Hanging Out and Up to No Good: The Link Between Time Use and Delinquency, And Its Implications for Youth Programs

D. Wayne Osgood

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Views of Time Use & Delinquency

• “Idle hands" or “Involvement"
  – Being busy keeps you out of trouble
  – But busy doing what and for how long . . . ?

• Activities of “deviant subculture”
  – "Pool halls," "street corners," etc.
  – Effect of activity or who is there?

• A routine activity alternative
  – Shift focus to activities and opportunities for delinquency
Routine Activity Perspective

• Shifts attention:
  – From the person
  – To situations and opportunities

• Opportunities arise in everyday life.

• Most research has emphasized:
  – Group differences in victimization
  – Time trends in aggregate crime rates
Routine Activity Perspective

- Necessary elements for crime to occur
  - Potential Offender
  - Suitable Target
  - Absence of Capable Guardians

- Situational Motivation
  - Rewards of offending inherent in the act & situation
  - Openness to deviance, not motivation for deviance

- Premise: More time in situations conducive to deviance, more offending.
What Activities Bring Opportunities for Trouble?

• Spending time with peers
  – Can provide assistance
  – An appreciative audience

• In the absence of authority figures
  – People obligated to respond to trouble
  – Leisure activities away from adult family members

• Engaged in unstructured activities
  – That leave time available for deviance
Examples of Unstructured Socializing: “Hanging Out”

- How often do you:
  - Ride around in a car (or motorcycle) just for fun
  - Get together with friends, informally
  - Go to parties or other social affairs

- During a typical week, on how many evenings do you go out for fun and recreation?

- Hours per week hanging around with friends, not doing anything in particular, where no adults are present
Examples of Unstructured Socializing: “Hanging Out”

• Roaming typical of serious offenders
  – Far & wide, for long hours, even among young

• Gangs: Hanging out as a primary activity
  – Set space
  – Activities as predictor and consequence of joining

• “Life is a party” criminal life style
Activities that Don’t Bring Risk (or Directly Reduce It Either)

• Laying around the house
• Structured socializing
• Organized activities

• Why? The limited trade off in time use

• Aren’t some of these better for kids than others? Yes! But . . .
Unstructured Socializing & Problem Behavior

• Found by at least 17 studies
• Holds for:
  – Ages 9 to 26
  – Males and females
  – Majority and minority ethnicity
  – Varieties of illegal and problem behaviors
    Crime & delinquency  Illicit Drugs
    Alcohol Use  Dangerous Driving
Kinds of Evidence

- Qualitative and quantitative methods
- High and low risk populations
- International: many Western nations
- Cross-cultural
  - Variation across 50 pre-literate cultures
What Time Will Delinquency Occur?

- When are kids hanging out with their peers, doing nothing in particular?

- Will curfews solve the problem?
Juvenile Arrests for Aggravated Assault by Time of day

Adapted from Snyder, H. & Sickmund, M. 1999: 65
Why 3:00 in the Afternoon?

- Schools bring kids together, and then turn them loose together.
- Self report results a little different:
  - More delinquency DURING school.
  - And lots of substance use Friday & Saturday nights.
Unstructured Socializing as Normal Teen Behavior

- Increases through adolescence
  - Response to growth in skills and judgment
  - Less concern for safety and guidance
  - Anticipation of independence

- Decreases with transition to adulthood
  - Growing responsibilities leave less time available
  - Shifting leisure preferences

- Normal to a degree . . .
Parent’s Limits on Unsupervised Socializing

- How Far from Home
- How Long Away from Parents

Age:

- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
Does It Matter Who Your Friends Are?

- Bad friends rather than risky time use?
- Does time use only matter when its with bad friends?
- Their combined consequences
  - Haynie & Osgood, 2005
  - Independent measure of peer delinquency
    - Both matter separately; & even more jointly
    - Minor versus serious delinquency
Effects of Hanging Out for High Versus Low Risk Kids

• Unstructured socializing affects all
  – Unstructured socializing is normal behavior
  – Broad appeal of being wild/pushing limits
• But consequences greater for high risk
  – Risk factors multiply
  – Serious delinquency requires combinations
  – Some other major risks: Personality, parenting, school, friends, . . .
Other Factors Tied to Activities and Delinquency

• Gender
  – Males hang out more
• Social Class
  – Higher class kids out and about more (!)
• Teen employment
  – Brings more (!) unstructured socializing
• Marriage
  – Less time hanging out with friends
The Larger Context of Hanging Out

• School/Neighborhood rates of delinquency and unstructured socializing
  – Individual effect
  – Context effect

• Origin of group differences in hanging out?
  – Strong context effect of parental monitoring
  – Reason that parenting programs have broad effects?
Activities & Youth Programs: What Not to Do 1

• Don’t bring kids together for unstructured activities
  – Swedish youth center example
  – Unstructured activities offered as alternative to the streets
  – Frequent participation goes with increased delinquency

• Be sure the activities you offer are low risk
  – Supervising, structured, and/or solitary
Activities & Youth Programs: What Not to Do 2

• Don’t inadvertently create more unstructured socializing
  – What activity does program replace?
    • Partly a matter of who it attracts
  – How does program alter other time use?
    • Such as traveling to and from
  – Does program expand social networks?
  – Midnight basketball as hypothetical example
Programs that Address Teens’ Time Use

• Enhance adult control over teen time use
  – Most needed and difficult for high risk kids
  – Multisystemic therapy; treatment foster care

• Programming to improve time use skills
  – TimeWise program, Linda Caldwell, Penn St.
  – School based prevention program
  – Promotes positive youth development via improved leisure choices
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