



An investigation of Eysenck's Antisocial Behavior Hypothesis in general education students and students with behavior disorders

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Abstract

This study evaluated Eysenck's antisocial behavior (ASB) hypothesis. Eysenck's ASB hypothesis predicts that individuals high on P, E, and N with poor socialization are at the greatest risk for the development of serious conduct problems. The participants were students receiving services in Emotional and Behavior Disorders (EBD) ($n=75$) and general education (GED) students ($n=75$) matched for age, ethnicity, and sex. Participants were enrolled in middle and high schools in five counties in a large South-eastern state in the United States. Participants were administered three questionnaires; the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, the Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success-Adult (BASIS-A), and the externalizing scale of the Youth Self-Report (YSR). Participants were compared by educational placement and by the seriousness of self-reported behavior problems. Students with EBD were significantly higher on the N scale and lower on the E scale in comparison to their GED peers indicating greater risk for emotional disorders. Their assessment also suggested greater socialization difficulties than the GED participants. Elevated P and N scores were found in students reporting serious levels of conduct problems on the YSR in comparison to those reporting average difficulties. Students reporting serious levels of conduct problems also reported poor early socialization experiences as assessed by the BASIS-A. © 2003 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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The possible role of biological factors, such as temperament, in the development of conduct disorders has received little research attention. Eysenck (1977, 1997) has a well-researched biosocial theory of personality that includes the role of temperament in the development of conduct problems. In Eysenck's model, personality is the product of an interaction between temperament and social experience. The research support for the model has a long and continuous history (Eysenck, 1947, 1967, 1981, 1991a, 1991b, 1995; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985). Eysenck's model also has a clearly articulated hypothesis concerning the development of conduct problems in children and adolescents (Eysenck & Gudjonsson, 1989).

1. Eysenck's personality theory

Eysenck's theoretical model is based on the interaction of three temperament-based, personality traits interacting with socialization experiences and general intelligence (Eysenck, 1991a). Each of the independent temperament-based personality traits; Psychoticism (P), Extraversion (E), and Neuroticism (N), are on a continuum ranging from low to high. Eysenck's (1977, 1997) ASB hypothesis predicts that individuals high on the P, E, and N traits are at the greatest risk for the development of conduct problems. The risk of developing serious behavioral problems is exacerbated by poor socialization as well as below average intelligence (*g*) associated with low academic achievement. The P trait is primarily implicated in the development of conduct problems; elevated scores on the E and N traits are secondary. Eysenck also suggested that high E has a greater influence than high N on adolescent antisocial behavior. Individuals elevated on P are usually found to be low on the Lie (L) Scale. Low L Scale scores are viewed as an indication that an individual is indifferent to social expectations and is not well socialized (Eysenck & Gudjonsson, 1989, p. 74).

2. Review of related literature

A recent meta-analysis of research bearing on Eysenck's high P, E, N, and low L personality profile for the development of conduct problems in children provided partial support for the ASB hypothesis (Center & Kemp, 2002). The samples in these studies were largely composed of school children or adjudicated adolescents. The strongest support for Eysenck's ASB hypothesis was found for the P trait, with an average effect size of 0.86. There was weak support for E with an average effect size of 0.20. There was moderate support for N with an average effect size of 0.43. Finally, there was moderate support for L with an average effect size of -0.51 . No studies, based on Eysenck's theory, of students receiving special education services for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) in the United States were found.

The review indicated that there has been little investigation of the interaction of socialization with high P, E, and N in the development of conduct problems. Studies of the ASB hypothesis have not employed socialization as a dependent variable other than through the analysis of L Scale scores. However, Kemp and Center (2000) did evaluate both temperament-based personality traits and socialization experiences in a sample of young adult parolees. Socialization was assessed in the above study using a retrospective instrument, the Basic Adlerian Scales for

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