

NAME OF PRESENTING AUTHOR: Emma Sims

EMAIL ADDRESS OF PRESENTING AUTHOR: emmasims1996@gmail.com

Does depression lead to criminal behavior? A sibling comparison design using the NLSY

Emma E. Sims¹, Jonathan D Trattner², S. Mason Garrison¹

¹ Department of Psychology, Wake Forest University, Winston Salem, NC USA

² Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Wake Forest University Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA

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ABSTRACT:

Relative to the general population, adolescents with psychiatric disorders such as major depression disorder are incarcerated (and reincarcerated) at higher rates (McDougall et al., 2013). Current research is mixed whether this association is a cause, consequence, or familial confound. For example, correctional facility time leads to more depressive symptoms (Fazel et al., 2008), yet depression is associated with antisocial behaviors (e.g., delinquency; Ozkan et al., 2019). Moreover, most studies have failed to incorporate genetic-and-environmental confounding. Therefore, we employed the discordant kinship model to see whether compared siblings. We examined the direction and timing of the relationship between criminal behavior and depression, using sibling pairs from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth 1979 -- a nationally representative study. This allowed us to control for within- and between-family variance, reducing plausible confounds in analyzing the causal relationship between depression and delinquency. After controlling for familial confounds, we failed to find a causal link between depression and delinquency.

References

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