

**BRAIN IMMATURITY AND
JUVENILE DELINQUENCY:
EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE, AGE-
RELATED LEGAL DEBATE,
AND ETHICAL CONCERNS**

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Brain development research has revealed that the adolescent brain continues to mature until the mid-20s. Adolescence is a unique developmental period with large brain structural and functional changes. The evidence of brain development offers new insights in understanding adolescent decision-making, impulsivity, and delinquency. Its practical implications are widespread and extend to juvenile justice policy and practice. Yet, public policy is struggling to keep up with brain science. Adolescent brain immaturity has shaped age-related policy debates about how to determine the legal age cutoff for substance use and when to consider an adolescent as mature enough for legal processing. Application of brain science in legal contexts has engendered several social, legal, and ethical concerns, such as determining juvenile culpability, identifying at-risk individuals, and applying neuro-prediction

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techniques. These issues are critical to address because policy changes may have unintended effects on adolescents and other vulnerable groups. Further, discussing the role of adolescent brain development in determining legal maturity, explaining delinquent behaviors, and informing public policies can facilitate research-to-practice translation and increase its effectiveness.