Exposure to Family Violence and Risk Factors for Recidivism in Juvenile Offenders

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ABSTRACT

A better understanding of the relationship between exposure to family violence and criminal recidivism is essential in order to develop interventions which target the specific needs of juvenile offenders. Using the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY), we explored the differences in historical, social/contextual, and individual risk and protective factors for delin- quency among youth males exposed (n = 253) and not exposed to family violence (n = 497) in Spain. Chi-square test shows that most of the risk factors assessed were present in the group exposed to family violence, especially a history of child maltreatment. Logistic regression analysis show that peer delinquency was a common predictor of recidivism in youth both exposed and not exposed to family violence. Early initiation of violence predicted recidivism in young offenders without exposure to family violence, while the absence of strong social support predicted recidivism in young offenders with this exposure. Professionals in juvenile justice services need to work on peer relationships, but also to keep in mind and to address the specific needs of young offenders both with and without exposure to family violence if the aim is to avoid recidivism.

KEYWORDS

Victimization; family/ domestic violence; juvenile justice; recidivism; risk factors

Children and youth experience high rates of both direct and indirect violence, e.g., by witnessing different forms of violence and abuse toward others (S. Hamby et al., 2010). Indirect exposure to violence is a serious form of victimization (Mrug et al., 2008), with negative effects on development (Mueller & Tronick, 2020). Research in this area has mainly focused on family, domestic, intimate partner or interparental violence, and especially on violence from the father or father figure toward the mother (Weir et al., 2019). Children who witness family violence are at higher risk for a wide range of developmental difficulties (see Artz et al., 2014), and meta-analytic studies (Chan & Yeung, 2009; Vu et al., 2016) have confirmed that exposure to parental violence is related to negative child adjustment outcomes. A moderate association has been found between exposure to parental violence and psychosocial problems in children (Basto-Pereira & Da Maia, 2019), mainly externalizing behaviors (Fong et al., 2019), although factors that seem to help children fare well despite such exposure must also be considered (Howell, 2011).

Exposure to family violence and its association with criminal behavior

It is widely agreed in the scientific literature that witnessing family violence during childhood can predispose individuals to criminal behavior (Artz et al., 2014; Fox et al., 2015; Mrug et al., 2008). Furthermore, meta-analytic studies suggest that the magnitude of this association strengthens over time (Vu et al., 2016). Studies have found, for example, that being a victim of child maltreatment and witnessing interparental vio- lence is linked to violent offenses (Steketee et al., 2019), bullying at school (Chesworth et al., 2019), and delinquency in general (Artz et al., 2014). Similarly, Cénat et al. (2015) found that youth exposed to family violence were more likely to have committed at least one form of delinquent behavior during the previous 12 months, compared with their peers who had not been exposed to family violence. It should be noted, however, that other studies have found no relationship between exposure to family violence and delinquent behavior (Franzese et al., 2017; Herrera & McCloskey, 2003; Holmes, 2013; Moylan et al., 2009), while some have observed a relationship but only when adoles- cents did not

report exposure to community violence (Mrug & Windle, 2010). Meta- analytical studies have shown that many factors influence the relationship between early violence exposure and antisocial behavior (Wilson et al., 2009).

Studies show that the stress in children exposed to family violence negatively affects their development and functioning and increases their vulnerability to health problems (Artz et al., 2014). From a psychological and neurobiological perspective, it has been proven that chronic exposure to adverse experiences in childhood such as living in a violent family environment affects children's psychological functions and hampers the development of interpersonal skills and interactions, thus promoting and reinforcing dysfunctional and antisocial cognitive patterns, as well as criminal behavior (Basto- Pereira & Da Maia, 2019).

Likewise, experiences of child abuse, exposure to family violence, parental neglect, or living in toxic family environments can reduce prosocial or altruistic behavior, which is a protective factor against criminal delinquency (Gomis-Pomares & Villanueva, 2020). Learning mechanisms such as modeling and differential reinforcement may explain this link, since from the point of view of child development, children may imitate violent behaviors and show a lack of prosocial behaviors in their relationships with others. Indeed, the literature indicates that less exposure to violence in the family in childhood predicts better emotional regulation and the presence of prosocial behaviors in youth (Artz et al., 2014). It has also been found that the relationship between behavior problems and lack of prosocial skills is exacerbated by early exposure to family violence (Holmes et al., 2015). Exposure to violence in the family negatively affects the child's secure attachment, a protective factor against juvenile delinquency, and increases the risk of antisocial behavior during adolescence (Sousa et al., 2011). According to attachment theory, insecure and disorganized attachment styles tend to be relatively stable and maintained into adulthood, leading to the appearance of externalizing problems including delinquency and crime (Fong et al., 2019). Thus, strong social support and strong attachments to prosocial adults are significant predictors of desistance from criminal behavior (Blasco et al., 2014; Lodewijks et al., 2010).

Exposure to family violence and recidivism in juvenile offenders

According to several studies and meta-analyses conducted in Spain, the risk factors for criminal recidivism and the recidivism rate are similar to those in other countries (Horcajo-Gil et al., 2019; Ortega et al., 2014). Spanish youth commit crimes in similar proportions against persons and property (48.5 and 51.5%, respectively). However, youth from Eastern

European countries commit a higher proportion of crimes against property, while those from Latin American and African countries commit more crimes against persons (Cuervo et al., 2015).

Likewise, numerous psychological and social risk variables and protective factors have been linked to recidivism in juvenile offenders (Cacho et al., 2020; Hoge et al., 2015; Lodewijks et al., 2010; Ortega et al., 2014). However, very little is known about which of them may predict reoffending among youth who have been exposed to family violence in comparison to not exposed youth (Shaw, 2019). Despite the reported association between exposure to family violence and delinquent behavior, its effect on recidivism remains unclear. Although some authors have found a significant relationship between exposure to family violence and recidivism in juvenile offenders (García España et al., 2011; Holmes et al., 2015), this association is not supported by other reports (Department of Research and Criminology and Social Training [DRCST], 2017; Shaw, 2019). The fact that the results appear to be diverse and even inconsistent may be related to the fact that the onset and cessation of criminal activity are determined by different risk factors that may also vary with age (Hoge et al., 2015; Horcajo-Gil et al., 2019).

In addition, there is clear evidence that associations between exposure to family violence and children's externalizing problems may be mediated or moderated by a number of factors (Conrad, 2015; Fong et al., 2019). For instance, some research suggests that the behavior of children exposed to family violence may be mediated by the quality of caregiver interactions (Levendosky et al., 2003), while other studies have found a greater presence of exposure to family violence and conflicts between parents in young repeat offenders (Cacho et al., 2020; García España et al., 2011). Other factors, such as mother's social support (Artz et al., 2014), the use of physical punishment and child neglect (Huang et al., 2015), have also been found to mediate or moderate the relationship between exposure to family violence and delinquent behavior. However, other studies suggest that factors associated with family dynamics are less important in explaining youth recidivism than individual risk factors, association with dissocial peers (Blasco et al., 2014; Hilterman et al., 2016), or school-based violence prevention programs (Crooks et al., 2007). In addition, research has shown that exposure to intimate partner violence alongside other forms of victimization in childhood, what is referred to as poly-victimization (Finkelhor et al., 2007), is associated with a greater risk of antisocial behavior than is the case when only one form of maltreatment is experienced (Park et al., 2012; Sousa et al., 2011).

In this respect, research has yet to explore risk factors for delinquency in relation to specific profiles of young offenders (Cuervo et al., 2015). Additionally, the degree to which different risk and protective factors in childhood may determine subsequent delinquent behavior remains unclear and requires further investigation (Baglivio et al., 2015). A better understanding of the relationship between exposure to family violence and criminal recidivism is essential in order to develop interventions which target the specific needs of juvenile offenders.

Aim of the study

Youth involved in the juvenile justice system are one of the segments of the population reporting higher rates of victimization (Dierkhising et al., 2013; Ford et al., 2008; Pereda et al., 2017). Several studies have analyzed the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and recidivism in juvenile offenders (Wolff & Baglivio, 2017; Wolff et al., 2017). However, only a few studies have specifically examined risk and protective factors for delinquency among youth exposed to family violence (Shaw, 2019). Thus, the objectives of the present study are: a) to explore differences in historical, social/contextual, and individual risk and protective factors for delinquency among youth males exposed and not exposed to family violence; b) to determine whether youth males exposed and not exposed to family violence differ in recidivism rates, as well as in age at the time of the first re-offense; and c) to identify risk and protective factors that predict recidivism in youth males exposed and not exposed to family violence .

We aim to better understand the risk and protection factors associated with criminal behavior and to identify the best predictors of criminal recidivism among young people exposed and not exposed to family violence. To do so, we compare and evaluate a group of male juvenile offenders exposed and not exposed to family violence, using the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth in Spain (SAVRY; Borum et al., 2003).

Based on previous studies we hypothesize that male juvenile offenders exposed to family violence will, in comparison with those not exposed to such violence, present more risk factors and fewer protective factors associated with delinquent behavior (Bender, 2010; Mrug et al., 2008). Given that risk factors increase the likelihood of committing an offense and of reoffending (Hoge et al., 2015), we expect to find a higher rate of recidivism among male juvenile offenders exposed to family violence, and also that they will be younger at the time of the first re-offense (Cénat et al., 2015). We also consider that the risk and protective

factors which predict recidivism among male juvenile offenders exposed to family violence will be related to family variables such as maltreatment by parents, as well as to youth variables such as running away from home, problems at school, parental criminality, and early caregiver disruption (Baglivio et al., 2015; Bender, 2010; Maas et al., 2008). Finally, we consider that delinquent peer associations, antisocial personality traits, and substance abuse will predict recidivism among male juvenile offenders not exposed to family violence. The literature shows that these factors are robust predictors of juvenile delinquency risk regardless of the presence of factors associated with family dynamics (Blasco et al., 2014; Coie et al., 1995; Ferguson et al., 2009; Hilterman et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2006).

Method

Data

The data used for this study were obtained from an open access database containing information about recidivism among male minors who committed a criminal offense between the ages of 14 and 18 years ($n = 750$) (DRCST, 2017) and who completed in 2010 a program imposed as part of criminal proceedings by the Juvenile Court in Catalonia (north-east region of Spain). From these proceedings, identified as the "baseline case", we selected the last program completed. The data consulted were updated on 25 September 2016 and access to them is authorized under Law 37/2007 (Government of Catalonia, Department of Justice; Center for Legal Studies and Specialized Training). The data included the following: a) personal and penal information and information about the program or measure imposed, as recorded in the information system of the juvenile justice system; b) a risk assessment for delinquent behavior based on the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY; Borum et al., 2003; adapted for the Spanish context by Vallès & Hilterman, 2006); and c) follow-up of criminal recidivism by the young person up until 2013, with a mean follow-up of 3.5 years (range = 3 − 4) from the time of the "baseline case". For the present study, we selected all males juvenile offenders who were assessed with the SAVRY ($n = 750$), a tool that began to be used in Catalonia in 2009. We chose to focus on data for youth assessed with the SAVRY because we were thus able to examine in detail the risk and protective factors associated with recidivism, and because the instrument is used to manage the risk of delinquent behavior in young offenders. The SAVRY comprises 24 items organized into three risk domains: Historical (10 items), Social/Contextual (6 items), and Individual (8 items). Each item has a three-level rating structure ranging from "low" to "moderate" to "high". The SAVRY also includes six protective items scored as either present or absent. A risk factor is rated as "low" when it is absent, "moderate" when it is somewhat present or not considered a determining factor, and "high" when it is clearly present and significantly interferes with the young person's life. Each risk factor is scored on a 3-point scale; *low* (0), *moderate* (1), or *high risk* (2). Protective factors are scored *present* (1) or *absent* (0). The risk assessments were completed by professionals of the Catalan juvenile justice system.

The original database ($n = 858$) comprised both men ($n = 750$) and women ($n = 108$). The results of the chi-square test did not show a statistically significant association between exposure to family violence and gender ($X^2[1] = 2.62$, $p = .105$, *ns*), ethnicity ($X^2[1] = 0.116$, $p = .734$, *ns*), or the age of the first recidivism ($U = 8938.5$, $p = .683$, *ns*). In the ROC analysis from the original database, the Areas Under the Curve (AUCs) for the SAVRY Total Score, Protective Score, and the Historical, Social/Contextual, and Individual/Clinical Risk Domains ranged from 0.62 to 0.65. Regarding SAVRY's internal consistency, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient presented a value of 0.90 for the total score.

In the current study, we chose the subsample of men ($n = 750$). Studies carried out in Spain with the SAVRY have identified differences between genders in relation to risk factors for criminal recidivism, a fact that could lead to confusing results if both genders are included

in the analyses as a homogeneous group (Hilterman et al., 2016). In terms of nationality, 443 were Spanish (59.1%), 24 were from other countries in Europe (3.2%), 142 were Latin Americans (18.9%), 126 from Africa (16.8%) and 15 (2%) from other countries. Regarding recidivism, 261 young people (34.8%) reoffended and 489 (65.2%) did not. The mean age of the first recidivism was 18.3 years (*SD* = 1.89, range = 14– 24). Among the youths who reoffended, 123 (47.1%) committed a violent crime, and 137 (52.5%) a nonviolent crime: specifically, 69 (26.4%) perpetrated a crime against people, 54 (20.7%) against property with violence, 73 (28%) against property without violence, and 65 (24.9%) other types of crimes. In the preliminary analyses, the results of the chi-square test did not show a statistically significant association between exposure to family violence and ethnic origin (X2 [1] = 0.313, p = .576, ns) or with the age of the first recidivism (U = 7724.5, p = .614, *ns*).

In the ROC analysis from the current study, the Areas Under the Curve (AUCs) for the SAVRY Total Score, Protective Score, and the Historical, Social/Contextual, and Individual/ Clinical Risk Domains ranged from 0.61 to 0.64. Regarding SAVRY's internal consistency, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient presented a value of 0.89 for the total score. The total score was 15.74 (SD = 8.87, range = 0 − 40).

Variables

Structured assessment of violence risk in youth (SAVRY)

In order to identify the juvenile offenders' characteristics (risk and protective factors and recidivism) in relation to their exposure to family violence we first divided the sample into two groups based on responses to the SAVRY item "*exposure to violence in the home*". Violence in the home, or violence in the family, generally refers to any direct physical aggression or violence (e.g., pushing, hitting, throwing objects) that occurred in the family between parental figures or a parental figure and another child. It may have involved parents, step-parents, foster parents, common-law or romantic partners, grandparents, legal guardians, or siblings, and it refers to violence that the youth was not directly involved in but nevertheless witnessed. The group of juvenile offenders we labeled *not exposed to family violence* comprised those cases rated as "low" (n = 497) on the aforementioned SAVRY item, whereas the group we labeled *exposed to family violence* consisted of those youths who were classified as "moderate" or "high" (n = 253). In order to identify in both these groups (exposed vs. not exposed to family violence) the risk factors that were clearly present and which significantly interfered with the young person's life, the three categories ("low", "moderate", and "high") for the remaining 23 SAVRY items were recoded into two levels (low = 0; moderate and high = 1). For the six protective items, we retained the original coding (0 = present; 1 = absent). The SAVRY has been used in previous studies with other European samples (see Lodewijks et al., 2008).

In order to identify the risk and protective factors that predicted criminal recidivism in the group of juvenile offenders exposed to family violence (n = 253), we considered the risk and protective factors assessed by the SAVRY. The risk factors included in the present study were thus divided into historical (i.e., history of violence, history of nonviolent offending, early initiation of violence, past supervision/intervention failures, history of self-harm or suicide attempts, childhood history of maltreatment, parental/caregiver criminality, early caregiver disruption, poor school achievement), social/contextual (i.e., peer delinquency, peer rejection, stress and poor coping, poor parental management, lack of personal/social support, community disorganization), and individual (i.e., negative attitudes, risk-taking /impulsivity, substance use difficulties, anger management problems, low empathy/ remorse, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, poor compliance, low interest in school or work). The protective factors were prosocial involvement, strong social support, strong attachments and bonds, positive attitude toward intervention, strong commitment to school or work,

and resilient personality traits.

Criminal recidivism

Information about recidivism was obtained by consulting the corresponding databases of the juvenile and adult justice system. For the follow-up of recidivism, the adult database was also consulted, because studies that only record juvenile recidivism up to 18 years of age do not give an accurate idea of the rate and characteristics of recidivism in young people who commit perpetrate their first crime close to adulthood (for example, between 16 and 17 years old) (García España et al., 2011). In accordance with most of the investigations carried out in Spain (DRCST, 2017; Ortega et al., 2014), in this study criminal recidivism was defined as committing a new crime (e.g., assault, burglary, robbery, thefts, sexual assault, domestic violence, drug trafficking) when one crime (or more than one) ha previously been committed. We did not consider proceedings in which the young person was absolved or deemed not to have been involved in the act. General criminal recidivism (No = 0; Yes = 1) covered a mean period of 3.5 years (range = 3 − 4) from the end of the "baseline case" (reoffending in the short term).

Analytic strategy

In order to investigate differences between the two groups of juvenile offenders (exposed vs. not exposed to family violence), we applied chi-square tests to categorical variables and calculated effect sizes using Cramer's V. Effect sizes were interpreted as follows: < .10, small; between .10 and .30, medium; > .30, large (Cohen, 1988). For metric variables, we first checked for normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and then applied the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. Only variables shown to present significant differences between the two groups of offenders in chi-square tests were included in the logistic regression analysis. However, before performing the logistic regression, we analyzed the inter-correlations between the predictor variables to confirm the absence of multicollinearity. In general, correlations between variables were low, but six high associations were found ($V > .50$). From each pair of variables with a high association, we eliminated the one with the lower association with the outcome variable "criminal recidivism" ("childhood history of maltreatment", "lack of personal/social support", "low empathy/remorse", "low interest to school or work", "strong attachments and bonds", and "positive attitude toward intervention"). The item "exposure to violence in the home" in the SAVRY was excluded as a predictor in the logistic regression analyses, since it was the variable used to categorize the two subtypes of juvenile offenders. Finally, we found that the relationships between the remaining predictors and the outcome variable were significant. After these preliminary analyses, two hierarchical binary logistic regression models were carried out to identify predictors of criminal recidivism in the groups exposed and not exposed to family violence separately. Because the importance of certain risk factors may not be detected when their effects are mediated by other risk and protective factors, we sequentially added blocks of conceptually similar explanatory variables (e.g., protective factors, historical, social/contextual, and individual risk factors). Variables not significantly associated with criminal recidivism were dropped from subsequent models. The level of significance was set at $p \leq .05$. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 21.0 for Windows for Windows.

Results

Differences in risk and protective factors between juvenile offenders exposed and not exposed to family violence

Regarding historical factors (Table 1), the proportion of youth who had experienced maltreatment in childhood (73.1% vs. 18.3%, $p < .001$) and present parental/caregiver criminality (45.8% vs. 14.5%, $p < .001$), was significantly higher in the group of juvenile offenders exposed to family violence, and the associated effect size was large. Also in the group exposed to family violence we found that a higher proportion had a history of violence (72.7% vs. 59.4%, $p < .001$), a history of nonviolent offending (67.6% vs. 56.5%, $p = .003$), early initiation of violent behavior (40.3% vs. 26.2%, $p < .001$), past supervision/ intervention failures (45.5% vs. 26.4%, $p < .001$), a history of self-harm or suicide attempts

Table 1. Differences in the historical and social/contextual risk factors in young offenders exposed to violence in the family.

	Exposure to violence				
	No (n = 497)	Yes (n = 253)			
Factors	(%) n	(%) n	$X^2(df)$	p	Cramer's V
Historical					
History of violence	(59.4) 295	**(72.7) 184**	12.99(1)	<.001	.13
History of nonviolent offending	(56.5) 281	**(67.6) 171**	8.55(1)	.003	.11
Early initiation of violence	(26.2) 130	**(40.3) 102**	15.73(1)	<.001	.14
Past supervision/intervention failures	(26.4) 131	**(45.5) 115**	27.74(1)	<.001	.19
History of self-harm or suicide attempts	(10.3) 51	**(28.9) 73**	42.00(1)	<.001	.24
Childhood history of maltreatment	(18.3) 91	**(73.1) 185**	216.58(1)	<.001	.54
Parental/caregiver criminality	(14.5) 72	**(45.8) 116**	87.80(1)	<.001	.34
Early caregiver disruption	(31.8) 158	**(60.9) 154**	58.35(1)	<.001	.28
Poor school achievement	(87.1) 433	**(92.9) 235**	5.72(1)	.017	.09
Social/Contextual					
Peer delinquency	(59.9) 297	**(74.7) 189**	16.16(1)	<.001	.15
Peer rejection	(17.5) 87	**(30.0) 76**	15.49(1)	<.001	.14
Stress and poor coping	(54.5) 271	**(75.9) 192**	32.39(1)	<.001	.21
Poor parental management	(65.2) 324	**(88.5) 224**	46.43(1)	<.001	.25
Lack of personal/social support	(43.9) 218	**(67.6) 171**	37.80(1)	<.001	.22
Community disorganization	(45.9) 228	**(54.5) 138**	5.04(1)	.025	.08

(28.9% vs. 10.3%, $p < .001$), and early caregiver disruption (60.9% vs. 31.8%, $p < .001$). The associated effect size in each case was medium. Also, a higher proportion of school achievement (92.9% vs. 87.1%, $p = .017$) was found in the group exposed to family violence. The associated effect size was small.

With respect to social/contextual factors, proportions in the group exposed to family violence were also significantly higher, with a medium effect size, for peer delinquency (74.7% vs. 59.9%, $p < .001$), peer rejection (30% vs. 17.5%, $p < .001$), stress and poor coping (75.9% vs. 54.5%, $p < .001$), poor parental management (88.5% vs. 65.2%, $p < .001$), lack of personal/social support (67.6% vs. 43.9%, $p < .001$). The proportion of youth who had experienced community disorganization was significantly higher in the group of juvenile offenders exposed to family violence (54.5% vs. 45.9%, $p = .025$), and the associated effect size was small.

In regards to individual factors (Table 2), a significantly higher proportion of juvenile offenders who had been exposed to family violence showed negative attitudes (66.8% vs. 51.8%, $p < .001$), risk-taking/impulsivity (73.5% vs. 59.4%, $p < .001$), substance use difficulties (70% vs. 50.4%, $p < .001$), anger management problems (71.5% vs. 52.1%, $p < .001$), low empathy/remorse (62.5% vs. 50.7%, $p = .002$), attention problems/hyperactivity (48.6% vs. 32.1%, $p < .001$), and poor compliance with interventions (51.4% vs. 37.3%, $p < .001$). The effect size for each of these associations was medium. However, the two groups of juvenile offenders (exposed. vs. not exposed to family violence) did not differ in terms of commitment to school or work (53.8% vs. 46.9%, *ns*).

Concerning protective factors, a significantly higher proportion of juvenile offenders who

had been exposed to family violence also experienced a lack of the following: prosocial involvement (66.4% vs. 53%, $p = .001$), strong social support (51.8% vs. 27.6%, $p < .001$), strong attachments with at least one prosocial adult (46.2% vs. 31.4%, $p < .001$), a positive attitude toward interventions and authority (28.5% vs. 15.7%, $p < .001$), and resilient

Table 2. Differences in individual risk factors and protective factors in young offenders exposed to violence in the family.

		Exposure to violence			
		No (n = 497)	Yes (n = 253)		
Factors	(%) n	(%) n	$X^2(df)$	p	Cramer's V
Individual					
Negative attitudes	(51.8) 257	**(66.8) 169**	15.37(1)	<.001	.14
Risk-taking/impulsivity	(59.4) 295	**(73.5) 186**	14.62(1)	<.001	.14
Substance use difficulties	(50.4) 250	**(70.0) 177**	26.15(1)	<.001	.19
Anger management problems	(52.1) 259	**(71.5) 181**	26.10(1)	<.001	.19
Low empathy/remorse	(50.7) 252	**(62.5) 158**	9.34(1)	.002	.11
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder	(32.1) 159	**(48.6) 123**	19.57(1)	<.001	.16
Poor compliance	(37.3) 185	**(51.4) 130**	13.64(1)	<.001	.13
Low interest to school or work	(46.9) 232	(53.8) 136	3.18(1)	.075	*ns*
Protective (absent)					
Prosocial involvement	(53.0) 263	**(66.4) 168**	12.27(1)	<.001	.13
Strong social support	(27.6) 137	**(51.8) 131**	42.8(1)	<.001	.24
Strong attachments and bonds	(31.4)156	**(46.2) 117**	15.98(1)	<.001	.15
Positive attitude toward intervention	(15.7) 78	**(28.5) 72**	17.07(1)	<.001	.15
Strong commitment to school or work	(36.9) 183	**(45.8) 116**	5.60(1)	.018	.09
Resilient personality traits	(54.3) 270	**(66.0) 167**	9.41(1)	.002	.11

Note: ns = non-significant association.

personality traits (66% vs. 54.3%, $p = .002$). The effect size for each of these associations was medium. A significant association, but with a small effect size, was also observed between exposure to family violence and the absence of a strong commitment to school or work (45.8% vs. 36.9%, $p = .018$).

Risk and protective factors for recidivism in juvenile offenders exposed and not exposed to family violence

We found no significant difference between the two groups of juvenile offenders (exposed vs. not exposed to family violence) in the rate of general criminal recidivism, (39.1% vs. 32.6%, $X^2[1] = 3.15$, $p = .076$, *ns*). Neither was there any significant difference between the groups in the age at which the first re-offense was committed (18.4 vs. 18.2 years, $U = 7724.5$, $p = .614$, *ns*).

We also analyzed the risk and protective factors that predicted general recidivism in the group of juvenile offenders not exposed to family violence ($n = 497$). The results of the logistic regression showed that early initiation of violence (OR = 1.93; 95% CI = [1.24, 3.01], $p = .004$) and peer delinquency (OR = 2.08; 95% CI = [1.26, 3.19], $p = .003$) were associated with approximately a 2-fold increase in the likelihood of general criminal recidivism (Table 3). However, no individual risk or protective factor showed significant association with general recidivism.

The logistic regression model was statistically significant ($X^2[8] = 34.61$, $p < .001$). According to the pseudo r-squared, between 6.7% (Cox & Snell) and 9.4% (Nagelkerke) of the variability in recidivism was explained by this set of variables.

In regards to the risk and protective factors that predicted general recidivism in the group of juvenile offenders exposed to family violence (n = 253), the analysis showed that absence of strong social support increased the likelihood of reoffending (OR = 1.82; 95% CI = [1.03, 3.24], $p = .041$) (Table 4). Peer delinquency was associated with a 2.3-fold

Table 3. Risk and protective factors for recidivism in young offenders not exposed to violence in the family (n = 497).

Predictor variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Protective (absent)				
Prosocial involvement	NS			
Strong social support	NS			
Strong commitment to school or work	NS			
Resilient personality traits	NS			
Historical				
History of violence		NS		
History of nonviolent offending		NS		
Early initiation of violence		1.88**(1.19, 2.98)	1.99** (1.29, 3.09)	1.93** (1.24, 3.01)
Past supervision/intervention failures		NS		
History of self-harm or suicide attempts		NS		
Parental/caregiver criminality		NS		
Early caregiver disruption		NS		
Poor school achievement		NS		
Social/Contextual				
Peer delinquency			1.99** (1.25, 3.15)	2.01**(1.26, 3.19)
Peer rejection			NS	
Stress and poor coping			NS	
Poor parental management			NS	
Community disorganization			NS	
Individual				
Negative attitudes				NS
Risk-taking/impulsivity				NS
Substance use difficulties				NS
Anger management problems				NS
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder				NS
Poor compliance				NS

Note: Outcome variable: criminal recidivism (0 = No; 1 = Yes). NS = not significant association. Data in the cells correspond to the adjusted odds ratios (ORs) and the confidence intervals. The following omnibus tests and the goodness of fit correspond to model 4. −2log likelihood = 592.08; R^2 = .067 (Cox & Snell); .094 (Nagelkerke). n = 497. X^2 (8) = 34.61, p < .001. Hosmer & Lemeshow = X^2 (8) = 5.30, p = .725. Correctly predicted: 68.8%.

increase in the likelihood of reoffending (OR = 2.30; 95% CI = [1.13, 4.65], p = .021), but only before introducing the individual risk factors. However, no historical or individual risk factor showed a significant association with general recidivism.

The logistic regression model was statistically significant (X^2[8] = 30.47, p < .001). According to the pseudo r-squared, between 11.3% (Cox & Snell) and 15.4% (Nagelkerke) of the variability in recidivism was explained by this set of variables.

Discussion

This study explored differences in recidivism between juvenile offenders exposed and not exposed to family violence, and its relationship with risk and protective factors. The results suggest that juvenile offenders exposed to family violence have a greater presence of historical, social/contextual, and individual risk factors for re-offending and fewer protective factors against re-offending.

Therefore, most of the risk factors we assessed were present in the group exposed to family violence, in line with our hypothesis as well as previous studies (Bender, 2010; Mrug et al., 2008). One of the most significant risk factors was a childhood history of maltreatment. It is well established that children exposed to family violence are at increased risk for physical abuse and other forms of child maltreatment (see the reviews by Herrenkohl et al.,

Table 4. Risk and protective factors for recidivism in young offenders exposed to violence in the family (n = 253).

Predictor variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Protective (absent)				
Prosocial involvement	NS			
Strong social support	2.06* (1.14, 3.72)	2.28** (1.31, 3.95)	2.14** (1.23, 3.72)	1.82*(1.03, 3.24)
Strong commitment to school or work	NS			
Resilient personality traits	NS			
Historical				
History of violence		NS		
History of nonviolent offending		NS		
Early initiation of violence		NS		
Past supervision/intervention failures		NS		
History of self-harm or suicide attempts		NS		
Parental/caregiver criminality		NS		
Early caregiver disruption		NS		
Poor school achievement		NS		
Social/Contextual				
Peer delinquency			2.30* (1.13, 4.65)	NS
Peer rejection				
Stress and poor coping				
Poor parental management				
Community disorganization				
Individual				
Negative attitudes				NS
Risk-taking/impulsivity				NS
Substance use difficulties				NS
Anger management problems				NS
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder				NS
Poor compliance				NS

Note: Outcome variable: criminal recidivism (0 = No; 1 = Yes). NS = not significant association. Data in the cells correspond to the adjusted odds ratios (ORs) and the confidence intervals. The following omnibus tests and the goodness of fit correspond to model 4. −2log likelihood = 308.21; R^2 = .113 (Cox & Snell); .154 (Nagelkerke). n = 253. X^2 (8) = 30.47, p < .001. Hosmer & Lemeshow = X^2 (8) = 7.71, p = .463. Correctly predicted: 65.2%.

2008; Jouriles et al., 2008). From a neurobiological perspective, abuse affects the psychological functions of children, increasing the mental health problems associated with persistence in crime (Artz et al., 2014; Basto-Pereira & Da Maia, 2019). In turn, child abuse negatively affects a child's ability to form secure attachments and predicts antisocial behavior in both the short and long terms (Gomis-Pomares & Villanueva, 2020). Furthermore, from a developmental point of view, children who are victims of abuse may imitate violent behaviors, particularly if they perceive that such violence is rewarded (Artz et al., 2014). Abuse affects the development of relational skills, such as empathy and social competence, promoting dysfunctional personal interactions and a decrease in prosocial behavior that inhibits criminal behavior (Basto-Pereira & Da Maia, 2019).

These findings underline the importance of considering poly-victimization (Finkelhor et al., 2007) in order to have a complete picture of juvenile offenders. Our analysis also showed that poor parental management was one of the main risk factors for delinquent behavior. This is consistent with research showing that poor parental management, which includes inadequate supervision, lack of trust, and harsh or inconsistent discipline, is a factor associated with the development and persistence of antisocial behavior in young people exposed to family violence (Huang et al., 2015; Tajima et al., 2011).

Regarding protective factors, juvenile offenders exposed to family violence also presented lower levels of prosocial involvement, strong social support, positive attachments and bonds, positive attitudes toward intervention, resilient personality traits, and commitment

to school or work. The importance of protective factors with respect to desistance from reoffending in adolescents has been reported in a previous study that also used the SAVRY (Lodewijks et al., 2010). It seems, therefore, that the presence of risk factors and the absence of protective factors that have been related to delinquent behavior (Borum et al., 2003; Hilterman et al., 2016) is a common phenomenon in youth exposed to family violence.

Interestingly, however, and contrary to our hypothesis, our analysis suggests that exposure to family violence is not related to recidivism. This result is consistent with some previous reports (DRCST, 2017; Shaw, 2019). With regard specifically to the Spanish context, the rate of recidivism found in our sample (34.8%) was similar to the rate of 34.4% obtained in the meta-analysis by Ortega et al. (2014). On the other hand, in contrast to other studies (García España et al., 2011) and contrary to our hypotheses, we did not find a higher recidivism rate in young people exposed to family violence than in those not exposed. In this context, Hilterman et al. (2016) found, in a sample of young Spanish offenders, that family dynamics (a factor comprising a history of child maltreatment, exposure to family violence, parental criminality, and early caregiver disruption) showed a low or moderate correlation with other factors that explained the risk of recidivism, such as antisocial behavior, personality or social support. Thus, one explanation for the lack of an association between exposure to family violence and criminal recidivism is that juvenile criminal behavior is multifactorial in origin; hence, it is not possible to identify single influences, since several variables converge in contributing to the risk of delinquent behavior (Hoge et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2009). For example, Ferguson et al. (2009) examined the multivariate nature of risk factors for youth violence (e.g., delinquent peer associations, exposure to domestic violence in the home, family conflict, neighborhood stress, antisocial personality traits, depression level, and exposure to television and video game violence) and found that exposure to interparental violence was not predictive of youth violence and aggression. It should also be noted that the SAVRY is used with the aim of managing the risk of violence in young offenders and avoiding criminal recidivism, and it was with this in mind that the juvenile justice system in Catalonia (north-east Spain) incorporated the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model (RNR; Bonta & Andrews, 2010) in order to adapt the intensity of intervention to the risk factors present in each case. It is possible, therefore, that the increased presence of risk factors in the group of juvenile offenders exposed to family violence may have been neutralized or buffered by the application of more wide-ranging intervention measures in this group, although this variable was not analyzed in the present study.

Although we hypothesized that the risk factors for juvenile delinquency would differ in young people exposed and not exposed to family violence, our study shows that peer delinquency is a factor that predicts criminal recidivism in both groups (exposed and not exposed). This result corroborates those of previous studies conducted in Spain (Blasco et al., 2014; García España et al., 2011). In fact, peer delinquency has been found to be one of the risk factors with the greatest explanatory power in relation to criminal recidivism (Brook et al., 2011; Hoge et al., 2015).

However, our results partially support our hypotheses by suggesting that there are also factors that specifically predict criminal recidivism in each group. In young offenders not exposed to family violence, early initiation of violence increased the likelihood of repeating delinquent behaviors; so the negative consequences of early delinquency should be kept in mind (Huang et al., 2015). Likewise, the finding that early delinquency was a predictor of

the risk of recidivism in young people not exposed to family violence coincides with other Spanish studies that highlight the role of previous criminal history in subsequent criminal recidivism (Cacho et al., 2020; Ortega et al., 2014). The absence of strong social support and the lack of strong ties with prosocial adults is associated with recidivism (Blasco et al., 2014), and predicts recidivism in young offenders exposed to violence in the family. Previous studies have also reported that the absence of social support increases emotional and behavioral problems in this group (Artz et al., 2014).

In turn, juvenile offenders present a higher proportion of risk factors associated with family dynamics (e.g., poor parental management, childhood history of maltreatment, and parental criminality). From the neurobiological perspective, these factors affect the development and psychological functions of the child and may lead to problematic personal interactions, reinforcing dysfunctional cognitive patterns and criminal behavior (Basto-Pereira & Da Maia, 2019; Blasco et al., 2014). In addition, toxic family environments reduce prosocial or altruistic behavior, which is a protective factor against criminal delinquency (Gomis-Pomares & Villanueva, 2020), and favor the learning of inappropriate behaviors. Secure attachment is also affected by exposure to family violence, increasing the risk of conduct behavior during adolescence (Fong et al., 2019; Sousa et al., 2011).

However, as shown by the studies carried out in Spain (Blasco et al., 2014; Hilterman et al., 2016), and elsewhere (Hoge et al., 2015), factors related to family dynamics and individuals, which are robust criminal risk factors in childhood, seem to gradually lose criminogenic strength during adolescence in favor of the influence of the peer group, along the lines suggested by our study.

Practice implications

Our study also found that juvenile offenders who had been exposed to family violence presented, in comparison with those not exposed to such violence, a higher proportion of historical, social/contextual, and individual risk factors, as well as fewer protective factors. In terms of the RNR model (Bonta & Andrews, 2010), this means that they would require more intensive interventions that specifically target their criminogenic needs. In fact, in our study none of the risk factors was more present, and none of the protective factors was more absent, in the group of young offenders not exposed to family violence. Research has shown that a dysfunctional family background, inadequate supervision, lack of trust, and harsh or inconsistent discipline favor delinquent behavior (Cuervo et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2015; Tajima et al., 2011). In our study, risk factors such as a childhood history of maltreatment, parental criminality, and early caregiver disruption were also present among youth exposed to family violence, indicating that family variables play an important role in the etiology of their criminal behavior. Since living in a violent and dysfunctional family context affects children's mental health (Basto-Pereira & Da Maia, 2019), juvenile justice systems should improve the accessibility and quality of mental health services which may help to reduce recidivism.

However, most of these factors are historical or static, and it is therefore difficult to modify them once the young person has entered the criminal justice system (Hilterman et al., 2016). Consequently, efforts to prevent criminal recidivism in this group of young people must include targeted interventions for families of these characteristics while the child is still young (Cénat et al., 2015). Social services, health professionals, and schools can play a key role in prevention as they are usually aware of at-risk children long before they come to the attention

of the juvenile justice system. Programs aimed at improving parenting skills can also help to reduce the risk of future delinquent behavior (Artz et al., 2014; Tajima et al., 2011).

Regarding the prevention of recidivism, there is a need to establish intervention programs that bring offenders into contact with young people with prosocial behaviors. As this study shows, association with delinquent peers is a common predictor of criminal recidivism in both our groups. As for early initiation into violence, which predicts criminal recidivism in youth not exposed to violence in the family, school-based prevention programs can play a key role in avoiding these negative peer experiences that may later induce more serious violent behavior (Crooks et al., 2007). On the other hand, the effects of the absence of strong social support, which predicts criminal recidivism in youth exposed to violence in the family, together with the absence of other protective factors (i.e., prosocial involvement, strong attachments and bonds, positive attitudes toward intervention, strong commitment to school or work, and resilient personality traits), indicate the need for more intensive engagement on the part of juvenile justice workers and other professionals to compensate for these shortcomings. Ultimately, when assessing the risk of criminal recidivism, juvenile justice professionals must remember that while young lawbreakers who have been exposed to family violence are delinquents, they are also victims of multiple adverse experiences in childhood that can affect their neurobiological development and social adaptation (Cuevas et al., 2007).

Limitations of the study

There is an overlap between witnessing family violence and child maltreatment and other forms of victimization (Baglivio et al., 2015; S. Hamby et al., 2010) that has not been controlled for in the present study. The narrow definition of exposure to violence is also a limitation. Sharkey (2018) has argued that in order to capture the long reach of violence, it is necessary to consider a broader conceptualization that focuses not only on exposure to violent interactions but also on exposure to violent residential environments and violent situations. In this respect, the effects of exposure to family violence on recidivism that we found could be influenced by other forms of violence that the child has experienced, and this should be taken into consideration when interpreting our results. Further research on polyvictimization with juvenile offenders and its effects on recidivism would be valuable here. It is also important to continue investigating risk and protective factors in relation to specific profiles of juvenile offenders (Cuervo et al., 2015), since our results suggest that those young offenders who have been exposed to family violence have particular criminogenic characteristics which need to be taken into account so as to tailor interventions to their needs.

Conclusion

In summary, the present study has shown that juvenile offenders exposed to family violence present more risk factors for re-offending, and fewer protective factors against re-offending, than juvenile offenders without this exposure. This paper adds to the literature on the effects of child victimization which have associated early exposure to family violence with recidivism in juvenile delinquents via the action of a set of particular criminogenic characteristics which should be taken into account so as to tailor interventions to the needs of this specific group. Importantly, a childhood history of maltreatment seems to be very common in the

exposed group, and this needs to be addressed by professionals working with juvenile offenders. In fact, complex trauma exposure appears to be highly frequent among youth involved in the juvenile justice system (Ford et al., 2012), and it places them at high risk for psychological problems and delinquency (Ford et al., 2010). It should also be noted that peer delinquency is a common risk factor for both study groups, a fact that underlines its importance in intervention programs with juvenile delinquents.

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