



The Influence of Delinquent Peers: How Sub-Types of Peer Delinquency Predict Juvenile Rule-Violating Behavior



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BACKGROUND

- Adolescence is a critical period marked by increased susceptibility to peer influence, especially when delinquency is involved⁵. While prior research has consistently linked peer delinquency to juvenile rule-violating behavior (RVB)¹, less is known about how specific sub-types of peer delinquency—such as violence, theft, substance use, and vandalism—differentially impact youth outcomes.
- This study investigates how distinct forms of peer delinquency predict RVB and whether these associations vary by age³ and gender^{2,4}. Understanding these demographic interactions can help refine risk assessments and intervention strategies tailored to developmental and gender-specific needs.
- By identifying which sub-types of delinquent peer behavior are most influential—and for whom—this research aims to inform more nuanced prevention and rehabilitation efforts for at-risk youth.

HYPOTHESIS

- Higher levels of peer delinquency will significantly predict higher levels of general RVB among adolescents
- The relationship between peer delinquency and rule-violating behavior is stronger in males than females.
- As ones age increases, so will the influence of peer delinquency on one's RVB
- RVB Sub-types such as substance abuse and vandalism are more likely to be influenced by peers rather than sub-types such as Theft and Violence

METHODS

Participants:

- 831 Participants
- Middle school cohort: 7th grade; 12-14 years old
- High school cohort: 10th; 15-17 years old
- Mean Age

Procedure:

- Data was collected using the New Hampshire Youth Study, a longitudinal survey that began in 2006
- The data used in this research is from wave 4 which was acquired in the Spring of 2008.
- Measure for RVB asked adolescents to report whether they had engaged in any of the 26 delinquent behaviors in the preceding 6 months in the following 4 areas:
 - Violent Offences (e.g. ...gotten into a fight at school?)
 - Theft Offences (e.g. ...knowingly stole or held stolen goods?)
 - Substance Offenses (e.g. ...had an alcoholic drink?)
 - Property Offenses (e.g. ...intentionally damaged or destroyed property that did not belong to you/them?)
- Participants reported whether they had engaged in any of the behaviors by responding Yes/No.
- Measure for Peer Delinquency was conducted utilizing the same set of 26 questions but asked adolescents to report how many of their close friends have engaged in any of the 26 delinquent behaviors in the preceding 6 months

Measures:

- Demographics: Gender and Age
- RVB Sub-Types: Violence, Substance Abuse, Theft, and Vandalism
- Peer Delinquency Sub-Types: Violence, Substance Abuse, Theft, and Vandalism

DISCUSSION

Findings:

- Peer delinquency significantly predicts all forms of individual rule-violating behavior (RVB).
- Age**
 - Peer delinquency subtypes are strong predictors of RVB across all adolescent age groups, especially at age 14
 - Peer Theft and Peer Vandalism were the strongest predictors of their respective RVB subtypes, with exceptionally high standardized beta values ($\beta = .971$ and $\beta = 1.061$ at age 14, respectively).
- Gender**
 - Males showed consistently stronger peer effects in
 - General peer delinquency ($\beta = .758$, $R^2 = .582$)
 - Vandalism ($\beta = .507$, $R^2 = .276$)
 - Theft ($\beta = .472$, $R^2 = .236$)
 - Violence ($\beta = .221$, $R^2 = .058$)
 - Females, however, were more influenced by peer substance use ($\beta = .236$, $R^2 = .073$) compared to males ($\beta = .168$, $R^2 = .034$).

Implications:

- Findings strongly support Social Learning Theory
- Prevention efforts should focus on:
 - Disrupting the development of deviant peer groups
 - Promoting prosocial peer environments
 - Tailoring interventions based on gender, age and delinquency subtype

Limitations:

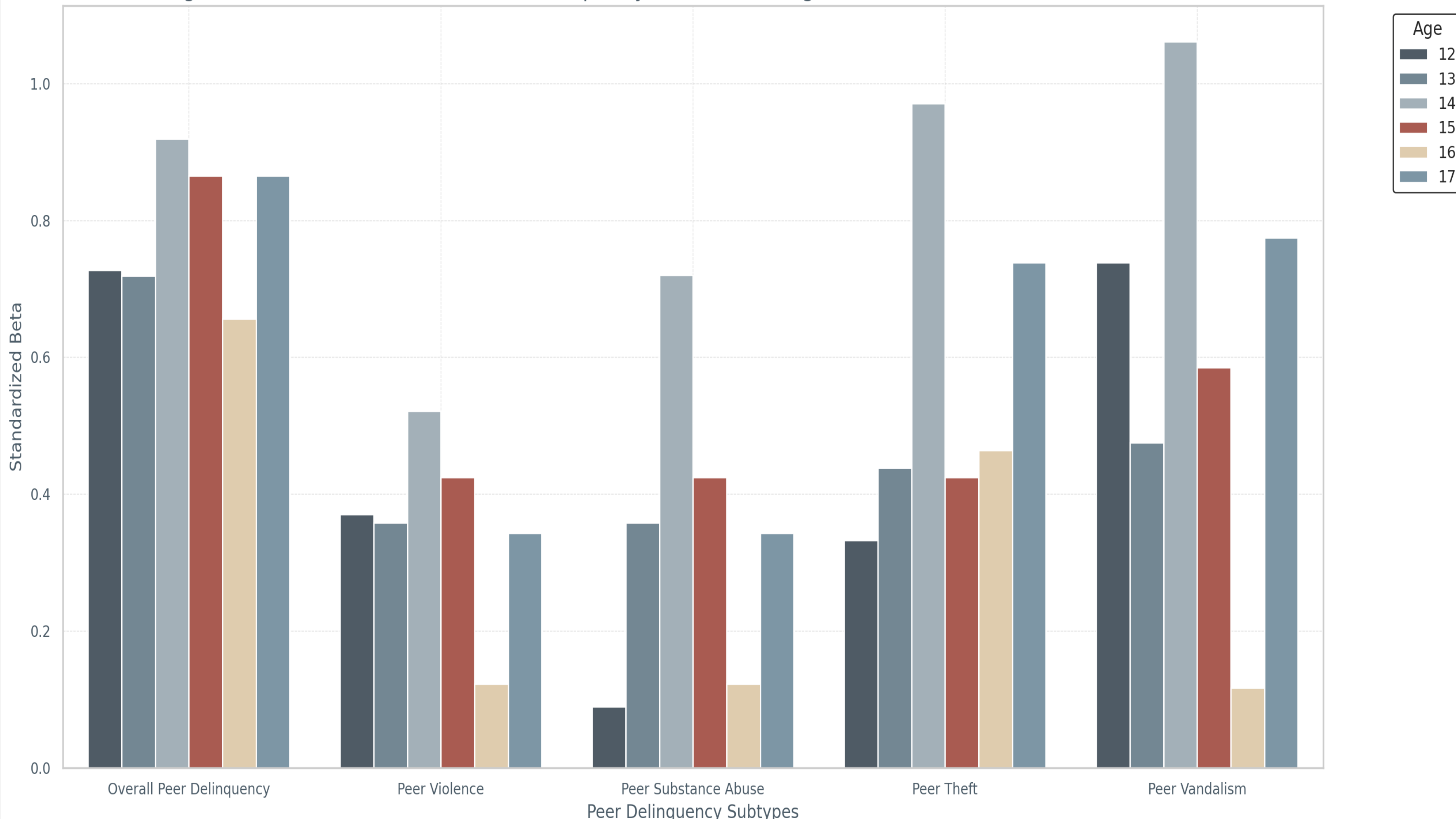
- Peer influence was assessed broadly; friendship closeness or peer group size not considered
- Data is cross-sectional (only taken at Wave 4), which limits potential conclusions on causality
- Data was only collected in NH high schools which limits generalizability

Future Directions

- Use longitudinal data to explore how peer influence develops over time.
- Examine other interaction effects (e.g., SES \times Peer Influence; Race \times Peer Influence).
- Diminishing Influence in Late Adolescence (Age 17+)

RESULTS

Age Differences in the Effect of Peer Delinquency on Rule-Violating Behavior: Standardized Beta Coefficients



Gender Differences in the Effect of Peer Delinquency on Rule-Violating Behavior: Standardized Beta Coefficients



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