

## Episode 71 - Katherine Montgomery: Individual and Relational Factors Associated with Delinquency Among Throwaway Adolescents

[00:00:08] Welcome to living proof a podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu). We're glad you could join us today. The series living proof examines social work research and practice that makes a difference in people's lives. I'm your host Adjoa Robinson and I'd like to take a moment to address you our regular listeners. We know you have enjoyed the living proof podcast as evidenced by the more than 130000 downloads today. Thanks to all of you we'd like to know what value you may have found in the podcast. We'd like to hear from all of you practitioners researchers students but especially our listeners who are social work educators. How are you using the podcasts in your classrooms. Just go to our Web site at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu) forward slash podcast and click on the contact us tab. Again thanks for listening and we look forward to hearing from you. When you have nothing and life is ripping at the seams. You watch your hope and pride just go slipping with your dreams. Everything you knew and love means nothing to you. Now this is an anthem for kids out on the streets. Throw away kids throw away kids and those song lyrics by the artists virus may well represent the sentiment of thousands of youth in this country who have been turned out of their homes overnight and prevented from returning by a parent or guardian. Such adolescents are known as throw away you.

[00:02:03] Today's guest Kathrine Montgomery is a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin s School of Social Work. Ms Montgomery has worked with at risk youth and families in a variety of settings including residential treatment facilities juvenile detention centers and drop in centers for homeless youth. Ms Montgomery reports on the findings and implications of her recent study on domain specific factors associated with delinquency. Among this unique population of adolescence her hope is that her work may promote more individualized evidence based planning in the field of Juvenile Justice prevention and treatment. Charles Syms critical associate professor at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work spoke with Ms Montgomery by telephone Well thank you Katherine for being willing to talk with us today about some of your very interesting work and working with throwaway and delinquent youth. Absolutely I'm happy to be here. Oh great great. So I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about the way we hear about kids all the time but oftentimes I don't know if we are all on the same page certainly. So OJJDP the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and prevention actually came up with a really great definition of throwaway youth back in the early 90s and they basically said for a while used to be deemed a throwaway. They had to have either been prevented from returning home or happened after told to leave the home by a parent or house a little. Secondly they had to have no adequate alternative care arranged for them. And then thirdly they had to stay away from home at least for one night.

[00:03:53] So really the major differentiating factor between some are runaway youth and a throwaway uses that we use is considered throwaway as it was forced to leave the home. Very few studies currently exist just because they're so difficult to really get a group of this population together to study them. And the ones that do exist they do tell us a few things they tell us that one in five youth that are labeled as runaway adolescence. But one thing that's very interesting is that although we know a lot about runaway youth throwaway youth are more likely to reside in single parent homes and more likely to come from families that have higher levels of conflict abuse and neglect than runaway youth even though that's really prevalent in the home of runaway OK. Can you tell us a little bit more about why you chose to study delinquency among runaway youth. What is that nexus about. So my primary area of interest is actually in juvenile delinquency prevention and treatment. However when we talk about reducing the risk of delinquency or treating delinquency. We're actually talking about a quite large umbrella of factors that reside under this term delinquent or delinquency. So for example when we talk about delinquency or delinquent

when we can be referring to youth with the sphere mental illness who's uses addictive substances displaying internalizing behaviors or conversely externalizing behaviors or uses coming from an incredibly abusive home or an adolescent who's involved in a gang or even an adolescent who's displaying a combination of these factors. So all of that said we also know that interventions are that are more specifically catered individuals typically are more effective. A lot of the evidence based research is coming out to say that if it's more catered specifically to that individual it's specifically more effective.

[00:05:43] I really wanted to conduct the study that was looking more at specific factors that were associated with a more specific group of delinquency about which we know very little which is throwaway use. I understand that when you were conducting the study you were beginning to look at this group of youth. You really were thinking about using a kind of a risk and protective framework. Can you tell us a little bit about what that is and then the rationale for your choosing this particular way of looking at this population. Yes certainly it's beginning approximately around 20 years ago with the work of David Hawkins and Richard Catalano. Scientists have been investigating this domain specific factor model associated with juvenile delinquency to inform prevention and treatment efforts. And basically the basic premise of this model is that various factors can place someone at risk. Will protect them from juvenile delinquency. Typically the most commonly referenced example comes from the field of medicine when we talk about the risk and protective factor framework. And people usually fight like heart disease and they say for example poor diet lack of exercise or high blood pressure all contribute to making somebody more at risk of heart disease. So in the same vein very similar to how it translates over to juvenile delinquency that this was the factor some of them that I just recently mentioned with regard to delinquency or more a juvenile has been more at risk. They are becoming delinquent. So the specific factors that have been studied over the past couple of decades there have been two that are considered to really be the most developed and these two are individual factors.

[00:07:19] Examples include attitudes the behavior mental health substance use and then relational factors is what we chose to call it for the study which include both peer and family factors. Additionally most of the current evidence based practice for juvenile delinquency involves assessment and intervention in both individual and relational levels. Multisystemic therapy Functional Family Therapy multidimensional family therapy. So even just by these names you can tell that they are Multisystemic they involve working with more than just the individual and really have a great emphasis on these relational factors. So we chose to investigate individual and relational factors associated with delinquency among this growing population. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what kinds of what those risk factors might be or what those protective factors might be. Just some examples of what they might look like. Yes certainly certainly. It just was kind of an example in individual domains school attitudes academic achievement aggressive behavior substance use. Those are all kind of considered to be some risk factors at the individual level of the relational level of gang involvement. Pure substance use are also considered to be risk factors and protective factors might be things like support from the family or support from the school system having normative or conventional peers that would adhere to more kind of conventional behaviors. Those are kind of some examples. Let's move from kind of overview to and talk a little bit more about the study. I think that that will bring some of this to life for individuals that are for people who are listening.

[00:08:57] So can you talk about your study can kind of describe that for us and give us some examples about some of the questions you are asking and kind of give us an overview of your study. Yeah absolutely. Before we really dive into that I want to really quickly to acknowledge my colleagues in the fabulous Sosina Thompson and Amenabar tech both had significant contributions to this work and they're both at the University of Texas and I just want to acknowledge their work. And it was actually the three of us that really designed the study together and came up with three

questions that we wanted to investigate that we really felt kind of really helped lead the study for us. So the first question what are the levels of delinquency among these youth. And then secondly we wanted to know what specific individual and relational factors were associated with delinquency among white youth. And thirdly we wanted to know to what extent that these particular factors predict greater levels of delinquency among the Sunni population and then to tell you just a little bit about the participants that we recruited it's kind of interesting like I mentioned before this is a very difficult population for researchers to really get to. And we were lucky we actually had 170 adolescents in our sample. And at that particular time that this data was collected from my understanding in the state at that time the foster care system was full and there were no places for kids whose parents were relinquishing rights. But these kids. And so what they had done at that time was they actually had these kids be admitted to a detention center through family court and they stayed over on the status of side until proper care could be arranged for them.

[00:10:36] So that's actually how we were able to collect the data with these kids and all these kids that were roughly around 15 years of age more than half of them about 52 percent were female and they were predominantly either black about 45 percent or white 36 percent and the majority the adolescent adolescents similar to what we do know about runaway adolescents they were sexually active about 80 percent of them and about 60 percent of them roughly give or take a little bit reported smoking cigarettes drinking alcohol and or smoking marijuana. So there were a handful of variables just demographic variables about these adolescents that were similar to what we do know about runaway youth. And whenever we put our study together the dependent variable course was delinquency which we measured with the youth self report and then like I mentioned earlier we have this list of these individual and relational risk and protective factor variables that we looked at specifically what we talked about a lot in our findings actually in our methodology where these factors that came up significant at the library level. We ran a whole bunch of individual relational factors at the library level and then we came up with this list that actually were significant. I'll just mention those right now briefly the individual level ones where school attitudes academic achievement depression aggressive behavior runaway history and substance use. And then the relational level gang involvement peer substance abuse parental support positive family effect family conflict and the level of abuse by the parent were all factors that came up significant at the library level among this group.

[00:12:10] So that's just a little bit about my research questions and our participation with regard to the major findings our very first question like I had previously mentioned was what were the levels of delinquency among early youth and their delinquency score was quite high it was eight point zero six and compared to the norm in the sample range which is roughly one point seventy three point one. This population not surprisingly has a fairly high level of delinquency. And I say not surprisingly just because when you look at homeless youth or runaway youth they often engage in a lot of delinquent behaviors for survival skills. So we expected to see a fairly high level of delinquency among this group with regard to our second question. What individual and relational factors were associated with delinquency. What we did is we ran two separate multivariate or multiple regression models because we wanted to see OK we know that there's this group of factors that contribute to their delinquency by variant level but what really stands out when you put them together in a group so at the individual domain if you had ever run away carried a weapon and had aggressive behavior Poor attitudes or poor academic performance these were all variables that significantly accounted for the variance in their relationship with delinquency and the effect size with model was actually pretty good it was a point 3 6. For this model and the next model that we did we looked specifically at the relational domain. And this when we had gang involvement peer substance abuse and family conflict all came out to be significant. But this model actually wasn't as strong was only appointee's for the third question that I had said earlier. To what extent individual and relationship factors predict greater delinquency among this group.

[00:13:50] This is a model that we put together that we included both the individual factors and the relational factors and we really wanted to see okay when you included all together what really predicts the likelihood of becoming delinquent or delinquent behavior. And really interestingly every single one of the relational factors dropped out of significance and what remained were all of the same ones that were significant at the individual level. They're running away carrying the left and aggressive behavior and school attitudes and academic performance. And this model was actually a moderate effect size as well with the point 3 5. So that's roughly kind of a snapshot a little bit of the study the participants and then some of the major findings that we had come up with in terms of cutting costs for me I'm most interested in. The point is you've got this information and you know for a number of our listeners they're actually working with this population and working with the population on a regular basis. So the research about patients fear the feel of juvenile delinquency or delinquency work or throw away use or you have thoughts about now what. What can the practitioner do with the information that you've been able to develop in your work. The big so what question right. So what does this all matter. Yeah that's a great question. So one of the things that this study suggests is that the throw away used to have very similar characteristics not surprisingly to that of runaway youth and delinquent youth.

[00:15:11] So for example we found that antisocial behavior carrying a weapon and running away aggressive behavior poor academic performance involvement with delinquent peers and youth who come from current sexual family homes. Those are all characteristics that this population had that was very similar to you and it's similar to what we know about delinquent youth in general and runaway youth. Probably what I think is of more interest at least to me is how throwaways differ from what we know about delinquent youth. One finding that interesting and I haven't mentioned too much yet and I wonder some listeners find this interesting is that of drug use I mentioned really early on we talk a little bit about what a delinquent looks like and substance use of something that I mentioned. However it's not something that was mentioned when I talked about the variables in this study. When we initially did our very first list of analysis. There were actually several different drug use variables that we looked at. And surprisingly not one of them came up as significant. In fact when we even dichotomized drug use and we made it they did or did not use drugs it did not come up as a significant variable that was associated with delinquency among this population. They might recall earlier when I was driving this particular group about 60 percent of them did report using marijuana. So they definitely had a high percent of them that use drugs. However among this population it was not strongly associated with whether or not they were more or less likely to be delinquent. Which is interesting and kind of in the same vein is alcohol use and alcohol use was one of the variables that we did have come up significant at the library level.

[00:16:44] But when we put it into the multivariate the multiple regression model it actually dropped out and wasn't significantly associated with their delinquency. So this is something that's really interesting and different about this population. And what we know about General delinquent youth. Another finding that was very interesting for us was that gender couple of things interesting one as you may recall about 52 percent of this population was female. And what we know about both runaway and delinquent youth is a larger percentage of them are male. Something else it's interesting that I think a lot of people know delinquency and research. No. Is that simply being male placing someone at greater risk of becoming delinquent is considered a risk factor. And so one thing that was really interesting about this study was that at least among this group of throwaway youth being male or female really couldn't play a role in their delinquency. And then really the third and probably what I think is a really interesting finding is this emphasis on only individual factors in the final model. What we know and when you get into the delinquency literature there's a lot that says that when you intervene with the family and you intervene at multiple levels you're more likely to get positive outcomes like admission before there's all these different evidence based practices and all of them are Multisystemic currently that I'm aware of that are used and considered to be evidence based practices with the link. However this study suggests that for away youth it's actually

the individual factors that are really more significant and being associated and accounting for their delinquency. So that's why there's just a couple of implications that we've kind of drawn from the study.

[00:18:24] One kind of in the vein of what I was just saying is is it different from what we know about effective interventions with delinquent youth. The study suggests that we might need to focus more on individual characteristics and assessment and treatment planning among the specific population and then the other implication that we've drawn is that that we drew is that it illustrates the need to emphasize more individual treatment planning and working with and understanding specific types of daily news. And what I mean by that this is kind of why I was drawn to study initially and I'm very interested in delinquencies in general however because there are so many different types of youth. I think the study really emphasizes the need for us to really look at maybe different types of youth who are at risk of becoming delinquent to see if they do need more specialized individualized treatment planning rather than looking at it more as a broad term. As I listen to you talk about a discussion or this notion that at least with this particular group of individuals kids some of I refer to them as that older notions of how we get the family involved in or the notion of get the family involved and that's going to be the critical crux of the work. While important we really have to pay attention to the individual factors that might be impinging upon this child at the same time also. So you're talking a bit about the study you talked a little bit about your findings and how you think that this will be important. In the. So where do you go from here what are you thinking about your next steps. Do you plan on staying here.

[00:19:52] It sounds like you have a passion for this population more passion for individuals who have a history of juvenile delinquency is this way you plan on staying and building on this. Do you have a passion for delinquency prevention and treatment. And I think the results of this study really lead me to be interested to study additional groups of adolescents who are at risk of becoming delinquent. So I'd be interested in looking that maybe for more specific adolescents who fall into a particular category so maybe adolescents with ADHD I'm definitely they are also interested in mental health being a risk factor for delinquency. And so I would like to know you know to what extent do we need to cater more specific interventions to youth who have particular mental illness. So I think for me the next steps aren't really investigate and look for gaps in their research of where other people haven't looked at some of these more specific factors. Adolescents are more likely to be delinquent if you were talking to a group of social workers. So budding social work students who are looking and are very interested in working with this population of throwaway youth or throw away delinquent youth. What would you want to leave them with. What would be you think for yourself would be the most important thing for them to walk away with. As they begin to think about how they're going to do the work that's a really really great question. You know I would think the answer to that is kind of twofold and it actually kind of I think is theoretically based.

[00:21:20] I was reading about this and that hepsi book that human behavior in the social environment just last semester that talking about the importance of the general and the unique that we need to pay attention to when we work with our client and that we need to think about goals. And so the general being what do we know generally about the population and really how to apply for this study what have we learned about faraway youth generally. Right. And so some of the things that we learn is that substance use doesn't necessarily make them more or less likely to become delinquent. You know we've learned some of the ways that they differ and that we may need to focus more like you were saying before that we were saying before on these individual factors maybe having them play more of an emphasis is more of a role in our assessment and treatment planning. But then secondly and I think of equal if not really greater importance is the unique and this kind of goes back to I think a lot of theoretical underpinnings underpinnings of social workers in general is really what's going on with this individual specifically. And so I think it's very important for social work students to use studies like this to understand the general. But

then also be armed and ready to learn about the unique about the individual and really specifically you know what is going on for this individual. Separate from all of the things that we know and research you know what can I learn about this individual by asking them about their family history and about their own journey in their own story really. And for my treatment planning for that probably what I would say is thank you.

[00:22:48] Excellent. Thank you. We appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today and the time that you've spent with us and good luck in your work and we'll be looking forward to reading more about your work. Working with delinquent intent away. Great. Thank you so much. You've been listening to Kathrine Montgomery discuss her research on throwaway views. Thanks for listening. And join us again next time for more lectures and punkers sessions on social work practice and research. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth Professor and dean at the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. For more information about who we are our history our programs and what we do we invite you to visit our website at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu). At UB we are living proof that social work makes a difference in people's lives.