

Traumatic brain injury to delinquent teens associated with mental problems

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Nearly one out of five delinquent youths suffer from traumatic brain injury, which can contribute to wide ranging mental illnesses, a new University of Michigan study shows.

The findings appear in current issue of *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health*.

Provided by University of Michigan

These troubled teens had a significantly earlier onset of criminal and substance-using behaviors, more lifetime substance abuse problems and suicidal tendencies than youths without traumatic brain injury (TBI), said Brian Perron, assistant professor in the U-M School of Social Work.

A traumatic brain injury is a head injury causing unconsciousness for more than 20 minutes. The findings suggest that fights and other assaults may have been a significant source of these injuries.

The researchers used interviews from 720 residents in Missouri rehabilitation facilities. The youths' ages ranged from 11 to 20, and 87 percent of the sample were male. About 132 teens reported having a traumatic brain injury.

Respondents with the brain injury were significantly more likely than their counterparts without it to have used heroin (11 percent versus 5 percent), cocaine or crack cocaine (36 percent versus 21 percent), marijuana (93 percent versus 85 percent) and ecstasy (33 percent versus 17 percent).

When including demographic factors, the research indicates that boys were at higher risks for traumatic brain injury than girls.

Researchers said the study did not assess the severity of the brain injury or treatment received following it.

"Some youths with more severe TBI and unmet treatment need may have greater functional impairments than the overall trends suggest," said Perron, who co-wrote the study with Matthew Howard, a professor at the University of North Carolina.

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