

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Low Self-Control, Deviant Peer Associations, and Juvenile Cyberdeviance

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Key Words: Criminogenic Needs, Cybercrime, Anti-social Peers, Low Self-control, Juveniles

Summary/Conclusions

Prior research has identified low self-control, anti-social personality, anti-social attitudes, and anti-social peers are the top four factors that contribute to real world criminal behavior. Researchers were interested in how the factors of low self-control and anti-social peers influence juveniles' virtual environment behaviors. Survey data showed a significant relationship between, anti-social peers and low self-control and the commission of cybercrime by a juvenile. While both factors contribute to cyberdeviance, the strongest overall predictor of virtual offending was anti-social peer groups.

Limitations of Information

The results of the study were produced from analyzing survey data from one middle school and one high school in suburban Kentucky. Demographic and geographic factors may have had an effect on the results of the survey. The survey was not able to account for household income or factors such as access to the internet. Lastly, the survey did not contain longitudinal data that could identify how each of the factors influence individual's cyberdeviance over time.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Criminogenic Needs and Juvenile Cybercrime

With the increase in access and availability of technology to juveniles, researchers were interested in the factors that influence criminal behavior in online environments. Prior research in cybercrime has largely focused on college populations and digital piracy. Previously identified factors that contributed to college cyberdeviance were low self-control and anti-social peers.

A total of 435 eighth grade and high school students completed an online survey regarding the students' demographics, social network, online behaviors (i.e. piracy, purposely viewing sexual explicit material, harassment, and hacking), self-control, computer location, non-school hours of computer use, and grades. The data was collected and analyzed for any correlations.

Both low self-control and anti-social peers were found to significantly influence cyberdeviance. Anti-social peers were shown to be the strongest predictor of cybercrime commission. While low self-control was correlated with cyberdeviance, anti-social peers exacerbated low self-control and resulted in an increase in cybercrime. The researchers believe that, much like the real world, anti-social peer groups gather and interact in virtual environments. Low self-control and anti-social peers were not associated with increased activity in any single form of cyberdeviancy but rather contributed to all types.

The study also found that access to a

computer located in a private place, being knowledgeable with computers, and being male increased the likelihood of a juvenile cyberdeviance. Lastly, researchers found that females were more likely to engage in internet harassment. Males were more likely to pirate software.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Ask the juvenile about his or her peer groups off and online when assessing the juvenile using the CJRA.
- ✓ For juveniles with low self-control, use the Carey Guides. There are packets specific to self-control strategies.
- ✓ Probation Officers should consider asking juveniles about their internet usage, deviant peers, and how their online activity hurts or harms others.
- ✓ Consider having candid conversations with juvenile probationers about social networking sites, social media and the implications of their online actions.
- ✓ Educate parents of juveniles about cyberdeviance, the dangers of the internet, computers, and smart devices. A computer located in an open space will likely decrease opportunities to commit cybercrimes.
- ✓ Collaborate with juveniles to create a case plan that minimizes impulsive virtual behavior, dissuades anti-social peer engagement, and maximizes pro-social activities.
- ✓ Utilize CBT programs for juveniles that present as highly impulsive.

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