

Escalation of Aggression after the Preschool Years and its Individual and Social Causes

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What changes in aggression after the preschool years?

- All children become physically stronger
- In some children, there is an increase in:
 - Severity of aggression leading to violence
 - Frequency of aggression
 - Use of arms
 - Aggression becomes interwoven with a pattern of covert antisocial acts
- This results in an increase in casualties and fatalities of the victims of aggression
- Increase in victimization of aggressive individuals
- Serious delinquents tend to have antisocial offspring

Some Key Conceptional Issues about the Causes of Violence

- Violence is more likely the higher the number of risk factors and risk domains (individual, family, peer, neighborhood).
- Interventions appear more effective if they address multiple risk domains rather than a single risk domain.
- Is there priority in terms of risk domains (are individual factors more important than social risk factors?).
- Is this true for all types of delinquency, and for delinquency in all types of neighborhoods?

Questions to be Addressed:

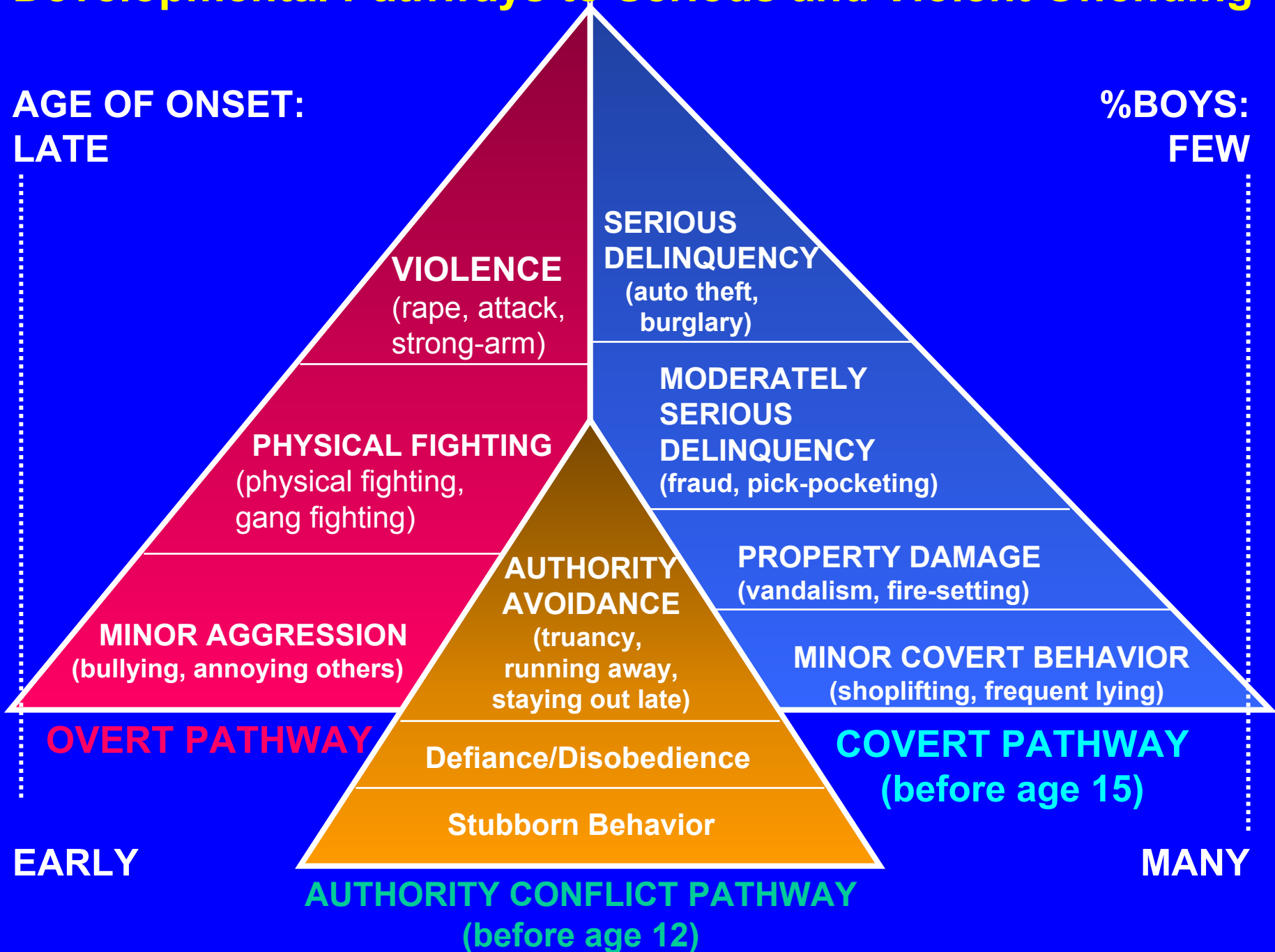
1. Is there a developmental pathways to violence, and why is it important to consider developmental pathways to authority conflict and covert antisocial behaviors?
2. What are risk factors of violence?
3. What is the relative contribution of individual and social risk factors, and why is this relevant for interventions?

Question 1: What is the developmental pathway to violence, and why is it important to consider developmental pathways to authority conflict and covert antisocial behaviors?

Developmental Pathways to Serious and Violent Offending

AGE OF ONSET:
LATE

%BOYS:
FEW



Characteristics of the Pathways (1)

- Individuals can be on more than one pathway at the same time.
- The model is hierarchical in that it helps to identify those who escalate and who do not escalate to serious behaviors.
- The earlier the onset of entering the overt or covert pathways, the more likely that boys will escalate to higher steps in the pathways.

Characteristics of the Pathways (2)

- As boys escalate to higher steps in a pathway they tend to retain behaviors characteristic of earlier steps.
- Boys in the Overt Pathway have a higher likelihood of entering the Covert Pathway than Boys in the Covert Pathway are likely to enter the Overt Pathway.
- As boys escalate to higher steps in pathways, their rate of offending tends to increase.

Characteristics of the Pathway(3)

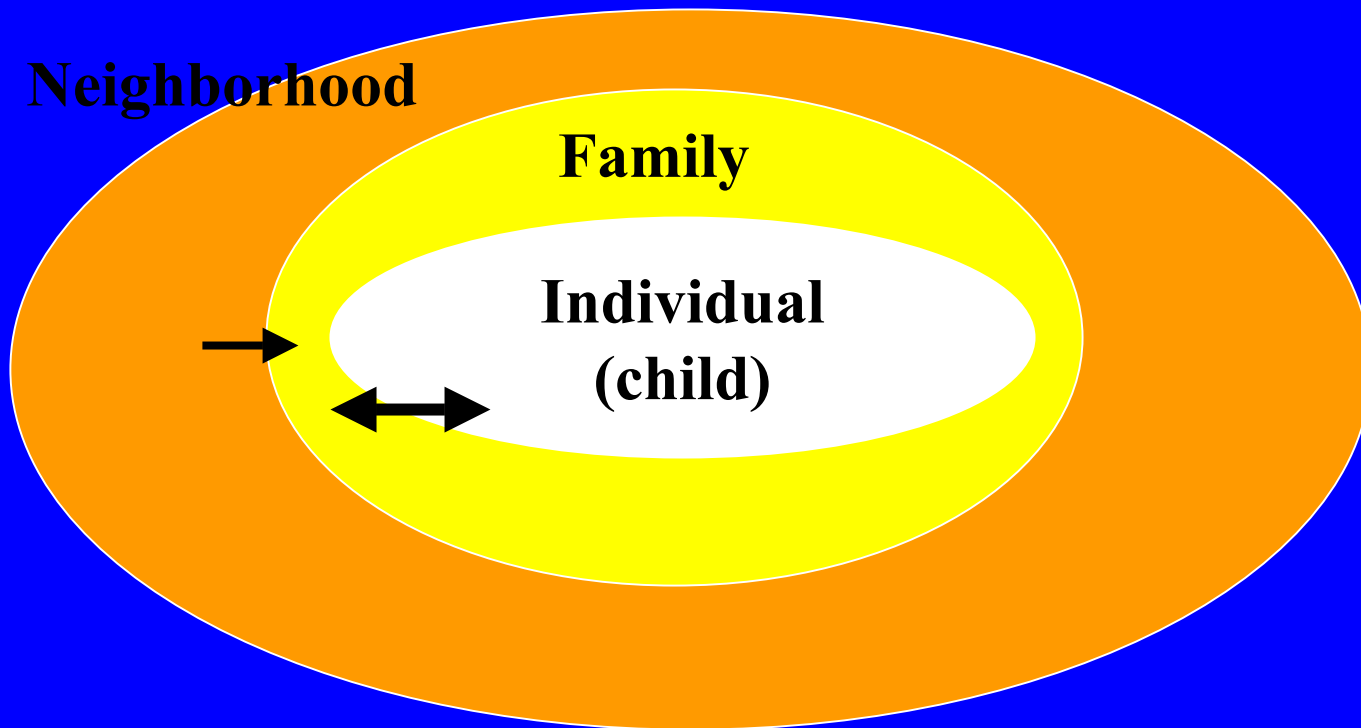
- Boys who escalate to the highest level in the Overt and Covert Pathways have a higher rate of offending than those who escalate in the Covert Pathway only.

Question 2: What are risk factors
of violence?

Definitions

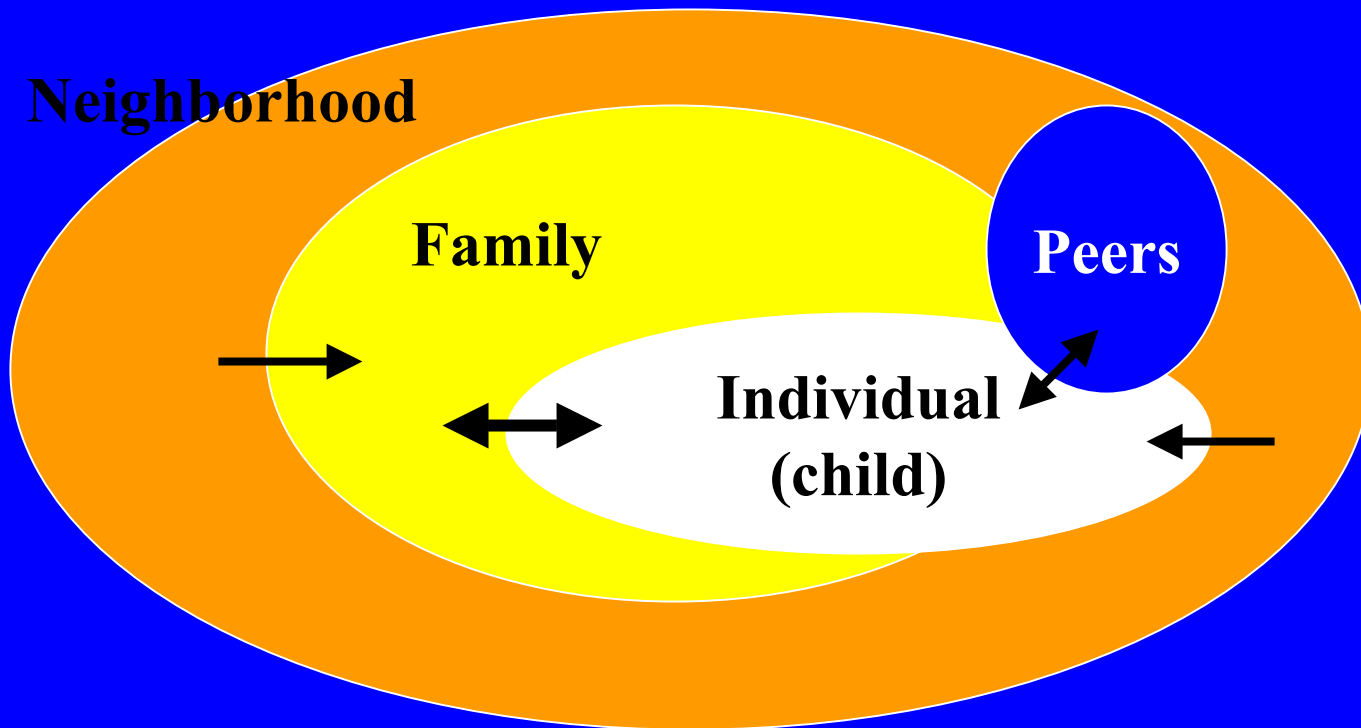
- **Individual (child) factors** are putative causes that are situated in the individual, such as:
 - Lack of guilt feelings, aggression, biological factors, and genetic factors.
- **Social factors** are putative causes in children's environment, including the family, peer group, and neighborhood.

Nested domains of influences on children (toddler period, based on Bronfenbrenner, 1979).



↔ Mostly reciprocal influences

Changes in Nested domains of influences on children from middle childhood onward.



↔ Mostly reciprocal influences

Predictors of Violence in the Pittsburgh Youth Study (1)

- Early Child factors:
 - Early externalizing problem behavior: High risk score at screening, cruelty to people, conduct problems, physical aggression, covert behavior, early psychopathy, onset of delinquency by age 10-13, Disruptive Behavior Disorder at age 10-13
 - Attitude/Cognitions: Lack of guilt feelings, tolerant perception of problem behavior, positive attitude to substance use, belief not likely to get caught

Predictors of Violence in the Pittsburgh Youth Study (2)

- **History of Delinquency:**
 - Carry weapon, including gun carrying, weapon use, gang membership, gang fighting, persistent drug use, selling marijuana, selling hard drugs
- **Family Process Factors:**
 - Parenting: poor supervision, poor communication, poor relationship with caretaker
 - Parent Problems: child abuse, parental stress

Predictors of Violence in the Pittsburgh Youth Study (3)

- **Family Demographics**: low SES, family on welfare, African-American, young mother
- **Peer factors**: bad friends, peer delinquency, peer substance use, peer alcohol use
- **School factors**: old for grade, low academic achievement, poor school motivation, truancy
- **Neighborhood**: living in a disadvantaged neighborhood (census and parent report)

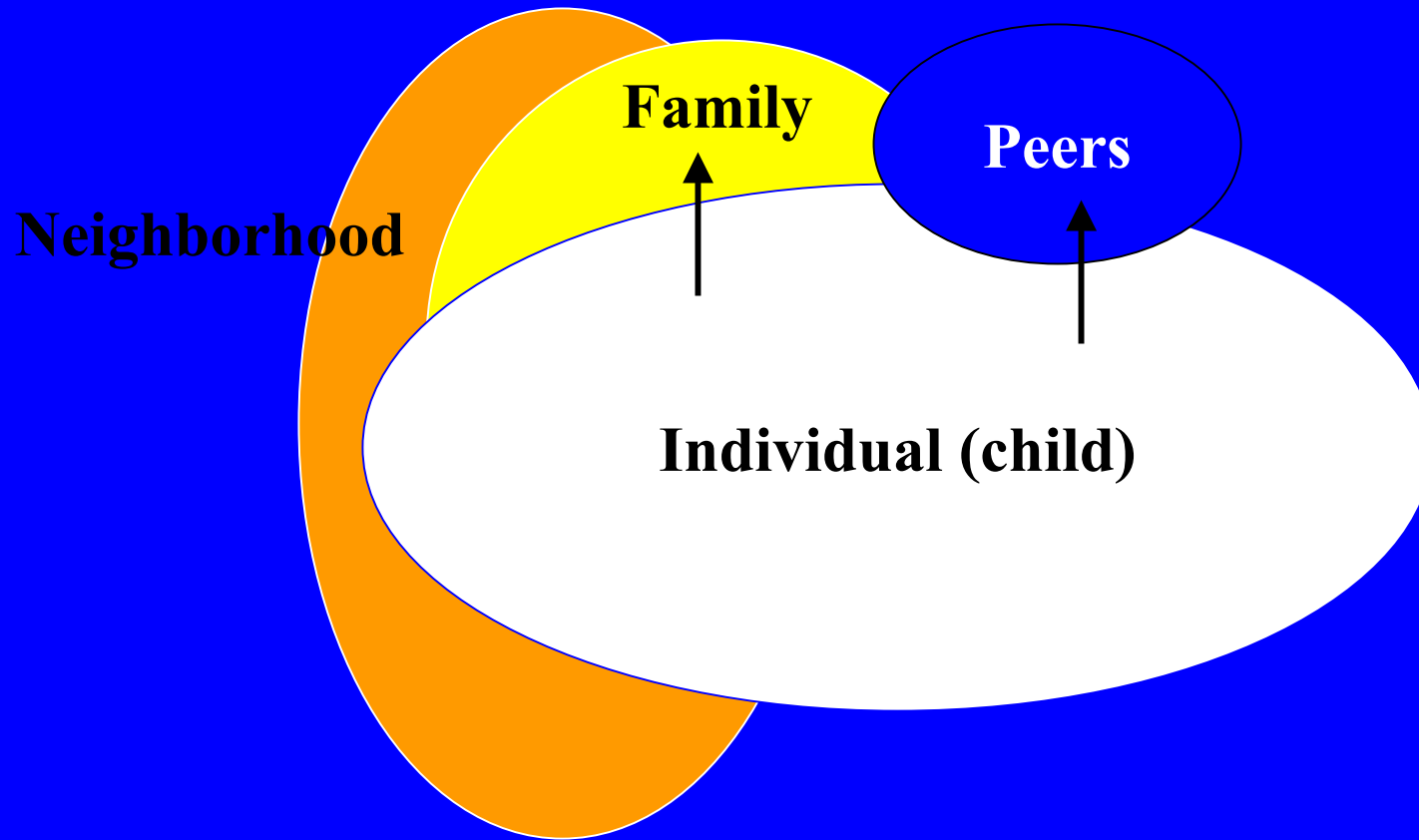
Accumulation of Risk Factors

- The higher the number of risk factors or risk domains, the higher the risk of later violence.
- The accumulation of risk factors often takes years
- However, some children experience a podium effect of risk factors (e.g. child maltreatment, or antisocial behavior of parents), which means that exposure to a few more risk factors will substantially increase the risk of violence.

Question 3: What is the relative contribution of individual and social risk factors, and why is this relevant for interventions?

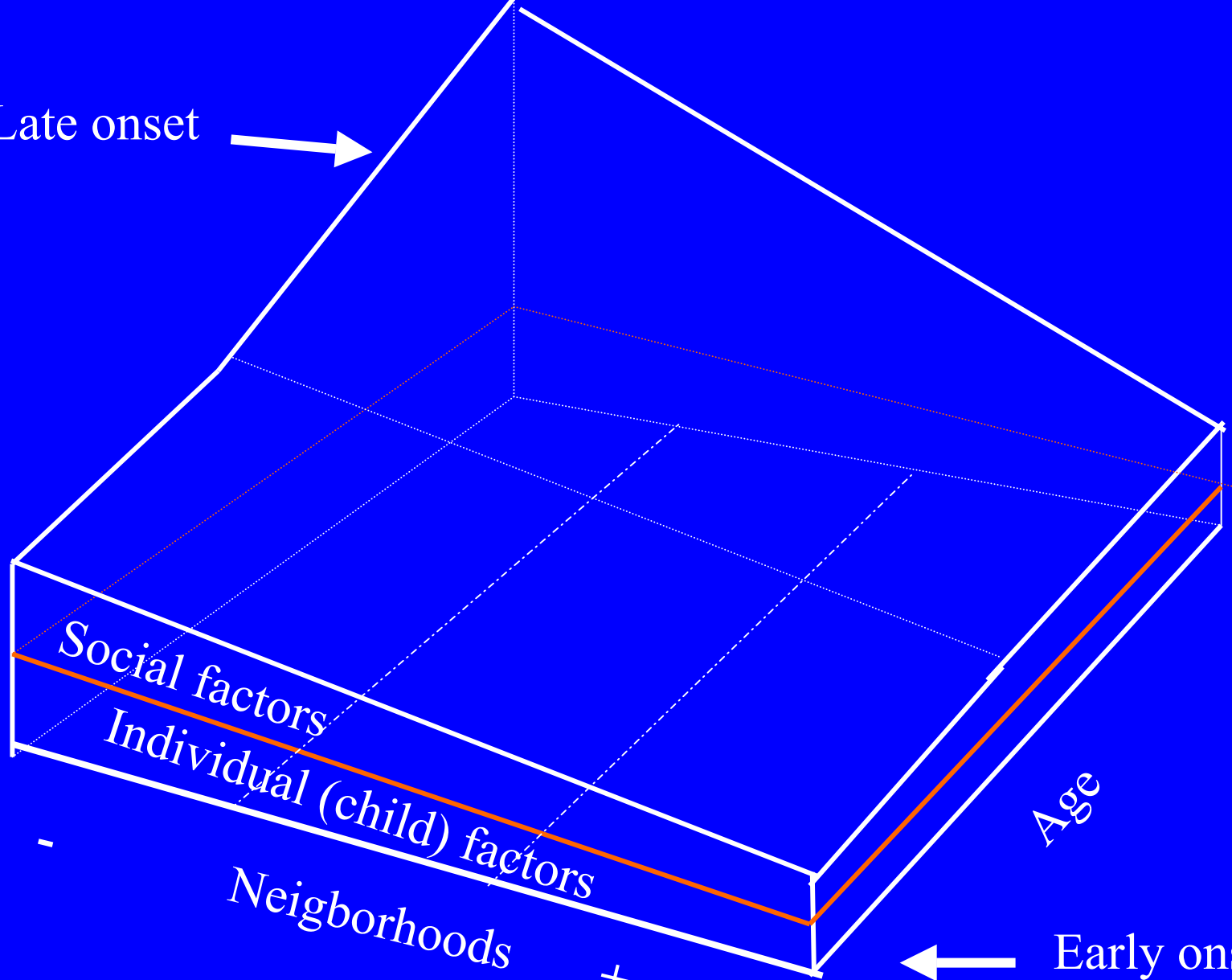
Not Every Child is the Same:

In the minority of young men their serious violence is predominantly caused by individual factors rather than by other domains of risk factors.



→ Mostly unidirectional influences

Late onset



Social factors

Individual (child) factors

Age

-

Neighborhoods

+



Early onset

Some Key Conclusions (1)

- Violence is more likely the higher the number of risk factors and risk domains (individual, family, peer, neighborhood).
- Interventions appear more effective if they address multiple risk domains rather than a single risk domain.
- The reduction of social risk factors should be part of interventions.

Some Key Conclusions (2)

- However risk domains are not equally relevant for interventions.
- Interventions based on changing **early manifestations of individual risk factors** are particularly relevant for reducing very serious forms of delinquency, and for reducing delinquency in advantaged neighborhoods.