

TRAUMA EXPOSURE IN JUVENILE DEFENDANTS: MOCK JURORS'
PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCE AND RECIDIVISM

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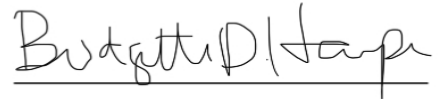


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PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCE AND RECIDIVISM**

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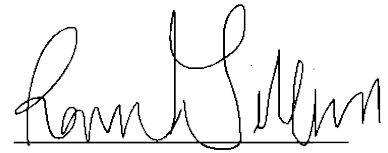
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raven Gilliam", written over a horizontal line.

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Trauma Exposure in Juvenile Defendants: Mock Jurors' Perceptions of Competence and
Recidivism

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile offenders, their level of competency, and the factors that affect it, have been researched extensively. Studies have assessed how juvenile age, type of crime, and outcomes of crime can affect perceptions of juvenile competency as well as guilty verdicts. However, studies have not investigated perceptions of competency when the juvenile has been exposed to trauma. The present study how a juvenile defendant's trauma history and competency could impact mock juror perceptions of recidivism, rehabilitation, competency, and guilt. Participants (N=102) read a case vignette of a mock trial and were required to answer questions about the case. Results indicated that when experts agreed on the defendant's competency, mock jurors perceived the defendant as significantly more competent and significantly likely to reoffend. There were no interactions or main effects of trauma history on juror perceptions. Trauma history nor competency had any impact on juror perceptions of the defendant's ability to be rehabilitated. These findings are not consistent with current literature that suggests having a history of trauma and abuse renders the juvenile defendant incapable of rehabilitation. These findings do however, offer new insight into juror perceptions of competency when discrepancies are present in expert evaluations of the juvenile's competency.

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Trauma Exposure in Juvenile Defendants: Mock Jurors' Perceptions of Competence and Recidivism

Juvenile delinquency and various factors correlated with delinquent behaviors have been studied extensively. Existing literature demonstrates that childhood neglect and abuse are associated with violent offending and delinquency (Mersky & Reynolds, 2007). Research has also examined how trauma affects a child's ability to effectively manage stress and other resulting psychological effects. Nickerson et al., (2012) reported a link between an intermittent explosive disorder (IED) diagnosis and childhood exposure to traumatic events. Childhood experiences with interpersonal trauma contributed to difficulties in regulating anger, further inhibiting cognitive and emotional development (Kinniburgh et al., 2005). Evidently, experiencing trauma during the early stages of development is highly associated with externalizing and internalizing emotional and behavioral problems (Dierkhising et al., 2013). These findings pose more questions than answers concerning juvenile delinquents and their developmental capacities after experiencing trauma at an early age.

Trauma

Childhood victimization, especially physical abuse and neglect are significantly associated with criminality in young adulthood (Howell et al., 2017). Neglect or child abuse is defined as a parent failing to meet a child's basic needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Gateway, 2019). In an analysis of cases from the Illinois Department of Child Services and the juvenile court, neglect was significantly linked to violent delinquency when experienced before the age of 12 (Mersky & Reynolds, 2007). Youths high in posttraumatic risky behavior reported significantly more exposure to trauma and severe Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Crosby & Patricia, 2019). Kazemian et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study on men in London, finding childhood

neglect in boys to be linked to significant increases in the likelihood of being convicted of a crime in adolescence. Their findings also suggest that identifying childhood neglect and exposure to adverse factors causes children to be stigmatized and expected to participate in offending behavior in adolescence (Widom, 2003).

Childhood neglect can cause a severe inability to successfully adapt and cope in various stressful situations (Hilyard & Wolfe 2002), including the absence of self-control and lack of problem-solving skills (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). It is likely that emotion dysregulation is a causal factor of traumatic exposure to violence resulting in violent behavior (Allwood & Bell, 2008). Specifically, emotional numbing and detachment has been linked to adolescent violent crimes (Steiner et al., 1997). Incarcerated male adolescents who have been exposed to violence express the belief that violence enhances self-image and reputation (Spaccarelli et al., 1995). It is possible that emotional dysregulation and the desensitization to violence are both connecting variables between violence exposure and violent offending (Allwood & Bell, 2008).

Problem behaviors including risk taking and conduct disorder are most prevalent among neglected adolescents (Kazemian et al., 2011). Along with poor behavior, juvenile court officials attribute the presence of abuse history and neglect to result in criminal offense, cognitive delays, mental disorders, and the inability to be rehabilitated (Grisso et al. 1988; Stevenson, 2009). Juvenile court officials listed child maltreatment and the factors resulting from it, as an indication of a juvenile's lack of rehabilitation and need for incarceration (Stevenson, 2009). In a comparison of mock juror and juvenile court official perceptions, mock jurors tended to attribute the juvenile's crime to external factors. When the adolescent was a victim of abuse, jurors decided that the juveniles had less understanding and less

intention to commit the crime, further mitigating the severity of punishment (Stevenson, 2009). On the other hand, factors associated with a history of abuse led to more severe treatment and punishment from juvenile court officials. Pfeffer et al.'s (2012) reported perceptions that the cause of the crime committed by a juvenile was due to internal attributions, such as a lack of personal control; however, this did not translate into more lenient punishment. Mock jurors do not always attribute abuse history to external factors, nor does this attribution always lead to leniency for the defendant of a serious crime. For instance, mock jurors may be lenient in their punishment of a juvenile accused of murdering their abuser and someone who did not abuse them (Nunez et al., 2007; Stalans & Henry, 1994), while Najdowski (2009) show that mock jurors demonstrated leniency and the acceptance of self-defense only when the murder was of the abuser. Taken together, a defendant's history of trauma during adolescence can have inconsistent effects on juror perceptions of guilt, responsibility, and even their ability to fully comprehend and participate in legal proceedings.

Competency

Competency to stand trial is determined by the juvenile's ability to understand and comprehend court proceedings and appropriately consult with their counsel (Cordero, 2015). All defendants—adult and juvenile—must be capable of actively participating in their own defense and comprehending the long-term effects of their legal decisions (Bradley et al., 2012). However, few studies have investigated how a juvenile defendant's history of trauma may impact perceptions of competency to stand trial (CST).

Grisso et al. (2003) compared the different capacities of adults and adolescents related to CST. Grisso et al.'s findings reinforced the point that juveniles 15 years old and

younger were at risk of being developmentally impaired, in ways that potentially compromised their competency. Many of the youths ages 14 and younger in the juvenile justice system, are below-average intelligence (Grisso et al., 2003) and demonstrate poor abilities in understanding and reasoning related to participation in trial (Grisso, 1997; 2000). In evaluating the maturity of judgement in the course of adjudication, Berryessa and Reeves (2020), found that youths are likely to make decisions compliant with authority figures due to psychosocial immaturity. In assessing 27 juvenile judges' attitudes and considerations of adolescent development in relation to competency, Berryessa and Reeves (2020) found that most judges concluded adolescent development as being unimportant in determining competency to stand trial. Judges were cognizant of adolescent development and its direct impact on behavior, judgment, and competency, but most judges found the possible developmental impairment of court related competencies to have little effect on their overall decision of a juvenile's competency (Berryessa & Reeves 2020). Judges admitted recognition of psychosocial deficits linked to poor development, affecting juvenile judgement and decision making. More than half of the judges could recognize adolescent brain and psychosocial development as important, except in considering competency (Berryessa & Reeves 2020).

Researchers have investigated the impact of age, type of crime, and outcome of crime on adolescent competency (e.g., Ghetti & Redlich, 2001; Grisso et al., 2003; Cordero, 2015). For example, Cordero (2015) found that when a crime resulted in the victim being injured, and the defendant was found competent (i.e., without competency needing to be restored), participants believed the defendant was more responsible for their crime. Finding the juvenile defendant competent to stand trial caused mock jurors to consider defendants more

responsible for their crime when it resulted in the death of the victim (Cordero, 2015). Previous studies have assessed differences in mock jurors' perceptions of juvenile adolescents' competence based on age and gender. Mock jurors were likely to presume an adolescent offender was more competent, not only if they were older but also when details of their crimes were more mature (Ghetti & Redlich, 2001). Juvenile offenders were considered more likely to recidivate and a danger to their community when they specifically chose their victims (Bradley et al., 2012). However, little research has been done on the impact a juvenile's traumatic history can have on jurors' opinion of recidivism and rehabilitation. Further, no studies have investigated how disagreement between experts when evaluating a juvenile's competence can influence a jurors' perceptions of competence or guilt.

Studies have reported the likelihood of juveniles 15 and younger being developmentally impaired (Grisso et al., 2003), specifically in cognitive functioning related to legal competencies (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020). Studies also report trauma being positively correlated with aggression, inability to self-regulate (Wolff & Shi 2012), and cognitive development disturbances (Nickerson et al., 2012). Despite these findings, research has shown that these findings are not always considered important when deciding guilt or competence (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020). Further, no study to date has explored experimentally how a juvenile defendant's history of both physical and emotional trauma might affect perceptions of recidivism, rehabilitation, competency, and guilt. No research, to my knowledge, has investigated whether expert's disagreement when evaluating a juvenile's competence accompanied by a juvenile's history of trauma can influence a mock jurors' perceptions of the defendant's likelihood of being rehabilitated.

Present Study

This study investigated how a juvenile defendant's trauma history and competency to stand trial may impact mock jurors' perceptions of said defendant's risk of recidivism, likelihood of rehabilitation, competency, and guilt. Mock jurors read a case vignette about a juvenile defendant who was on trial for first degree assault. Based on random assignment, mock juror participants learned that the defendant had a history of physical and emotional trauma or no history of trauma (control condition). Further, participants learned that two independent experts evaluated the juvenile defendant's competency to stand trial, and these experts either agreed or disagreed that the defendant was competent. Participants then provided their perceptions of the defendant's likelihood of reoffending in the future, ability to be rehabilitated, competency to stand trial, and confidence in their guilty (or not guilty) verdicts.

Hypothesis 1:

I predicted that mock jurors would find defendants with a trauma history more likely to reoffend when found competent by both experts compared to when the experts disagreed on the defendant's competency.

Hypothesis 2:

I predicted mock jurors would be more confident in the juvenile's guilt when experts agree on competence and the defendant has a history of trauma, compared to when the experts disagreed.

Hypothesis 3:

I predicted that mock jurors would perceive the defendant as least capable of being rehabilitated when he has a history of trauma and the experts agree on defendants' competence.

Hypothesis 4:

I predicted that when experts disagreed on the defendant's competence, mock jurors would rate the defendant as less competent than when experts agreed.

Hypothesis 5:

Participants that were high in Belief in a Just World (BJW) would be the most confident in the defendant's guilt.

Hypothesis 6:

I predicted that when the defendant had a history of trauma, participants high in BJW would consider defendants most likely to reoffend compared to defendants without a trauma history.

Method

Participants and Design

I first recruited participants who were enrolled as students in AUM's undergraduate introduction to psychology courses through the SONA Systems database. Those participants were awarded 1 PREP credit or extra credit from their professors, for no more than 1 hour of their participation. I also recruited participants from the general public via social media sites Facebook and Instagram. A sample size of 102 participants was recruited for this study. A sample size of about 280 participants will be needed to detect any real effects of my independent variables. The sample was 85% female and 15% male. Participant ethnicities

included 52% Black or African American, 40% White, 3% Hispanic, 2% Multiracial, and 1% Other. The minimum age of the participants was 17 and the maximum age was 70, ($M=31.23, SD = 12.66$).

A 2 (Defendant's history: trauma vs. none) X 2 (Expert competency: Agree vs. Disagree) between-subjects factorial design was implemented. The primary dependent variables of interest were risk of recidivism, chance of rehabilitation, and perceptions of competency, with confidence in guilt and belief in a just world as secondary dependent measures. Both trauma history and experts' decision of competency were manipulated between subjects by random assignment of case vignettes.

Materials and Procedure

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Auburn University at Montgomery, I began recruiting participants. All recruited participants received a link to the study on Qualtrics. Participants or mock jurors were required to be at least 18 years of age and to electronically sign the informed consent form. Each participant was randomly assigned a version of the case vignette to read. All case vignettes were a variation of a defendant who was 14 years old, with or without a traumatic history, who assaulted a 15-year-old peer in the neighborhood. The defense and the prosecution hired experts to evaluate the defendant's competency. Case vignettes also varied by whether experts agreed or disagreed that the defendant was competent to stand trial. In either case, the defendant was declared competent by the judge and the trial proceeded. Depending on a participant's randomly assigned condition, the vignettes differed in trauma history (history of physical and emotional trauma or no history of trauma), and competence discrepancy: two experts that

agreed the defendant was competent or two experts that disagreed on whether the defendant was competent.

After reading the case, participants answered a series of questions about the defendant's perceived competency to stand trial, their risk of recidivism, chance of rehabilitation, and perceived level of guilt. Next, they completed the Belief in a Just World for Others Questionnaire (BJWQ). This 8-item scale was designed to assess participants' beliefs of living in a world that is just, and people get what they deserve (Lucas et al., 2011). The final task for each participant was to provide relevant demographic information regarding their age, sex/gender, prior experience with trauma, and prior understanding of competency to stand trial. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked for their generous contribution to this field of research.

Results

To address my first hypothesis, namely, that the defendant with a history of trauma would be perceived as most likely to reoffend when found competent by both experts, I conducted a 2(trauma history) X 2(expert agreement) factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA). Items used to calculate a total level of re-offense were "If released, the defendant would commit another violent crime", and "Rate the degree to which you believe the defendant is likely to reoffend". I detected a main effect of expert agreement: when experts agreed the defendant was competent to stand trial, mock jurors believed the defendant was significantly more likely to reoffend ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.66$) compared to when experts disagreed ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.47$), $F(1,98) = 4.96$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. However, I detected no main effect of trauma history, nor did I detect an interaction between trauma history and expert agreement. Therefore, the first hypothesis was partially supported.

To investigate my second hypothesis, namely, that mock jurors would be more confident in the juvenile's guilt when experts agreed about his competence and the defendant had a history of trauma, compared to when the experts disagreed, I conducted another 2X2 factorial ANOVA. No main effects or interactions were detected; however, there was an emerging trend showing that when experts agreed on the defendant's competence, participants were marginally more confident in his guilt compared to when the experts did not agree, $p = .09$. Therefore, my second hypothesis was not supported.

To investigate my third hypothesis, namely, that mock jurors would perceive the defendant as least capable of being rehabilitated when he had a history of trauma and the experts agreed on his competence to stand trial, a third 2X2 factorial ANOVA was conducted. No main effects or interactions were detected, so this hypothesis was not supported.

To investigate my fourth hypothesis, namely, that when experts disagreed on the defendants' competence, mock jurors would rate the defendant as less competent than when experts agreed, I first conducted a one-way ANOVA on a competency total score, which I calculated by summing the four separate competency items. I detected no main effect of expert agreement on competency total scores. However, I next ran four separate independent samples *t*-tests to analyze the effect of expert agreement on each individual competency item. These analyses detected a significant group difference for one of the competency items: "The trial should not have moved forward because the defendant was not competent to stand trial." When experts agreed about the defendant's competency to stand trial, mock jurors perceived the defendant as significantly more competent ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.26$) than when experts did not agree about his competence ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.41$), $t(100) = -2.41$, $p = .009$, Mean

difference = -0.64, 95% CI [-1.17,-0.11]. Therefore, this hypothesis was only partially supported.

To evaluate my fifth hypothesis, namely, that participants high in *Belief in a Just World* (BJW) would be the most confident in the defendant's guilt, I first created a BLW total score, which was the sum of all eight BLW items. For this BJW total score, higher scores indicate more belief in a just world. Next, I conducted a Pearson correlation to analyze whether mock jurors high in belief in a just world were positively correlated with confidence in guilt. I detected no significant correlation, so this hypothesis was not supported.

Lastly, my sixth hypothesis was that when the defendant had a history of trauma, participants high in BJW would consider defendants most likely to reoffend compared to defendants without a trauma history. To address this last hypothesis, I conducted a 2X2 analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) with likelihood to reoffend scores as the dependent variable and BJW total scores as the covariate. I detected no main effect of trauma on likelihood to reoffend; however, higher BJW total scores significantly predicted higher perceptions of the defendant's likelihood to reoffend, $F(1,97) = 5.58, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .05$. There was no interaction between trauma history and belief in a just world. Therefore, my last hypothesis was not supported.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential effects of a defendant's history of trauma and whether hired experts agreed in their competency assessment, on mock jurors' perceptions of the defendant's risk of recidivism, likelihood of rehabilitation, competency, and guilt. Results revealed that when hired experts evaluated the defendant's

competency to stand trial and agreed that he was indeed competent, mock jurors were significantly more confident that the defendant would commit another criminal offense. Although findings did not fully support this first hypothesis, they do suggest that mock jurors felt more compelled to consider the defendant likely to reoffend because expert agreement suggested a more competent defendant. This finding is both significant and new to the literature. To my knowledge, there are not any prior studies that have shown expert agreement of competency to affect perceptions of recidivism. No prior studies speak of correlations between competency and recidivism in juvenile cases.

Another goal of the present study was to investigate how a history of trauma and competency to stand trial might interact to affect mock jurors' perceptions of guilt. I detected no interactive effects on perceptions of guilt; however, I did detect an emerging trend such that when experts agreed on the defendant's competence, mock jurors were marginally more confident in the defendant's guilt than when experts did not agree. This suggests that when both experts declare the defendant as competent to stand trial, the defendant is also perceived as more likely to be guilty of said crimes. Although this is just a marginal trend currently, if this effect remains with further data collection, this would be an intriguing new finding, considering no prior studies have assessed perceptions of competence when competency was being evaluated by two experts. Cordero (2015) manipulated competency with the following levels: defendant found competent, incompetent but restored, and no mention of competency. Cordero's results revealed the defendant's level of competence had no effect on mock jurors' decisions of guilt. Cordero's manipulation of competency and related results differ from that of the present study. Considering no new information was presented to participants that should increase the defendant's apparent guilt, it is interesting that mock juror's perception of

guilt appeared to increase due to expert agreement. Interestingly, these results differ from other studies that also investigated issues related with juvenile competency (Cordero, 2015; Ghetti & Redlich, 2001; Grisso et al., 2003); however, my findings may offer new insight into perceptions of juvenile competency when discrepancies exist between experts in evaluating competency.

I predicted that when the defendant had a history of trauma and the experts agreed on his competence, mock jurors would consider the defendant least capable of being rehabilitated. There was no support for this hypothesis, which is inconsistent with previous literature (e.g., Grisso et al., 1988) that suggests a history of abuse leads to a defendant's inability to be rehabilitated.

Regarding a juvenile defendant's competency, I predicted that when experts disagreed on the defendant's competence, mock jurors would rate the defendant as less competent than when experts agreed. I only found partial support for this hypothesis, specifically for item, "The trial should not have moved forward because the defendant was not competent to stand trial". Group differences for this dependent variable were significant in that when experts agreed, the defendant was perceived as more competent. Showing that when experts did not agree on competence, mock jurors were less confident in the defendant's competency. None of the other competency variables revealed any significant differences for how mock jurors perceived the defendant's competence when experts agreed or disagreed. An example of one of the other items that did not reveal any significance to perceived competency was, "The defendant was capable of assisting his attorney in his own defense". It may be the case then that expert disagreement about juvenile competency has

little to no impact on mock jurors' perceptions of the defendant's competency: If one expert considers the defendant competent to stand trial, that may be sufficient for mock jurors.

The belief in a just world (BJW) scale was added to assess the mock juror's belief of living in a world that is just, and that people get what they deserve. The scale contained items such as: "I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get." I had expected that mock jurors who scored high on BJW would also be more confident that the defendant was guilty, regardless of trauma or competence agreement. This hypothesis was not supported. In other words, participants' BJW total scores did not impact the mock juror's confidence in the defendant's guilt.

Lastly, I had predicted that mock jurors high in BJW would rate the defendant as more likely to reoffend when the defendant had a history of trauma, compared to when they did not. This hypothesis was not supported. However, when mock jurors were high in BJW, they found the defendant significantly more likely to reoffend. The defendant having a history of trauma did not interact with participants' belief in a just world at all. This suggests that when jury-eligible individuals subscribe strongly to the belief that life is just and people get what they deserve, they might also believe that one who has already committed an offense is significantly more likely to reoffend despite their trauma history.

Taken together, my results only supported some of my predictions. Importantly, none of the findings suggested any main effects of trauma history or interactions between trauma history and expert agreement on competence. Specifically, whether or not the defendant was abused in the past had no impact on how the mock jurors viewed his level of guilt, likelihood of recidivism, or rehabilitation. These findings are inconsistent with existing literature.

Previous studies have reported the tendency for mock jurors to attribute the behaviors of

abused juveniles to external factors (e.g., Stevenson, 2009), resulting in jurors perceiving the juvenile defendant as having less understanding and less intent to commit the crime. These results may not be consistent with current literature, but they depict an accurate use of the information provided. As shown here, a history of abuse or trauma should not be used against the defendant when making decisions about their case.

Findings do suggest, however, that when a mock juror is aware that two hired experts agree about the defendant's level of competency to stand trial, mock jurors are more confident in the defendant's level of competence and likelihood of reoffending. Revealing that when experts did not agree on the defendant's competency, it was enough to place doubt in the mock jurors' overall perception of the defendant's competence, level of guilt and likelihood of reoffending.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a few limitations to be noted. First, I am limited by a relatively small sample size currently. However, data collection will continue until an adequate study sample is achieved. In the future it would be effective to adjust participant recruiting strategies. It is possible that as data collection continues, statistically significant effects may be detected. A second limitation is that my current sample size is below that of the recommended sample size calculation I conducted. Thus, I may be currently underpowered to detect some real effects of my independent variables. A third limitation may be that this was an online study that was heavily text-based, meaning that participants read everything about their randomly assigned case, without audio or video. Conducting an online study has resulted in low external validity. There are potential situational factors that could affect the study's external validity, such as the participants location, background, and time frame. Possible selection

bias is another threat to external validity in which I cannot be sure of the differences that led to people choosing to participate and others choosing not to. Therefore, the results found with this sample cannot be generalized to other settings and populations.

In the future it would be helpful to analyze participants' open-ended explanations for their perceptions of recidivism, likelihood of rehabilitation, and guilt. These types of analyses may provide useful insights into why participants made the decisions they made. For instance, doing this may reveal which variables are perceived as more (or less) important as they relate to juvenile defendants.

The findings of this study reveal trends that add to the existing literature. This study is the first to investigate how trauma history and expert agreement of competency can impact the perceptions of a defendant's level of guilt, likelihood to reoffend, and likelihood to be rehabilitated. These findings will be useful to other scholars investigating issues concerning juvenile offender's competency and risk of recidivism. There are a few findings to be noted that have not been reported by any existing literature. Specifically, the results indicate the agreement between experts of a defendant's competency having a significant influence on the perception the defendant's competence and likelihood to reoffend. Future studies should aim to find correlations between competency and recidivism. Future research should also investigate how competency can impact participant verdicts. It would be useful to potentially manipulate competency by giving detailed accounts of why one expert may have chosen to declare the defendant not competent to stand trial. Although these findings do not support previous research that investigates trauma or history of abuse, it would be useful to continue investigating trauma history and its impact on juror perceptions. Previous studies suggest that

defendants with histories of abuse and neglect are expected to participate in offending behavior in adolescence (Widom, 2003).

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Appendix A Case Vignette

Explanation of Competency to Stand Trial

“Competency to Stand Trial” (CST) is a legal term that consists of two prongs: (1) the defendant has adequate knowledge and understanding of the legal proceedings, and (2) the defendant has the ability to assist their counsel in their own defense. For someone to be put on trial, they must be found Competent to Stand Trial.

Trauma History Present

Mason is a 14-year-old male who lives with his mother and 12-year-old sister Lisa. Mason’s mother is a 33-year-old single parent and alcoholic. On nights that his mother is asleep or drunk, her boyfriend sexually assaults Mason. The boyfriend has tried to assault Lisa as well but Mason fights him off to protect his younger sister. When Mason does this, the boyfriend punches and kicks Mason, making sure not to leave any marks on his face. Whenever Mason tells his mom what her boyfriend has done, she refuses to believe him. His mother calls him a liar and tells him he is jealous of her love life. On numerous occasions, Mason’s mother has told him that he will never amount to anything because he is so much like his “useless” father. She blames him for her inability to maintain a stable relationship. Once, Mason’s mother told him whatever her boyfriend did to him he deserved it. Almost on a daily basis, Mason’s mother reminds him that her life would be so much better if she never gave birth to him and that she hates him.

One day, as Mason and Lisa were walking home from school, a 15-year-old boy, Sam from the neighborhood touched Lisa inappropriately. Mason approached Sam and warned him to never violate his sister ever again. The boy told Mason that he wasn't going to do anything to stop him. The confrontation became physical, and Mason hit Sam in the face repeatedly until a group of people separated them. Mason and Lisa ran home after the fight and eventually the police arrived after being called by multiple neighbors. The police informed Mason’s mother that Sam’s mother was pressing charges against him because Sam had a broken nose and a broken jawbone.

Trauma History Not Present

Mason is a 14-year-old male who lives with his mother and 12-year-old sister, Lisa. Mason’s mother is a 33-year-old single parent and alcoholic.

One day, as Mason and Lisa were walking home from school, a 15-year-old boy, Sam from the neighborhood touched Lisa inappropriately. Mason approached Sam and warned him to never violate his sister ever again. The boy told Mason that he wasn't going to do anything to stop him. The confrontation became physical, and Mason hit Sam in the face repeatedly until a group of people separated them. Mason and Lisa ran home after the fight and eventually the police arrived after being called by multiple neighbors. The police informed Mason’s mother

that Sam's mother was pressing charges against him because Sam had a broken nose and a dislocated jaw.

Defendant Background

Trauma History

The defendant, Mason Adams, is a 14-year-old male. He lives in Lee County, Alabama. He lives in a 2-bedroom apartment with his mother and younger sister. Since his parents' separation when he was 8 years old, he has been abused by his mother and her many different boyfriends. He is a student at Cypress Lake High School where he is in 9th grade. The defendant has an extensive history of experiencing emotional and physical trauma in his home. This is Adam's first offense.

No Trauma History

The defendant, Mason Adams, is a 14-year-old male. He lives in Lee County, Alabama. He lives in a 2-bedroom apartment with his mother and younger sister. He is a student at Cypress Lake High School where he is in 9th grade. This is Adam's first offense.

Expert Evaluation of Defendant Competency

Dr. Holley Jenkins: psychologist, expert hired by the **prosecution**

Dr. Jenkins evaluated Mason Adams's competency to stand trial, he was found competent.

Janice William: psychologist, expert hired by the **defense**

Dr. William evaluated Mason Adams's competency to stand trial, he was found him incompetent.

SUMMARY OF CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION

The case for the **prosecution** was based on the testimony of the following parties:

Sam Smith: victim, citizen of Chesshire community

Paula Smith: mother of the victim

Sam's Testimony:

Sam Smith testifies that he was walking home from school on Tuesday evening when the altercation occurred. Smith admitted to approaching both the defendant and the defendant's younger sister. Smith denies groping Adams sister, but instead he stated that he spoke to her and hugged her. Smith states that Adams started screaming at him and calling him profane names and attacked him suddenly. Smith recalls being hit in the face repeatedly before blacking out. Smith states that after that he recalls waking up in the hospital.

Paula's Testimony:

Smith's mother, Paula testifies arriving at the scene at approximately 3:30pm. Paula states she was in her front yard tending flowers as she waited for the victim to arrive home from school. She stated that at approximately 3:26pm the victim's friend, Mark approached her home running and yelling for her to come with him. She stated that upon arriving at the scene, she saw the victim sitting on the ground with blood all over him. She states that Smith was disoriented and groaning in agony. Ms. Smith immediately contacted the police and requested an ambulance.

SUMMARY OF CASE FOR THE DEFENSE

The case for the **defense** was based on the testimony of the following parties:

Lisa Adams: sister of the defendant

Lisa Adams Testimony

Lisa Adams testified that while walking home from school, she and the defendant were approached by a group of older boys including Smith. She stated that Smith immediately walked up to her groping her lower body, while she tried to push him off. She stated that the other boys laughed and made comments about her body. She stated that the defendant told Smith to never violate her again. Lisa testified that Smith then got into the defendant's face, pushed him and told him he couldn't do anything to stop him. She stated that this encounter started the physical altercation.

Closing Arguments from the Prosecution

Defendant with Trauma history

The District Attorney for the prosecution summarized his case against Mason Adams by arguing that the facts speak for themselves. The facts are that Adams is a child who took his anger stemming from his family life out on the victim. The defendant brutally attacked the victim for something that was playful and harmless. There were multiple independent witnesses who were present for the physical altercation.

Defendant without trauma history

The District Attorney for the prosecution summarized his case against Mason Adams by arguing that the facts speak for themselves. The facts are that Adams brutally attacked the victim for something that was playful and harmless. There were multiple independent witnesses who were present for the physical altercation.

Closing arguments for defense

Defendant with Trauma History

The Defense Attorney summarized his defense of Mason Adams by stating that the evidence against the defendant is very weak and misleading. The defendant cannot be punished for defending his sister when being harassed by a group of teenage boys. The defendant did not viciously attack the victim, he asked the victim to respect his sister and received disrespect and a shove in return. Ultimately, the defendant was placed in a situation where defending his sister's honor led to him having to defend himself physically. Mr. Adams was touched first by Mr. Smith and simply defended himself. The defendant has indeed experienced abuse throughout his childhood, and thus has felt like he is constantly fighting for his survival. The Defense Attorney stated, "I am confident that you all will reach the only appropriate decision here today, that my client is not guilty of first-degree assault."

Defendant without Trauma History

The Defense Attorney summarized his defense of Mason Adams by stating that the evidence against the defendant is very weak and misleading. The defendant cannot be punished for defending his sister when being harassed by a group of teenage boys. The defendant did not viciously attack the victim, he asked the victim to respect his sister and received disrespect and a shove in return. Mr. Adams was touched first by Mr. Smith and simply defended himself. Ultimately, the defendant was placed in a situation where defending his sister's honor led to him having to defend himself physically. The Defense Attorney stated, "I am confident that you all will reach the only appropriate decision here today, that my client is not guilty of first-degree assault."

Appendix B
Mock Juror Perception Questionnaire

1. In my opinion, the defendant was competent to stand trial.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

2. The trial should not have moved forward because the defendant was not competent to stand trial.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

3. The defendant had an accurate understanding of the legal proceedings.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

4. The defendant was capable of assisting his attorney in his own defense.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

5. The defendant is a danger to himself.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

6. The defendant is a danger to the general public.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

7. If released, the defendant would commit another violent crime.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree
			agree	agree

8. Rate the degree to which you believe the juvenile defendant should be tried as an adult.

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely	Definitely	Probably	Neither agree	Probably
as a juvenile	as a juvenile	nor disagree	as an adult	as an adult

9. Rate the degree to which you believe the juvenile defendant is likely to reoffend.

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely	Definitely	Probably	Neither agree	Probably
will not	will not	nor disagree	will	will

10. Rate the degree to which you believe the juvenile defendant can be rehabilitated.

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely	Definitely	Probably	Neither agree	Probably
cannot	cannot	nor disagree	cannot	cannot

11. Rate your confidence in the defendant's guilt.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely	Very	Somewhat	Somewhat	Very	
Extremely	Very	Somewhat	Somewhat	Very	
confident	confident	confident	confident	confident	
confident	confident	confident	confident	confident	
not guilty	not guilty	not guilty	guilty	guilty	
guilty	guilty	guilty	guilty	guilty	

12. Why did you decide the way you did? Explain your reasoning. If you are unsure, explain what factors made you unsure and why.

Belief in Just World Scale for Others

1. *Strongly disagree*
2. *Disagree*
3. *Slightly disagree*
4. *Slightly agree*
5. *Agree*
6. *Strongly Agree*

Please indicate your level of agreement on the following scale with respect to how well each statement applies to others and yourself.

- ___ 1. I feel that the world treats people fairly.
- ___ 2. I feel that people get what they deserve.
- ___ 3. I feel that people treat others fairly in life.
- ___ 4. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.
- ___ 5. I feel that people treat each other with the respect they deserve.
- ___ 6. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.
- ___ 7. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded.
- ___ 8. I feel that when people meet with misfortune, they have brought it upon themselves.

Appendix C Demographics Questionnaire

The following questions are intended to provide some basic demographic information about the jurors. Your answers to the following questions will be combined with the answers of many other jurors, and your answers will remain completely anonymous.

1. Age: _____
2. Sex: _____ Male _____ Female Non-binary _____ Other _____
3. Which of the following best describes your race/nationality/ethnicity?
 - White _____
 - African American _____
 - Hispanic _____
 - Native American _____
 - Asian _____
 - Other: _____
4. Religious Affiliation:

_____ Christian	_____ Hindu
_____ Jewish	_____ Mormon
_____ Muslim	_____ Atheist/Agnostic
_____ Buddhist	_____ Other
5. Political Affiliation
 - _____ Democrat
 - _____ Republican
 - _____ Independent
 - _____ None
6. Were you familiar with the concept of Competency to Stand Trial (CST) before this study?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
7. Do you or does someone close to you have a history of trauma?

- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Rather not say
8. What is your college major?
- a. Psychology
 - b. Sociology
 - c. Criminal Justice
 - d. Biology
 - e. Other: _____
9. Have you voted in the past year?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Juror Manipulation Check

The following questions will check the effectiveness of the manipulations used within this study. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1.) Did experts agree that the defendant Mason Adams was competent to stand trial?

Yes

No

2.) If you are a robot select the answer yes.

Yes

No

4.) Mason was abused by his biological father.

True

False

Appendix D

Debriefing

Thank you for your participation in my study. The main purpose of my study was to assess perceptions of juvenile defendants held by mock jurors. I am investigating whether the presence of an abusive childhood will significantly impact the way mock jurors feel about the defendant's guilt level and competence. In order to proceed with the trial, the judge had to have confirmed that the defendant was indeed competent to stand trial. I was interested in assessing whether having experts disagree on the child's competence would cause mock jurors to perceive the level of guilt differently. I was also interested in seeing if the presence of both emotional and physical trauma, including having experts disagree on competence, will present a more significant difference. I also wanted to investigate the influence these variables would have on mock jurors' perception of the defendant's likelihood of reoffending and possibility of being rehabilitated. In order to assess any bias, I had you also answer questions about your personal experience with trauma and your basic understanding of competency.

I apologize if any part of this study or case scenario was triggering or caused the arousal of negative emotions. All people and events described in the case vignette were fictional. If you need to speak to a mental health professional after your participation, please visit the Counseling Center on campus. If you need to contact them or you're unaware of where the center is located, contact the researcher for more information.

For psychological experiments it is sometimes difficult to measure our variables of interest when participants are aware of the true purpose of the study. We apologize for not informing you of all the details prior to your participation. We would also like to emphasize the importance of confidentiality regarding this study. Please, do not tell anyone about the details of this study. If participants come to us knowing what to expect, we can no longer investigate what we intend to. Being a psychology student, you are no stranger to the importance of your participants being unaware of your specific hypotheses. We ask that you please keep this information to yourself so that we can continue to conduct this study successfully. Thanks again for your time and we really appreciate your help!

Do you have any questions for us? Ask me at rgilliam@aum.edu.