Reviewer’s report

Title: Describing associations between child maltreatment frequency and the frequency and timing of subsequent delinquent or criminal behaviors across development: Variation by sex, sexual orientation, and race

Version: 1 Date: 25 May 2019

Reviewer: Joshua Mersky

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript again. The revisions have strengthened it some degree, though several issues warrant further attention.

First, the revised title, which simply adds the words "across development" does not resolve confusion related to the paper's purpose. In the subtitle, it is still unclear whether the "when" and "how much" refers to the independent or dependent variable. A title that more clearly describes the study's purpose would be preferred.

Regrettably, I must reiterate my previous critique of the manuscript's claims regarding self-report data and the implication that they are superior to administrative data. It is well established that both administrative and self-report data have strengths and limitations. Held separately, both present a partial view of the phenomenon. One of the concerns with survey data that is germane to this study is the potential for common methods bias, an issue that has been known for 60 years (see Campbell & Fiske, 1959). The major issue here is that analyzing self-reports of both maltreatment and offending can inflate the correlations between the two. Here is a relevant paper in this substantive area that discusses this issue:


And here is another paper that presents a more general discussion of the limitations of self-report data:


Aside from these critiques, which should be added to the limitations section, the claims regarding the strengths of self-report data are simply unnecessary. As the authors note, the is a major prospective, longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample. That's all that needs be said.

Adding the study's research questions/hypotheses is helpful. Thank you. However, research question 1 should be divided into two questions, one that focuses on the frequency of offending (i.e., how much) and another that focuses on the timing or onset of delinquency (i.e., when).
Discussion

The authors devote inordinate attention to the purported strengths of the study in paragraphs 2-4 of the discussion. Much of this content can be omitted entirely and that which is retained should come after a discussion of the study's limitations. Aside from the organizational advantages to doing so, this is preferable stylistically because it helps to avoid the appearance of self-advocacy. The discussion should, instead, move swiftly into a presentation of the study's central findings and key inferences, which begins in paragraph 5.

The discussion of results presented in paragraph 5 would be strengthened by indicating that these findings replicate a long line of research. Provide citations accordingly.

Similarly, paragraph 6 should convey whether the demographic differences uncovered in this study comport with previous research.

The second half of paragraph 7 is speculative and only loosely related to the data at hand.

Paragraph 8 pertains to research question 1, not question 2. It should be moved to another location earlier in the discussion. This will enhance the flow between what are now paragraphs 7 and 9 of the discussion. In addition, the citations provided in paragraph 8 do not support the claims made. The specific papers cited (e.g., references 42-44; 45,46) do not represent an entire body of literature. Again, the authors are overestimating the extent to which this study is distinctive and the importance of demonstrating its distinctiveness. As a means of advancing the science in this area, it would be preferable to take the opposite approach and compare the findings from this study to other studies that are similar. There are many. Here is a sampling:


Paragraph 9 would also be strengthened by comparing the study results to previous studies that have tested differences by race/ethnicity and sexual orientation.

The limitations section is sparse, particularly when juxtaposed against the amount of attention paid to the study's strengths. As noted in my previous review, the low internal consistency reliability of the outcome measures should be acknowledged. As should the limitations of self-report data. Plus, the dataset isn't old at all. Wave IV data collection took place in 2008, and the most recent wave of data collection occurred from 2016-2018.
Minor edits

The phrase "shed light" is used four times. Synonymous phrasing could be used to replace some of these instances.

It is unclear why the colloquial phrase "boys will be boys" is invoked. The terminology itself seems dated and, more importantly, the associated inferences lack a concrete connection to the study's hypotheses and results.

The lengthy paragraph at the end of the discussion on p. 12 needs to be divided into multiple paragraphs.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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No

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