

Family Dysfunction, Youth Emotion Dysregulation, and Caregiver Strain Among Families of Youth Involved in the Legal System (YLS)

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Background

YLS are disproportionately exposed to trauma, family stressors, and socioemotional challenges. Although family dysfunction, emotion dysregulation, and caregiver strain have been studied in relation to youth delinquency, there's a gap in the research examining the interaction of these factors among families of YLS.

Methods

This study explored associations among family dysfunction, emotion dysregulation, and caregiver strain using baseline data from the *Leveraging Safe Adults (LeSA)* study ($N = 220$) youth-caregiver dyads from 9 juvenile justice detention facilities across Texas ($n = 6$) and Illinois ($n = 3$).

Participants:

Youth ($n = 250$): 14-19 years old ($M = 16.128$, $SD = 1.0098$)

- 82.8% ($n = 207$) male, 17.2% ($n = 43$) female
- 36.5% White ($n = 91$), 32.5% Black/African American ($n = 81$), 16.5% multi-racial ($n = 41$), 11.6% other ($n = 29$), 2% American Indian/Alaska Native ($n = 5$), 0.4% Asian ($n = 1$), and 0.4% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ($n = 1$)

Caregivers ($n = 210$): 23-78 years old ($M = 45.24$, $SD = 10.348$)

- 92.9% ($n = 195$) female, 7.1% ($n = 15$) male
- 50.5% White ($n = 105$), 28.4% Black/African American ($n = 59$), 14.4% other ($n = 30$), 4.3% multi-racial ($n = 9$), 1.4% American Indian/Alaska Native ($n = 3$), 0.5% Asian ($n = 1$), 0.5% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ($n = 1$)

Measures:

Family Functioning: Considers Youth & Caregiver Perspective

- Youth-Family Assessment Device-General Functioning (**Y-FAD**) – Likert scale of 1-4.
- Caregiver-Family Assessment Device-General Functioning (**C-FAD**) – Likert scale of 1-4.

Emotion Dysregulation

- Youth State-Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (**Y-DERS**) Likert scale of 1-5, summation scores range from 21-105.

Caregiver Strain

- Caregiver Strain Questionnaire-Short Form (**C-CGS**) – Likert scale of 1-5.

Results

Table 1: Bivariate Correlations

		C-CGS	C-FAD	Y-FAD	Y-DERS
C-CGS	Correlation	1	0.337**	0.002	0.103
	<i>N</i>	210	208	206	207
C-FAD	Correlation	0.337**	1	0.244**	0.156*
	<i>N</i>	208	208	204	205
Y-FAD	Correlation	0.002	0.244**	1	0.259**
	<i>N</i>	206	204	244	243
Y-DERS	Correlation	0.103	0.156*	0.259**	1
	<i>N</i>	207	205	243	246

*. Correlation was significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- C-CGS related to C-FAD, not Y-FAD. C-FAD and Y-FAD were correlated.

- Y-DERS was associated with C-FAD and Y-FAD.

- Y-DERS and C-CGS were not significantly correlated.

Table 2: Linear Regression Predicting C-CGS

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients			Sig.	Variance
	<i>b</i>	Std. Error	<i>t</i>		
C-FAD	0.661	0.129	5.140	< 0.001	0.114

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Y-DERS

Model & Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients			Sig.	Variance
	<i>b</i>	Std. Error	<i>t</i>		
Model 1: C-FAD	4.390	1.917	2.290	< 0.05	0.025
Model 2: C-FAD	2.883	1.932	1.492	0.137	0.073
Model 2: Y-FAD	6.152	1.919	3.206	< 0.05	3.206

Discussion

Importance & Implications:

- This study helps to provide a better understanding of the objective socioemotional processes of and between YLS and their families.
- Caregiver perception of family dysfunction may be predictive of caregiver strain. Youth perception of family dysfunction was not related to caregiver strain, which is why it was not factored into the model in Table 2.
- Youth perception of family dysfunction may be predictive of youth emotion dysregulation.
- This highlights the importance of incorporating both youth and caregiver perspectives into study design and assessments.
- There's a need for family-based interventions that address the caregiver, family unit, and YLS.

Limitations:

- Causality cannot be inferred. This study design used cross-sectional data. Future studies should use a longitudinal design.
- The recruitment process had various exclusions, making the sample less applicable and generalizable.
- Biases may have occurred across the self-report measures used.

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