

Adolescents' mental disorders and violent offending

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What is the relation between youths' mental disorders and their risk of assaultive harm to others?

Reviews of results from recent studies suggest answers that are ambiguous and conflicting. This keynote address demonstrates that we should never expect our future research to provide a single, consistent answer to this question, because the question itself is too general. This is shown by asking the question in four very different contexts: (a) early prevention, (b) public agency responsibilities, (c) recidivism prediction, and (d) recidivism reduction. As each context is discussed, examples from major research studies focused on each context show how different answers to the question arise—for example, how the relation is relatively significant in one context but not in another. The four contexts offer a typology with which to categorize future studies of youths' mental disorders and aggression, thus reducing some of the current confusion in this area of research.