

Impact statement

The works included in this thesis have partially answered a number of questions which had not been previously investigated. These answers have both theoretical and policy/clinical implications.

In my meta-analysis, I have shown that individuals with conduct problems are at higher risk of poor psychosocial outcomes compared to individuals with no history of conduct problems. Although this has been previously suggested by individual studies, I have shown that different trajectories of conduct problems differ in terms of risk of poor psychosocial outcomes in a hierarchical manner. Namely, the highest magnitude of risk exists in individuals with an early-onset and persistent pattern of conduct problems, followed by adolescent-onset and by childhood-limited youth. This is important because it suggests that, with varying degree of risk, all groups of youth with a history of conduct problems carry elevated risks of poor outcomes into adult life. This suggests that early intervention is needed across all groups of conduct problems individuals to minimise negative outcomes at later stages of life.

In the developmental cascade model, I have shown that males belonging to the early-onset persistent trajectory show the highest levels of risk and childhood-limited females show the lowest levels of risk across several domains (i.e. prenatal maternal psychopathology, maternal bonding, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) symptoms and academic achievement). I have shown that these common risk factors are longitudinally associated with one another across these two groups of conduct problems individuals. Of particular relevance, I found that ADHD symptoms in childhood-limited youth are more strongly predictive of future academic problems compared to early-onset persistent youth: this may impact the way future prevention and intervention programs are designed and delivered. For example, intervention programs that target ADHD symptoms in children with conduct problems may drastically reduce the risk of poor academic achievement in adolescence, especially in those that are on a desisting trajectory.

To my knowledge, this is the first time that a subjective measure of quality of school experience (which includes school connectedness and school enjoyment) has been investigated as a potential mediator of the association between conduct problems trajectories and being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at age 20. I found that high school connectedness and school enjoyment decrease the risk of being NEET in the early-onset persistent group versus the low-conduct problems group by 21.1%. This finding is particularly important for schools, which generally focus on students' academic achievement over pupils' experience and feelings about the school (such as connectedness to the school and enjoyment of going to school).

In the last study, I showed that persistent patterns of conduct problems in early adolescence are associated with a number of school-level factors, specifically with poor school atmosphere/climate, which highlights again the importance of schools in protecting youth from engaging and persisting in antisocial behaviour. The last two studies are particularly relevant for guiding, designing and delivering prevention and intervention programmes for conduct problems and antisocial behaviour in school settings.