

Self Esteem And Psychosocial Factors Associated With Juvenile Delinquency

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Objectives: The study was designed to assess the level of self Esteem of juvenile delinquents and to find the psychosocial factors associated with delinquency. **Study Design:** Cross sectional study. **Duration and Place of Study:** This study was conducted in Borstal jail of Faisalabad, Pakistan during a period of three months from February, 2008 to April, 2008. **Subjects and Methods:** A sample of 100 male juvenile delinquents was drawn from Borstal jail Faisalabad through Purposive Convenient Sampling technique. Data were collected from participants by using informed consent with the

permission of the jail authorities. **Result:** In the over all picture of the data 56 (56%) of the total sample reported low self esteem. Mean of delinquents labeled as having low self esteem could only reach 13.46 on Rosenberg self esteem scale. High frequency of delinquent behavior was related to feeling of revenge with the mean of 6.00 and high frequency was also associated with love affairs with the mean of 2.80 in delinquents with low self esteem. **Conclusion:** Research findings concluded that low self-esteem, revenge and lack of supportive relationships are associated with delinquency. **Key Words:** Self-esteem, Juvenile Delinquents

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquents are considered children, teenagers and youths up to 18 years of age whose behavior does not comply with the norms of society and is considered to be a punishable activity or crime¹. Criminologists are concerned with psychosocial factors of rapidly increasing incidence of juvenile delinquency. Juvenile delinquency has always been an important legal and social issue especially in the period of transitions from one system to another. It has been widely accepted that juvenile delinquency, as a part of the whole criminality, increases during the time of sweeping changes and social crises.² Self esteem is a measure of one's sense of self worth based on perceived success and achievements, as well as a perception of how much one is valued by peers, family members, teachers and society in general.³ Children may turn to delinquency after a history of devaluing social feedback, which has produced negative self-esteem. Delinquent behavior is then adopted because it inflates self-esteem through behavioral rewards and psychological defenses

which allow the delinquent to reject general social feedback and to raise his self-perceptions.⁴ The link between global self-esteem and delinquency is currently being debated by researchers. On one side of the debate they have argued that individuals with low self-esteem are prone to real-world externalizing problems such as delinquency and antisocial behavior.⁵ However, others have questioned this claim, noting that several studies have failed to find a relation between low self esteem and externalizing problems.⁶ At least two distinct traditions in the social sciences hypothesized a link between low self-esteem and externalizing problems. Rogers⁷ have argued that a lack of unconditional positive self-regard is linked to psychological problems, including aggression. Finally, neo-Freudians also posit that low self-regard motivates aggression. For example, Horney⁸ and Adler⁹ theorized that aggression and antisocial behavior are motivated by feelings of inferiority rooted in early childhood experiences of rejection and humiliation. Despite these theoretical

arguments, research on the link between low self-esteem and externalizing problems has failed to produce consistent results. An understanding of the precise nature of this relation has important theoretical implications. A research found a strong relationship between low self-esteem and externalizing problems such as aggression, antisocial behavior, and delinquency: Moreover, this relation held both cross-sectionally and longitudinally even after controlling for potential confounding variables such as supportive parenting, parent-child & peer relationships, achievement-test scores, socioeconomic status, and IQ.¹⁰ The relationship between perceived approval of delinquent behaviors from referent group and frequency of their occurrence and analysis indicated that poor academic self-concept and poor relationship with school and parents were related to a higher frequency of delinquent behavior. However, a higher frequency of delinquent behavior was related to a more positive self-concept with regard to social ability and physical ability. Finally, higher perceived approval from parents and peers was related to more delinquent behavior.¹¹ Experts in the fields of child development, psychology, and criminology agree that family system variables play a key role in the development of delinquent and other deviant behaviors. Many studies^{12, 13} have documented the relationships between being raised in disturbed environment and a variety of emotional and deviant characteristics. These individuals have been found to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, anger, and a variety of acting-out behaviors. Significant differences were found in the areas of family violence, abuse; runaway, and self-reported substance abuse.¹⁴ According to a self-esteem model of deviance, juveniles may become involved in delinquency as a response to negative self-attitudes. In particular, self-derogation theory predicts that low self-esteem motivates youths to try out delinquent activities that are aimed at restoring self-esteem. The results show a curvilinear (second-order) interaction where self-enhancement from delinquent behavior occurs mainly among youths whose self-esteem is

extremely low and whose self-esteem needs are unusually high. These effects appear to be quite persistent, enduring & undiminished over a 1 ½ to 3 ½ years lag. An additional and unpredicted finding is that delinquency may also show occasional enhancing effects among persons with very high self-esteem.¹⁵ In Pakistani culture, delinquent behavior is manifested in a wide variety of behavior; limited studies are conducted to explore the psychosocial causes of such behavior. These studies have some limitations. Most studies relate to criminal behavior, with specific reference to the personality attributes, however no such research is carried out, which examines the role of self esteem and other psychosocial factors associated with juvenile delinquents or in the context of early environment or inter-personal stressors in adolescences behavior.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study participants were 100 juvenile delinquents with different types of crimes including murder, kidnap dispute, stealing, smuggling, rape and enmity. These participants were taken from Borstal jail Faisalabad by using Purposive Convenient Sampling technique. Informed consent form, sociodemographic information form and Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale were used as instruments in present study. Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale was administered individually to measure self-esteem of juvenile delinquents in Urdu version. It is valid and reliable tool consisting of 10 items followed by four point rating scale, its score may range from 0-30. Scores of 25-30 indicate high range of self-esteem, scores between 15 and 25 are within normal range, and scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. Item no 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 were scored in reverse order. Before starting data collection permission has been taken from Deputy Inspector General DIG (prisons). After this the liaison social welfare officer of Borstal jail introduced juvenile delinquents to the investigators. The test booklets were provided to the juvenile delinquents which comprised of three instruments named Informed Consent form, Demographic Sheet and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. These were administered

individually on sample. After the completion of data collection, analyses were conducted using the statistical package for the social sciences, SPSS for Windows, version 10.

RESULTS

A total of 100 juveniles participated in the study, the age range of the sample was 13 years to 18 years, and the mean age of the participant was 16.58 ± 1.51 . Out of them 48 were illiterate while only 5 were intermediate. 73% participants reported that their parents are alive and 5% were those who reported their parents are dead. More over demographic information also reveals that 52% of delinquents had a history of physical abuse and 19% reported a history of sexual abuse (see table 1). In the over all picture of the data 56% of the total sample reported low self esteem. Mean of delinquents labeled as having low self esteem could only reach 13.46 on Rosenberg self esteem scale, it makes up to 56% of participants while rest 44% obtained a commutative score of 17.11 ± 1.368 on Rosenberg, that falls in the high self esteem category (See table 2). Results are unable to establish any relationship between frequency of crime and self esteem. The delinquents having low self esteem and high self esteem had committed almost the same number of crimes. High frequency of delinquent behavior was related to feeling of revenge with the mean of 6.00 (see table 3). Love affair is most frequent reason of committing delinquent behavior in juvenile delinquents with low self esteem showing a mean of 2.80 (see table 4).

DISCUSSION

With the use of the measure of self-esteem the present study was able to uncover any meaningful and systematic relationship between self esteem and delinquent behaviors. The findings of the past researches on delinquency were not consistent in establishing a relationship between low self esteem and delinquency. But in the present study delinquency was found to be associated with low self-esteem. This pattern of results can easily be explained by Kaplan's¹⁶ model, that the individuals

who have difficulties in establishing their self worth would be more likely to commit the delinquent acts in an effort to sustain their self worth and this may be explained by the fact that delinquent behavior violates the internal values and evokes negative response from others. Another explanation of this pattern is that a chronic state of self rejection is associated with frequent deviant behaviors. Rosenberg¹⁷ also gave an explanation that low self-esteem weakens the ties of the individual to the society, according to social bonding theory weak ties to the society decrease conformity to social norms and increase delinquency. Interesting to note that high frequency of delinquent behaviors was observed in those who reported the feeling of revenge as a reason of crime. This is well explained with the concept that individuals protect themselves against feeling of inferiority and shame by externalizing their blame for failures, which lead the feeling of hostility and anger towards other people¹⁸. Moreover love affair is related to high frequency of delinquent behavior in juvenile delinquents with low self esteem. It can be explained with the theoretical explanation which holds that in order to re-establish impaired self-esteem, juveniles reject the society or a group which have derogated them and turn to delinquent sub-cultures which admire their delinquent activities and grant them respect and approval.¹⁹ Another worth mentioning finding was relationship between social support and frequency of crime. Number of crime seems to be constant in those who reported lack of any social support. It goes in line with the study of Herschi²⁰ who theorized that individuals who were more tightly bonded to social group are less likely to commit delinquent acts because if individual is alienated from the parents, he will not develop an adequate conscience and super ego.

CONCLUSION

The main thrust of the present study is that low self-esteem, revenge and lack of supportive relationships are associated with delinquency. Treatment strategies and intervention need to aim at reducing juvenile's dependency on inappropriate

peer relationship and enhancing their self-esteem so that this may serve to decrease the likelihood of delinquency. There is need to make strategies based on broad social approach that decreases youth's involvement with peers who are delinquent and establish social mechanism that improve social skills. If programs are designed that aid youths to solve their family and school related problems and to help in the development of social skills then a large number of youths can be directed away from delinquency.

Table1:
Split up of juvenile delinquents as per demographic variable

Education			No. of Crimes	
	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Illiterate	48	48	1.6	2.3
Primary	21	21	1.52	1.9
Middle	13	13	1.36	.745
Matriculation	13	13	1.07	.267
Intermediate	5	5	*1	*0
Parental Status				
	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Alive	73	73	1.54	2.095
Died	5	5	*1	*0
Mother died	8	8	1.13	.354
Father died	14	14	1.23	.429
Social Support				
	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Yes	82	82	1.54	2.007
No	18	18	*1	*0
Sexual Abuse				
	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Yes	19	19.0	1.68	2.083
No	81	81.0	1.38	1.758
Type of crime				
	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Murder	44	44.0	1.41	2.265
Kidnap	6	6.0	1.50	.837
Dispute	14	14.0	1.29	.726
Stealing	17	17.0	1.41	1.004
Smuggling	2	2.0	1.50	.707
Sexual Abuse	5	5.0	2.50	3.674
Drug Supply	2	2.0	*1	*0
Sexual Relation	5	5.0	1.40	.894
Terror Act	4	4.0	*1	*0

*No. of crimes was found constant

Table2:
Level of Self Esteem in juvenile delinquents

	Frequency	Percent
Low	56	56.0
High	44	44.0
Total	100	100.0

Table3:
Frequency of crimes committed due to various reasons of crime in juvenile delinquents

Reason of Crime			No. of Crimes	
	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Enmity	11	11.0	*1	*0
Love Affair	7	7.0	2.29	3.402
Poverty	15	15.0	1.13	.352
Dispute	46	46.0	1.17	.529
Revenge	3	3.0	6.00	8.66
Sexual Abuse	6	6.0	1.33	.816
Denial	9	9.0	1.56	1.01
Peer Pressure/Adventure	2	2.0	2.50	2.12

*No. of crimes was found constant

Table 4:
Means of crimes as per reason in juvenile delinquents with low self esteem

Reason	Mean	S.D. (# of crimes)	Frequency of cases
Love Affair	2.80	4.025	5
Poverty	1.17	0.408	6
Dispute	1.17	0.539	29
Sexual Abuse	1.50	1.00	4
Denial	2.00	1.732	3
Enmity	All value Constant	All value Constant	6
Revenge			2
Peer pressure			1

Table 5
Means of crimes as per reason in juvenile delinquents with high self esteem

Reason	Mean	S.D. (# of crimes)	Frequency of cases
Poverty	1.11	0.333	9
Dispute	1.18	0.529	17
Denial	1.37	0.516	6
Enmity	All value Constant	All value Constant	5
Love Affair			2
Revenge			1
Sexual Abuse			3
Peer pressure			1

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