



Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section – 2010

I23 The Etiology and Taxonomy of Adolescent Antisocial Behavior

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By attending this presentation, attendees will be able to understand the difference between the etiology and course of “life-course persistent” and “adolescence-limited” antisocial behavior and to understand the ramifications (ethical, legal, and societal) of differentiating (or not differentiating) between these subtypes of individuals.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by exploring how incarcerating individuals for lengthy periods imposes a tremendous cost on society, both directly (e.g., cost to house inmate) and indirectly (e.g., institutionalization and loss of employment opportunities because of a criminal record). These costs may be justified in order to protect society or serve other legitimate penological interests. However, it is questionable whether indiscriminately incarcerating minors for extended periods serves these penological interests.

It is important to note that some degree of adolescent antisocial behavior is normative. Arrest rates for violent and non-violent crime peak around age 16 or 17, decrease quickly and linearly until age 30, and then continue to decrease each year thereafter, albeit more slowly. What does this mean? Adolescent antisocial behavior generally does not persist into adulthood and is, by definition, “adolescence-limited.” As contingencies change and neurological maturation progresses, the vast majority of adolescents are able to desist from their criminal behavior. However, there is a small subset of individuals who engages in “life course persistent” antisocial behavior.

Is severe, inflexible punishment (i.e., retribution) a legitimate penological objective if the actor is less blameworthy (or, in extreme cases, not culpable at all)? Is incapacitation necessary if the antisocial behavior is likely to cease even without specific interventions? These and other questions will be explored during the course of the presentation.

Adolescent, Antisocial Behavior, Life Course Persistent