cope with such feelings, with criminal or deviant behavior as one strategy for coping (Janssen et al., 2021; Zweig et al., 2014). According to Agnew (1992), strain can occur in the lives of individuals through personal, vicarious, and/or anticipated experiences. While some strains result in crime from the negative emotions they produce, they can also increase crime or

delinquent behaviors by reducing social control, fostering the social learning of crime, and leading to traits conducive to crime (Agnew, 2013; Guo et al., 2024; Iratzoqui, 2018). Strains are more conducive to crime when they are considered high in magnitude (e.g., severe, frequent, of long duration, recent, expected to continue in the future, and involving core goals, needs, values, identities, and/or activities) (Agnew, 2013, p. 654). GST asserts that the extent to which an individual experiencing the strain will resort to crime is related to several conditioning factors, such as negative emotionality (e.g., depression, fear, or anger) and low constraint (e.g., low self-control and impulsivity), self-efficacy, social support, social control, association with criminal peers, and beliefs favorable to crime (Agnew 1992, 2006, 2013; McGrath et al., 2011).

Agnew (2013) asserts that strains generally provoke different emotions. He argues that strains high magnitude and unjust result in anger, strains involving the inability to achieve desired goals can motivate feelings of frustration, and uncontrollable strains are linked to depression and strains involving impending threats seen as uncontrollable to fear. All these strains and emotions can be linked to victimization through forms of bullying and physical abuse. If an individual experiences these emotions all at once, it will likely have a long-lasting psychological impact on their lives. Agnew (2013) argues that the severity of strain impacts the likeliness of individuals resorting to criminal coping. Severe forms of victimization, such as physical abuse, are in certain circumstances where they are unable to escape or avoid the causes of their stressors are likely to generate the negative emotion of anger resulting in illegitimate rather than legitimate coping means (McGrath et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2021). Severe forms of victimization can also reduce the perceived costs of illegitimate coping and distance the individual from resources that promote legitimate coping (Kort-Butler, 2010). The experience of

physical victimization is likely to be viewed as unjust and severe and associated with low self-control and exposure to models of illegitimate coping (Guo et al., 2024). Agnew (2002) argues that vicarious victimization can also act as a strain and may lead to delinquent responses. For example, individuals who see or hear others being victimized can lead to anticipation that they will be victimized. As a result, this can increase fear and anxiety which may drive individuals to engage in delinquent behavior as a form or self-defense or to assert control (Hinton et al., 2020). They may also resort to associating with delinquent peers for protection or acceptance (Guo et al., 2024). Using the pains of imprisonment and GST allows for the understanding of how individuals in detention may experience strain through exposure to the victimization of others and anticipation of future victimization.

General Strain Theory and Juveniles

When applied to juveniles, GST posits that the various sources of strain juveniles may experience should result in negative emotionality and delinquency. Juveniles entering detention can experience a high degree of stress, primarily due to the restrictive environment and adverse conditions (Craig et al., 2023; Silver et al., 2022). Dierkhising and colleagues (2014) examine experiences of victimization in detention through different types of exposures to abuse (i.e., direct, witnessed, and vicarious) among a sample of formerly incarcerated young adults (ages 18-20). Almost all individuals in the sample (98%) reported experiencing at least one type of abuse during incarceration, which included physical abuse by staff, peer physical assault, excessive use of solitary confinement, psychological abuse by staff, denial of food, peer sexual assault, sexual abuse by staff, sexual harassment by staff, and sexual harassment by peers. The results revealed that many youth directly experienced abuse, witnessed abuse of others, and vicariously

experienced abuse by hearing about it happening to others. Considering that most youth in the sample experienced at least one form of direct abuse during incarceration, it is evident that the environments surrounding detention can serve as a significant source of strain for juveniles. Exposure to abuse, whether physical, emotional, or sexual, exacerbates the already challenging circumstances faced by juveniles in detention, resulting in potential long-term impacts. Research has examined how exposure types play a role in offending, consistently finding that experienced-witnessed violence exhibits the most potent effects on offending (Guo et al., 2024; Hinton et al., 2020) and that violence exposure is more likely to result in violent offending. Thus, it is generally understood that there is considerable overlap between violent offending and violent victimization and that those who engage in violent offending are at an increased risk for violent victimization. GST can explain the connection between victims and offenders through experienced, witnessed, or vicarious exposure to abuse, which is known to predict violent victimization and offending (McGrath et al., 2011). Studies have investigated this relationship, highlighting the importance of indirect victimization, primarily through the vicarious victimization hypothesis of GST. In support of this, Lin and colleagues (2011) have found that the combined effect of direct and vicarious victimization can lead to more severe consequences than experiencing either form alone.

According to GST, each type of strain can lead an individual to experience an array of negative emotions, including anger, fear, and depression. Among these negative emotions, anger is the most important to GST because anger is considered an outer-directed emotion, likely to produce outer-directed deviance, such as interpersonal aggression and violence (Agnew, 2002). Although anger is the most criminogenic and important negative emotion in GST, other negative

emotions, such as fear, might also be related to delinquency. Kiessl & Wurger (2002) argue that emotions of fear have a significant presence in detention settings for juveniles, meaning that if one individual may not be victimized, the victimization of others is observed, exacerbating a fear of victimization. Research finds that adolescents, in general, who fear victimization may carry a weapon or avoid areas where they may be prone to victimization (Esslemont, 2013); they also develop feelings of vulnerability, anger, and depression, all of which influence their daily lives. Less is known about how juveniles respond to emotions of fear surrounding victimization in a correctional setting. However, research finds that juvenile males who witness or are the victim of gun violence are more likely to engage in gun carrying in the future compared to those without the same experiences (Beardslee et al., 2018)— without measuring juvenile perceptions of safety and emotionality among those exposed to gun violence there is a gap in our understanding of how GST can be used to explain maladaptive coping behaviors. According to Levitt (2010), youth who are admitted to juvenile detention facilities are typically screened for psychological health-related issues that are associated with recidivism and further offending, such as substance abuse and various psychiatric disorders. In research among delinquent youth, approximately 90% reported experiencing at least one traumatic event, and 56.8% had been exposed to trauma more than six times. Other studies suggest that as high as 32% of incarcerated juvenile offenders present symptoms of post-traumatic stress. (Faulk et al., 2014).

As juveniles experience strain at an important developmental and learning stage of their lives, it is important to consider the consequences of victimization. The psychological impact of being victimized can lead to severe mental health issues, such as anger, frustration, and fear (Ganem, 2010). These psychological consequences create pressures for victims to find a way to

cope, and such coping strategies have implications for the attitudes, beliefs, and actions that have long-term consequences for those experiencing them (Zweig et al., 2014). The availability of social support networks can shelter juveniles from negative experiences by promoting legitimate coping responses to strain. However, this is based upon several conditioning factors: the availability of legitimate and illegitimate opportunities, the presence of delinquent peers, prior learning of prosocial or delinquent attitudes, social support, and personal resources like self-esteem, mastery, and coping skills (Agnew, 2013). Put into perspective, if the event of victimization is unsuccessfully resolved, it can generate negative emotions, and attempting to cope with these emotions may lead to delinquency as one may desire revenge or protection. For example, in detention, those with prosocial coping skills may avoid risky situations by keeping themselves occupied in prosocial recreation activities or educational experiences to avoid associating with delinquent peers (Reid & Listwan, 2018). In contrast, violence or misconduct may arise because of deviant or maladjusted coping strategies. For example, engaging in violence, joining gangs, using drugs, stealing, or engaging in severe self-injurious behavior. Victims of violent victimization (e.g., assault), in particular, may resort to isolation by avoiding areas they perceive as unsafe, such as places where the assault took place (James et al., 2020)—considering that victimization can occur in detention from other inmates or staff (Listwan et al., 2013), it is likely that they may be unable to escape these strains and it may increase anger and frustration. Much violent victimization (e.g., physical assault) can occur when victims are in a setting where delinquent peer association is high and social control is low (e.g., detention) (Barberi et al., 2019).

While prior research focuses on the maladaptive or deviant behaviors followed by severe

victimization (see Hansen et al., 2012; James et al., 2020), less is known about the maladaptive coping mechanisms followed by victimization in detention, especially among juveniles. According to Hansen et al. (2012), the way a victim responds and feels about victimization determines the coping process. For instance, individuals with several victimization experiences in a given year report higher levels of fear when compared to those who are only victimized once (Scherg & Ejrnæs, 2022). Experiences and exposure to violent victimization can also increase the likelihood of future violent offending (Guo et al., 2024). For most people, victimization may only occur once. However, for some, victimization is a recurring experience that occurs frequently and regularly in their lives over several years (Scherg & Ejrnæs, 2022), which may be due to prior experiences of victimization and offending. Considering that the way a victim's environment is perceived is shown to influence the likelihood of victimization (Hansen et al., 2012), then the availability of coping resources or strategies following the victimization is equally essential. Victimization has many consequences, but it affects everyone differently. For instance, those who experienced physical assault may feel unsafe around specific populations, as it may remind them of their assaulter (James et al., 2020). When examining the psychological impact on perceptions of safety, it is essential to consider individual factors such as prior experiences, age, gender, race, and environment. For example, one individual placed in solitary confinement may feel safer due to isolation from other inmates (Aranda-Hughes et al., 2021). In contrast, another placed in solitary confinement may feel mistreated and victimized (Ingel et al., 2022). Many conditioning variables can influence the effect of strain on crime: negative emotionality and low constraint, self-efficacy, social support, social control, association with criminal peers, and beliefs favorable to crime (Agnew, 2013). The evidence conclusively

suggests that an individual's responses to strain are shaped and conditioned by coping resources, availability of social support, association with criminal/delinquent peers, social control, beliefs about crime, and possession of specific traits such as self-control (Leban et al., 2016).

Considering that emotions play a critical role in how an individual responds to victimization, Agnew (2013) argues that anger is the most crucial emotional reaction to strain and is most conducive to criminal and delinquent behavior. Anger is considered an outer-directed emotion, likely to produce outer-directed deviance, such as interpersonal aggression and violence (Agnew, 2002). Experiences of victimization are shown to often lead to future bullying behavior for those experiencing it (Esselmont, 2013). Research also shows that those who are both victims and perpetrators of bullying suffer more consequences than those who perpetrate bullying (Walters & Espelage, 2018). According to Zweig and colleagues (2015), violent victimization in prison inmates results in outcomes of hostility and depression among victims. It is less known among the consequences of an inmate's perceptions of safety followed by violent victimization; however, it is known that frustration is followed by anger resulting from experiences of victimization. Agnew (2013) also argues that frustration is a negative emotion that could lead to specific harmful coping mechanisms. Within the pains of the imprisonment framework, juveniles may feel frustration from these strains coupled with a hostile environment where they are unable to achieve goals or have a sense of a lack of security, and they may fear future victimization. They may feel that guards are doing too much or not doing enough. Juvenile rehabilitation is crucial because juveniles possess fewer psychological coping mechanisms than adults, hindering their ability to legally cope with their emotional responses to being victimized (Valentine et al., 2019). More recent research among adults shows that the perceived likelihood of reoffending is

significantly lower for those who reported fearing for their safety in prison. However, those who feared safety reported stronger anger (Cook & Haynes, 2021). While there is a small amount of research examining the relationship between fear of safety and reoffending, there is little known about this relationship among juveniles.

The nature and severity of victimization experiences have been shown to strongly impact the way a victim's space and safety are perceived (Bradshaw et al., 2009). For instance, James and colleagues (2020) propose that the perception of safe and unsafe environments is related to experiences of criminal victimization and that these environments may differ based on the type of crime they had experienced (e.g., property crime, violent crime, identity theft, domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, physical assault, and gun violence). The authors find that experiences are individualized; two individuals may experience the same form of victimization, and the circumstances and effects will vary, influencing their perceptions in distinct ways. For example, the presence of individuals who share similar characteristics to a previous assailant could evoke feelings of fear, but that same person may not have any influence on others (James et al., 2020). Most research on perceptions of safety and victimization focuses on adult samples, and it is less known how victimization influences the fear and perceptions of juveniles.

However, a study by Esselmont (2013) tests the relationship between victimization and future violence among U.S. middle and high school students. The author finds that students who carry weapons, such as a gun, have increased perceptions of feeling safe while at school. The weight of the evidence suggests that many individuals carry weapons because it is perceived to enhance their perception of safety (Esselmont, 2013; Semprevivo et al., 2019), especially among

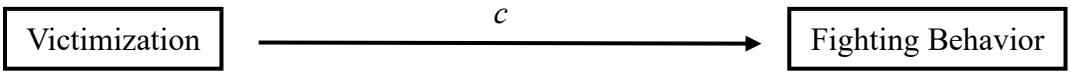
vulnerable youth (Streed et al., 2020). Studies have also explored other ways of responding to safety perceptions among adolescents. For instance, Barnert and colleagues (2015) contribute to the literature by including a sample of incarcerated youth's perceptions of safety in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods. The study revealed that those participants felt unsafe from victimization and gang activity, which resulted in youth joining gangs, carrying weapons, and avoiding school to gain protection and feel safer. These studies highlight a significant need to prevent victimization from occurring because those who fear future victimization may be socially pressured into deviant behaviors due to the desire for acceptance or approval from others or avoidance. (Esselmont, 2013; Barnert et al., 2015).

Current Focus

Many criminological studies focus on maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., substance use, self-harm, aggression, or isolation) followed by experiences of abuse outside of a correctional setting (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Hansen et al., 2009; Radford et al., 2013). Less explored is how maladaptive coping behaviors result from victimization experiences inside a correctional institution, specifically using the pains of the imprisonment and GST frameworks. The pains of imprisonment frameworks suggest that there are various deprivations individuals experience while incarcerated, such as loss of liberty, security, and autonomy, generating a significant amount of stress (Blevins et al., 2010; Listwan et al., 2013). Existing literature has provided valuable insights into the impact of victimization within the juvenile justice system (Craig et al., 2023), shedding light on the psychological and behavioral consequences of their experiences. Arguably, detention is a stressful experience for adolescents who are in a critical developmental phase of their lives. A negative environment, coupled with victimization, may result in negative perceptions of safety, and result in maladaptive coping. By integrating the pains of imprisonment framework with GST, we gain insight into the complex relationship between the experiences of victimization with a juvenile population. With the aim to inform more effective interventions to address the underlying causes of delinquency and promote rehabilitation. The current study tests the influence of victimization on perceptions of safety and maladaptive coping (i.e., fighting behaviors) during detention. It also examines whether negative emotions, specifically

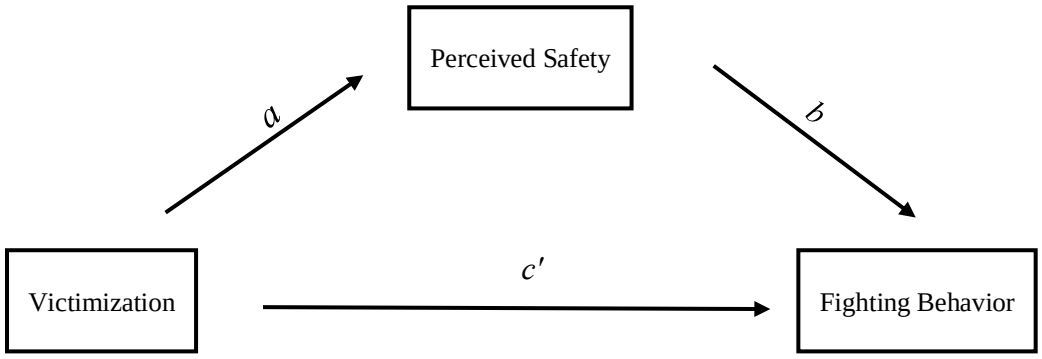
perceptions of safety, mediate this relationship between maladaptive copings. Drawing on the pains of imprisonment framework and victimization through the General Strain Theory and using data from the Northwestern Juvenile Project (NJP), this study seeks to answer whether victimization impacts perceptions of safety and maladaptive coping. It also examines if negative emotions mediate this relationship. The following hypotheses, illustrated in Figure 1 were presented in the present study:

Figure 1. *Total Effect of Victimization on Fighting Behavior*



Note: This figure illustrates the total effect of victimization on fighting behavior without considering any mediators. The path labeled "*c*" represents the direct relationship between victimization and fighting behavior. The total effect captures the overall influence of victimization on fighting behavior, combining both direct and indirect effects (if any).

Figure 2. *Indirect Effect of Victimization on Fighting Behavior through Perceptions of Safety*



Note: This figure demonstrates the indirect effect of victimization on fighting behavior, mediated by perceptions of safety. Path *a* represents the effect of victimization on perceived safety. Path *b* represents the effect of perceived safety on fighting behaviors, controlling for victimization. The indirect effect (a*b) reflects the ectent to which victimization influences fighting behavior through its impact on perceptions of safety. Path *c'* represents the direct effect of victimization on fighting behaviors, controlling for perceived safety.

H1: Individuals who experience victimization will be more likely to engage in fighting

behavior.

H2: Individuals who experience victimization will have lower perceptions of safety.

H3: Perceptions of safety will have a direct effect on maladaptive coping behaviors.

H4: Perceptions of safety will mediate the relationship between victimization and maladaptive coping behaviors.

METHODOLOGY

Data

This study uses data from a subsample of participants from the Northwestern Juvenile Project (NJP), which involved a stratified random sample of 1,829 youth from the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (CCJTDC) from 1995-1988. The sampling was stratified by gender, race/ethnicity, age and legal status to ensure adequate representation across key subgroups. All NJP participants were scheduled for follow up interviews approximately 16 years after the baseline. The follow-up interviews (2011-2014) were conducted with a random subsample of 389 participants and received two additional modules, which are the Juvenile Justice Experiences and Weapons-Related Injury modules.

The current study uses Juvenile Justice Experiences and Weapons-Related Injury (2011-2014) data set, which includes data collected from both supplemental and interview modules. The Juvenile Justice Experience data includes information about juvenile court experiences, family support, juvenile detention and prison facilities, perceived fairness in rules and treatment by staff, security, victimization, and gang activity. The Weapons-Related Injury data includes information on gun violence and knife violence victimization during adolescence.

Measures

Dependent and Mediating Variables

Maladaptive coping refers to the behaviors or strategies employed by individuals in

response to stressors or adverse experiences often resulting in criminal or deviant behaviors (Agnew, 1992). For the purpose of this study, maladaptive coping is operationalized as a dependent variable through one measure: (1) "*Were you involved in any fights in detention?*" (0 = No and 1 = Yes).

Negative emotionality will be captured through a single-item measure pertaining to perceptions of safety. Perceptions of safety[1] represent individuals' subjective assessments of their security and well-being within detention settings. The single-item measure used include (1) *perceived safety from other juvenile*s ("*In detention, how safe did you feel from other inmates?*" and the responses for the negative emotionality measure ranged from 1 = "Very unsafe" to 4 = "Very Safe", with higher scores reflecting higher levels of perceived safety.

Independent Variable

According to GST, *victimization* is identified as a leading source of strain due to the frequency and prevalence of its experience. Measuring its impact on juveniles allows for an exploration of its impact on maladaptive coping behaviors. For the purpose of this study and consistent with the GST framework, one measure for victimization will be employed: 1) "*In detention, were you ever beaten up or threatened?*" (0 = No and 1 = Yes).

Control variables

According to GST, *social support* should condition the effects of victimization on maladaptive

[1] Perceptions of safety (measures above) will serve as a mediating variable capturing negative emotionality, these measures will perform as both independent and dependent variables in this study. First as a dependent variable to estimate the relationship between victimization and perceptions of safety, and second as an independent variable alongside victimization to explain maladaptive coping behaviors. Juvenile perceptions of their surroundings are a significant indication of whether they have the ability to cope, their sense of security, and the likelihood of engaging in deviant behaviors. It is also a strong predictor of whether they experience victimization indirectly or directly. Accordingly, perceptions of safety in a juvenile detention setting have not been tested as mediation through GST.

coping behaviors. For the study, social support was operationalized through two measures: (1) "*When you were in detention, did a parent or caregiver come to visit you*?" and (2) "*In detention, did you talk on the phone to a parent of caregiver?*", and the responses for social support measured included a binary variable where 0 = No and 1 = Yes. *Gang membership* is also shown to serve as a negative form of social support in detention (Conway-Turner et al., 2019). Therefore, a single-item measure will be used to account for gang membership, (1) "*Were you a member of a gang in detention*?" and responses included a binary scale with 0 = No and 1 = Yes. Age was measured in years, but collapsed into three categories to protect participant anonymity, due to few participants identifying to one or more categories, and to prevent overgeneralization. The categories of age groups were measured where 1 = 10 to 12 years, 2 = 13 to 15 years, and 3 = 16 to 18 years. Gender was measured using a binary variable where 0 = Female and 1 = Male. Race/Ethnicity was measured using 0 = Black, 1 = White, 3 = Hispanic, and 4 = Other. However, due to insufficient sample sizes, the category of Other was dropped from the analyses.

Analytic Strategy

Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistics for study variables. Descriptive statistics were calculated with the goal of obtaining an overview of the sample characteristics.

Multiple steps were taken to assess this study's research questions. First, univariate statistics were used to examine sample statistics and was followed by bivariate statistics to provide an initital assessment of the study. To do so, correlations were generated between the study variables of choice. Afterward, multivariate regressions were completed to examine the relationships between the independent, dependent and mediating variables

GST literature suggests that individuals experiencing negative life events, such as

victimization are more likely to respond with negative emotions, which in turn, can increase the likelihood of engaging in deviant behaviors and may be the mediating variable that leads a person to deviant behavior (Carson et al., 2008; Cho et al., 2019). Therefore, to examine the mediating effect of perceptions of safety on the relationship between victimization and fighting, the analysis follows the Baron and Kenny (1986) (BK) approach which involves a series of regression analyses to test for mediation. This approach has been described as an approximate significant test for the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable via the mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1177; Hayes, 2009). First, an ordinal logistic regression was used to determine the effect of victimization on perceptions of safety, including control variables. This model was used to determine whether victimization significantly influences perceptions of safety. Parallel lines assumption was tested to determine whether the use of ordinal logistic regression was appropriate or not. The assumption tests whether the effect of dependent variable categories is parallel to each other, or consistent across different thresholds of the independent variable (Erkan & Yildiz, 2014). Next, two linear regression models were used to examine the influence of fighting behaviors on study variables. Victimization was modeled first to assess the direct effect of victimization on fighting behaviors; then negative emotions (perceptions of safety) variable was entered into the model to test potential mediating effects. This model allowed for an examination whether the inclusion of perceptions of safety influences the relationship between victimization and fighting behaviors. The Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg tests indicated the presence of heteroskedasticity in the models of the regression results. Therefore, robust standard errors were estimated Sobel tests were used to determine the significance of the indirect effect of perceptions of safety on the relationship between

victimization and fighting. This analysis was performed after applying listwise deletion to account for missing data, ensuring that the statistics reflect only those cases with complete information.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the variables of the study. Approximately 64% of juveniles in the sample were males, and the remaining 36% were females. In terms of race and ethnicity, approximately 55% of participants identified as Black, 16% as White, and 29% as Hispanic. The age categories included 6% in the ten to twelve age group, 53% in thirteen to fifteen categories, and the remaining 40% in the sixteen to eighteen years of age category. Among this sample, 36% of participants reported experiencing victimization, and 56% of participants reported being involved in fighting. Approximately 53% of the participants identified as gang members, and 82% reported having a form of social support. Regarding perceived safety, 7% of juveniles reported feeling very safe, 45% as safe, 42% as unsafe, and the remaining 4.71% as very unsafe.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables* (*N*=1,825)

Variables	*n*	%
Victimization [a]	141	36.72
Fighting [a]	205	56.94
Perceived Safety		
Very unsafe	18	4.71
Unsafe	164	42.93
Safe	173	45.29
Very safe	27	7.07
Age Group (years)		
10-12	114	6.23
13-15	973	53.20
16-18	742	40.57
Gang member [a]	204	53.12
Gender		
Female	656	35.95
Male	1,169	64.05
Social support [a]	317	82.77
Race/Ethnicity		
Black	1,005	55.07
White	296	16.22
Hispanic	524	28.71

Note: [a] Reflects the number and percentage of participants answering "yes" to this question.

Understanding the relationships among study variables

The Pearson's *r* estimated in Table 2 provides a preliminary assessment of the relationships between the study variables. Victimization was significantly and positively correlated with fighting ($r = 0.53$) and gang membership ($r = 0.47$) indicating that those who reported higher levels of victimization were more likely to engage in fighting and more likely to be affiliated with a gang. Victimization was negatively correlated with perceived safety ($r = -0.51$), suggesting that feelings of safety decrease as victimization increases, this was similar when evaluating the correlation between age and victimization ($r = -0.13$) and fighting ($r = -$

0.20) indicating that a younger age is a predictor of experiencing victimization and engaging in fighting. Perceived safety also showed negative correlations with gang membership (r = -0.30) and Hispanic ethnicity (r = -0.25), suggesting that individuals who perceive their environment as safer may be less likely to be involved in gangs or identify as Hispanic. Social support was also positively correlated with fighting (r = 0.15) and gang membership (r = -0.24).

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for Study Variables 12(N=1,825)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Victimization	1											
2. Fighting	0.53*	1										
3. Perceived Safety	-0.51*	-0.36*	1									
4. Gang membership	0.47*	0.52*	-0.30*	1								
5. Social support	0.22*	0.15*	-0.14*	0.24*	1							
6. Male	0.44*	0.43*	0.37*	0.63*	0.20*	1						
7. Black	-0.21*	-0.14*	0.23*	-0.16*	0.03*	-0.16*	1					
8. White	-0.00	-0.14*	-0.25*	0.34*	0.06*	-0.07*	-0.28*	1				
9. Hispanic	0.24*	0.26*	-0.25*	0.36*	0.06*	0.13*	-0.70*	-0.28*	1			
10. Age: 10-12	0.07*	0.14*	-0.07*	0.07*	0.05*	0.10*	0.07*	-0.06*	-0.03*	1		
11. Age: 13-15	0.04*	0.02	-0.02	-0.16*	-0.07*	-0.09*	0.05*	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.28*	1	
12. Age 16-18	-0.07*	-0.07*	0.06*	0.12*	0.04*	0.05*	-0.09*	0.06*	0.05*	-0.21*	-0.89*	1

Note: Entries are Pearson's r coefficients. Reference category for race Black and White is any other racial category. Reference category for Hispanic is not Hispanic

The Influence of Victimization on Perceived Safety

Table 3 provides results from an ordinal logistic regression examining the influence of victimization and on perceived safety, while accounting for the effects of control variables; the different paths of the model are provided in Figure 2. The results showed that victimization is significantly and negatively associated with perceived safety (path *a*: $b = -2.15$, $z = -6.92$, $\rho < 0.001$), indicating that participants reporting victimization have decreased odds of perceiving their environment as safe. This indicates that individuals with prior victimization experiences are less likely to report a greater sense of safety. Among the control variables, Hispanics also showed a significant negative relationship with perceived safety ($b = -0.74$, $z = -3.53$, $\rho < 0.01$), suggesting that individuals identifying as Hispanic tend to report lower perceptions of safety. Gender is also positively and significantly related to perceived safety ($b = -1.09$, $z = 3.53$, $\rho < 0.001$), indicating Males have a decreased odds of perceiving their environment as safe. However, those who reported to be gang members ($b = 0.36$, $z = 1.25$, $\rho > 0.05$), having a form of social support ($b = -0.03$, $z = -0.11$), White individuals ($b = -0.12$, $z = 0.34$, $\rho > 0.05$) and belonging to age groups of 13-15 ($b = 0.10$, $z = 0.29$, $\rho > 0.05$), 6-18 ($b = 0.26$, $z = 0.71$, $\rho > 0.05$) were not statistically significant, meaning, these variables do not influence perceived safety among juveniles in custody.

Table 3. *Ordinal Logistic Regression Estimating the Influence of Victimization and Control Variables on Perceived Safety* (N =380)

Variable	Perceived Safety	
	b (S.E)	*z* test
Victimization	-2.15 (0.31)	-6.92***
Age Group:		
13-15	0.10 (0.36)	0.29
16-18	0.26 (0.36)	0.71
Gang Member	0.36 (0.31)	1.25
Gender-Male	-1.09 (0.31)	-3.53***
Hispanic	-0.74 (0.24)	-3.04***
Social Support	-0.03 (0.28)	-0.11
White	-0.12 (0.34)	-0.35
Thresholds		
Very unsafe	-5.21 (0.52)	
Unsafe	-1.43 (0.46)	
Safe	1.90 (0.46)	
Model Fit		
LL	-325.05	
Wald X^2	111.92	
Pseudo R^2	0.18	

Note. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients (*b*), robust standard errors (SE) in parentheses, and test statistics (*z* tests). Threshold values indicate cut points between the categories of the dependent variable. Model fit statistics provide information about the performance of the model.

***$\rho < 0.001$, ** $\rho < 0.01$, and * $\rho < 0.05$ (two-tailed test).

The Effect of Victimization and Perceived Safety on Fighting Behaviors

Table 4 presents the results of two multivariate regression models examining the effect of study variables on fighting behaviors; the different paths of the models are presented in Figure 2. In Model 1,victimization (path c: b = 2.08, z = 5.45, $\rho < 0.001$) and gang membership (b = 1.49, z = 4.03, $\rho < 0.001$), significantly increases the odds of participants reporting that they have engaged in fighting behaviors.

Next, perceptions of safety were introduced into Model 2 to test the direct effect of victimization on fighting behaviors, when perceived safety is included in the Model. The results in Model 2 show perceptions of safety did not significantly predict fighting behaviors (path *b*: b

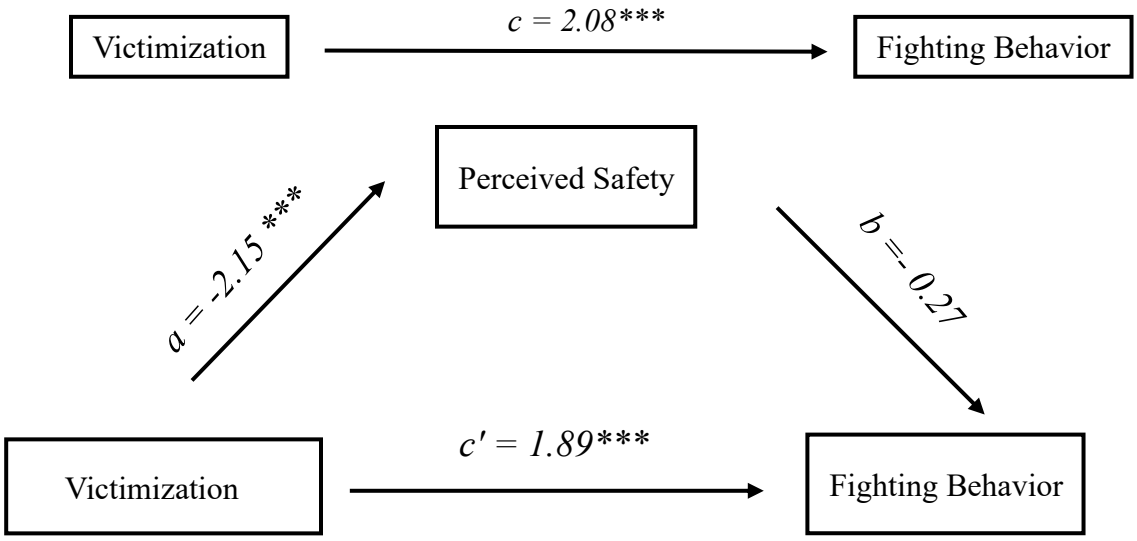
= -0.27, z = -1.11, $\rho > 0.05$), suggesting that perceptions of safety do not independently influence the likelihood of engaging in physical fights once victimization and other variables are considered. However, victimization (path *c'*: b = 1.89, z = 4.91, $\rho > 0.001$) and gang membership (b = 1.54, z = -4.16, $\rho < 0.001$) were significant in Model 2, indicating that victimization and gang membership still has a significant effect on fighting behaviors even when perceived safety is included in the model.

Table 4. Multivariate Regression Models Estimating the Effect of Study Variables on Fighting Behaviors (N = 1,825)

Variables	Fighting Behaviors			
	Model 1		Model 2	
	b (S.E)	*z* test	*b (S.E)*	*z* test
Victimization	2.08 (0.38)	5.45***	1.89 (0.39)	4.91***
Perceived Safety	--	--	-0.27 (0.24)	-1.11
Age group:				
14-16	-0.49 (0.73)	-0.67	0.47 (0.73)	-0.63
17-18	-1.04 (0.73)	1.12	-1.03 (0.73)	-1.41
Gang member	1.49 (0.37)	4.03***	1.54 (0.37)	4.16***
Gender-Male	0.42 (0.38)	1.11	0.39 (0.38)	1.02
Hispanic	0.38 (0.36)	-1.42	0.32 (0.34)	0.95
Social Support	-0.18 (0.37)	-0.48	-0.21 (0.37)	-0.57
White	-0.59 (0.43)	-1.38	-0.70 (0.43)	-1.62
Constant	-0.54 (0.81)	-0.66	0.22 (1.00)	0.22
Model Fit				
LL	-163.98		-162.43	
Wald X^2	120.75		119.21	
Pseudo R^2	0.33		0.34	
N	360		359	

Note. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients (*b*), robust standard errors (SE) in parentheses, and test statistics (*z* tests). Constant includes Model fit statistics provide information about the performance of the model. ***$\rho < 0.001$, ** $\rho < 0.01$, and * $\rho < 0.05$ (two-tailed test).

Figure 3. *Mediation Model Results*



Note: Path *a* represents the effect of victimization on perceived safety; Path *b* represents the effect of perceived safety on fighting behaviors; Path *c* represents the total effect of victimization on fighting behaviors before including the mediator; Path *c′* represents the direct effect of victimization on fighting behaviors after accounting for perceived safety. Significance levels are indicated as $**\rho < 0.001$.

The mediating effect of perceived safety

The mediation analysis explored the role of perceived safety in mediating the relationship between victimization and fighting behaviors. Path *a*, which examines the effect of victimization on perceived safety, was significant *(path a: b = -2.15, SE = 0.31_ z = -6.92, $\rho < 0.001$)*, Path *b* which assesses the effect of perceived safety on fighting behaviors was not significant (*b* = -0.27, SE = 0.24, *z* = -1.11). Path *c*, represents the total effect of victimization on fighting behaviors when the mediator was not in the analysis, was significant (*b* = 2.08, SE = 0.38, *z* = 5.45, ***p<0.001), and Path *c'*, the direct effect of victimization on fighting behaviors with the

mediator -perceived safety in the analysis, remained significant (b = 1.89, SE = 0.39, z = 4.91, ***p<0.001).

The Sobel test was used to determine the significance of the indirect effect of victimization on fighting behaviors through perceived safety was not significant. The results of the Sobel tests (z = 1.11) and the p = value of 0.267, which is greater than the typical significance threshold (0.05). This indicated that the evidence is not strong enough to conclude a significant mediation effect, indicating that while perceived safety affects victimization, it does not significantly mediate the relationship between victimization and fighting behaviors.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of victimization on perceived safety and consequential coping behaviors, namely, engagement in fighting after experiencing victimization. Researchers have investigated the outcomes of victimization among juveniles, revealing several behavioral and emotional outcomes such as negative emotions (e.g., depression, anger, frustration, fear, anxiety) and maladaptive coping behaviors (e.g., deviant behaviors, substance use, aggression, violence) (Carson et al., 2008; Faulk et al., 2014; McGrath et al., 2013; Zweig et al., 2015). While this line of research has been enlightening, it has largely overlooked the impact of victimization on perceptions of safety within correctional facilities. This study seeks to contribute to this body of work by drawing on Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory (GST) and Sykes' (1958; 2007) pains of imprisonment framework. According to these theories, victimization or a negative environment increases the likelihood of strain, leading to heightened negative emotions among those affected. These negative emotions, in turn, promote maladaptive coping behaviors.

Summary of Findings

In this study, several bivariate and multivariate statistical tests explored the effects of victimization on perceptions of safety and fighting behaviors in detention. Hypothesis 1 suggested that individuals who experience victimization will be more likely to engage in fighting behaviors and hypothesis 2 suggested they will also have lower perceptions of safety; both

hypothesis 1 and 2 were supported. As expected, juveniles who experience victimization will be more likely to engage in maladaptive coping behaviors and have lower perceptions of safety. The analysis showed that juveniles who have had experiences of victimization are less likely to perceive their environment to be safe. This is consistent with GST propositions that suggest that those who experience forms of victimization through abuse or threats are more likely also to experience negative emotions (Aranda-Hughes et al., 2021; Barnet et al., 2015; Zweig et al., 2015). Based on previous research suggesting that these negative emotions increase aggression-related behaviors (Hay & Evans, 2005), the analysis finds that victimization is associated with engaging in fighting behaviors. Indicating that those who are victimized and respond through aggression are more likely to experience future conflicts within their environment (Reid & Listwan, 2008).

Hypothesis 3 stated that perceptions of safety would have a direct effect on maladaptive coping behaviors, however it was not supported. The analysis found that the effect of perceived safety on fighting behaviors, controlling for victimization was not supported. This indicated that perceived safety does not significantly influence maladaptive coping behaviors such as fighting. Hypothesis 4 suggested that perceptions of safety would mediate the relationship between victimization and maladaptive coping behaviors and was not supported. Although victimization significantly affects perceptions of safety (path a), and there is a significant total effect of victimization on fighting behaviors (path c), the indirect effect through perceived safety was not significant. This finding suggests that perceived safety does not significantly mediate the relationship between victimization and maladaptive coping behaviors. The lack of mediation may be due to several factors, including measurement issues, the complexity of the relationship

between the victimization and fighting behaviors, and individual differences in psychological and behavioral responses. Research suggests that safety in prison is dependent who they are surrounded by and who they can trust (Liebling, 2011). Employing a more comprehensive measure of perceived safety could be employed to enhance the accuracy of the mediation analysis. For instance, using multiple items that assess different variations of safety such as physical safety or emotional safety, can provide a more nuanced understanding of juveniles' sense of security. It has been shown that a misrepresentation of the mediator could affect the detection of the indirect effect (Gonzalez & MacKinnon, 2020). Additionally, the strong direct effect suggests that victimization itself is a strong predictor of fighting behaviors, which may possibly reduce the impact of perceived safety as a mediator (Hair et al., 2021). Given that juveniles may respond directly to victimization through fighting behaviors as self-defense, bypassing the process where perceived safety may mediate this relationship, it is noteworthy that the relationship between victimization and gang membership was also significant. Research has shown that indicating that those affiliated with gangs are at an increased risk of being surrounded and experiencing violence (Katz et al., 2010); and this type of environment, surrounded by violence, may further exacerbate their perception of an unsafe environment (Reid & Listwan, 2008), which could perpetuate a cycle of aggression and gang involvement. However, some research suggests that gangs can serve as a social support system and as a protective factor for victimized youth (Conway-Turner et al., 2019). However, the analysis revealed that negative social support, operationalized as gang membership, increased fighting behaviors. This finding may suggest that not all forms of social support are equally effective in mitigating the negative emotions followed by victimization. Indeed, the present study underscores how the *quality* of

social support can shape its influence on behavior. Although research suggests that those juveniles can benefit by receiving social support from family members and friends through visitation (Pierce et al., 2017), these interactions may not always be positive. Because social support (i.e.,speaking on the phone or through visitation with family members) did not significanty impact fighting behaviors or perceptions of safety, this suggests that this form of social support may not always be an important factor for maladaptive coping in juvenile detention settings.

Implications

The findings of this study offer important insights into GST and the pains of imprisonment. GST is partially supported, that experiences of victimization create strain, resulting in negative emotional states and subsequent deviant behaviors, such as fighting. The pains of imprisonment framework, which highlights the adverse effects of incarceration experiences, is supported by the observed decrease in perceptions of safety due to victimization. It is evident that juvenile detention is surrounded by violence, through victimization and responses to victimization. When juveniles are placed in detention as punishment, policymakers fail to acknowledge the additional hardships they may face during detention and the consequences of this for future deviance in and of itself. Research has consistently shown that juveniles are deprived of essential social interactions and educational opportunities that promote positive and legitimate coping skills (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020).

The current study's findings are consistent with prior research, suggesting that those who experience victimization during detention report lower levels of perceived safety and are at risk of maladaptive coping behaviors. Several strategies can be adopted in detention facilities, based

on the current study's results to reduce negative emotionality and enhance access to prosocial coping mechanisms among detained juveniles. Research shows that implementing trauma-informed intervention services within juvenile justice settings can be an effective strategy (Baetz et al., 2021). This intervention strategy involves providing staff with psychoeducation about trauma and specific skills for emotion regulation, clear communication, and interpersonal problem-solving. Given the fact that adolescence is a developmental period, and in detention, they are surrounded by several stressors from experiencing and witnessing victimization and attempting to cope with these stressors with limited resources (Snyder, 2018). Scholars have also suggested that simple cognitive behavioral therapy that focuses on depressive symptoms can improve mental health among incarcerated adolescents (Ratnam et al., 2021). While studies using GST suggest social support from family members can reinforce positive coping mechanisms, helping them handle strains more effectively and potentially reduce the risk of negative outcomes (Kort-Butler, 2018). The results from the analyses suggest that it does not play a role in whether juveniles engage in fighting behaviors, indicating the need for fostering a supportive social environment within detention to create a safer and healthier environment. Social support within detention is shown to allow juveniles to adapt better to the conditions of confinement (Van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013). It is also essential to consider how conditions of confinement can exacerbate the stress of juveniles. Research suggests that promoting positive social interactions (Van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013)— through practices such as educational or vocational programming—can provide constructive skills for development, reducing time for potential conflict. Additionally, opportunities for recreational and physical exercise for juveniles are shown to improve emotional and behavioral problems, and enhance well-being, mental focus,

mood attention, and stress tolerance among juvenile delinquent moods and physical health (Kumar & Faruquie, 2016). By incorporating one or more of these strategies, it can help juveniles emotionally and physically with adapting to detention, allowing them to develop prosocial coping strategies, maintaining mental and physical well-being and better reintegrate into society upon release.

Study Limitations

As with any research, this study has limitations. First, the study uses cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to examine how victimization influences the likelihood of maladaptive coping or perceptions of safety over time. Second, the self-report nature of these measures may raise concerns. For example, juveniles may feel uncomfortable admitting to engaging in fights, experiencing victimization, or having negative emotions. Additionally, the item measuring victimization did not specify that the perpetrator was staff, visitors, or other juveniles, whereas perceptions of safety measures indicated if they felt safe from other inmates. Therefore, we cannot assume whether juveniles feel unsafe due to other juveniles or the conditions of their confinement. Additionally, the measure for maladaptive coping included engaging in fights, and this measure is likely to create gender limitations because females are more likely to use more internalizing coping strategies instead of fighting. Although the analyses considered various demographic and contextual factors, making direct assumptions regarding demographics is difficult due to inappropriate sample sizes.

Future Directions

Future research can expand on this study in several ways. For example, it could explore the severity and type of victimization, level of self-control, and additional emotional measures such

as self-esteem, depression, anxiety, or anger. These factors can influence how safety is perceived and help determine how individuals cope with such challenges. Since females tend to employ different coping methods compared to males, future research should explore the connections between victimization, negative emotions, and maladaptive coping among females. It would also be beneficial for future research to analyze behaviors outside of detention after experiencing victimization during incarceration, with the potential to enhance rehabilitation within the juvenile justice system.

Conclusion

The current study provides partial support for GST in explaining how victimization results in maladaptive coping, due to negative emotions among juveniles (Agnew, 1992). Further, the prevalence of victimization and its relationship with reduced perceptions of safety illustrates how the pains of imprisonment manifest among a sample of detained juveniles. Future research can include examining the psychological impact of victimization on individuals' feelings of safety, like through depression or anger. Additionally, this research has challenged our understanding of the role of social support in mitigating the effects of victimization on maladaptive coping, indicating that it may not play a role in coping with negative emotions. Policies and programs should focus on reducing victimization from occurring, and provide psychological support to victims, which can be done by training staff or offering forms if emotional and behavioral therapy. It may also be beneficial to explore how social interactions within detention influence victimization and perceptions of safety. Therefore, this research lays a foundation for future research by identifying key areas that need further exploration, such as the forms of social support that may enhance perceived safety and understanding the influence victimization may have on perceptions over time. By highlighting these areas, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing perceived safety and the impact of victimization.

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