

IMPACT OF PEER RELATIONS UPON SELF-ESTEEM OF JUVENILE DELINQUENTS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed at exploring the impact of peer relations on the self-esteem of juvenile delinquents.

Design: Cross sectional comparative study.

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted in various male Juvenile jails of Punjab province, Pakistan during 2003.

Subjects and Methods: A sample of 200 male convicted juvenile delinquents, who were taken from the Juvenile jails of Multan (n=70), Bahawalapur (n=70) and Faisalabad (n=60). This study was completed during one year time period. The Juvenile were approached with the permission of jail authorities and only those subjects included (i) who gave their informed consent to participate in the study and (ii) who were present at the time of study.

Results: The age range of the sample was between 13-to-18 years (M=16.36, SD=1.49) and they belonged to lower and middle socio-economic class. Their categories of crimes ranged from murder to crimes like shoplifting, dacoits, and theft etc. For the measurement of peer stressors and self-esteem of juveniles, Urdu translation of Hudson's (1982) Index of Self-esteem (ISE), and Index of Peer Relations (IPR) were used. The reliability estimates of scales showed high internal consistency reliability of the measures for the sample of our study. Results indicated highly significant correlation between the scores of ISE, and IPR.

Conclusion: The findings of the study suggest that juveniles having low self-esteem have faced higher stressors in peer relations as compared to those juveniles having high self-esteem, and juveniles belonging to lower socio-economic class have more problems with their self-esteem and face more peer stressors compared to the juveniles belonging from middle socio-economic class.

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency, Peer relationship, Self-esteem

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 so-

cial 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 crises².

Peers play an important role in the psychological development of most adolescents. It is important to recognize that the influence of peers on the socialization process does not begin with puberty and adolescence as in childhood; they provide an opportunity to learn how to interact with age-mates, to control social behavior, to develop age-relevant skills and interests, and to share similar problems and feelings³. Relations with peers during this vulnerable stage of development may also be harmful. Adolescents may be pressured by a group

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of their peers into suspending their own better judgment and engaging in behaviors that they may later regret⁴. The desire for close friends increases as adolescents turn to their peers for support formerly provided by the family⁵.

This is also termed as ... “the peer conformity and extrinsic rewards promote the cohesion between the adolescent and his or her delinquent associates, which increases the potential level of delinquent behavior for all parties involved⁶. As a result of interpersonal gratification, the adolescent may be destined to attach him or herself to delinquent peers. Adolescent peer groups are characterized by three stages of development that are important to delinquency. The first stage is typified by the group’s consumption values invidious relationships between adolescent peer groups, and indifference to other people’s welfare. For both socialite and street-corner groups, the first stage is characterized by delinquent acts that continue throughout adolescence⁷.

Self-esteem is defined as ... “the evaluative function of the self-concept. Self-esteem, thus, is the affective or emotional experience of the evaluations one makes with respect to one’s personal worth⁸”. 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-perceptions⁹.

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^{10,11}. 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 family and peer relations on the self-esteem on juvenile delinquents or in the context of early environment or inter-personal stressors in adolescences behavior.

We hypothesised that

1. Peer relationship will be significantly correlated with Self esteem.
2. The scores of Juveniles on peer relations will be significantly different as an impact of variations in their self esteem (high & low).
3. The scores of Juveniles on peer relations and self esteem will be significantly different due to their belongingness of different income groups (Low and high income group).

4. There will be significant differences in the scores of Juveniles having problems in family (such as single parent, history of child abuse, and criminal parents), compared to the juveniles who do not have problems in the family.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The sample consisted of 200 convicted male Juvenile delinquents, taken from Pakistani jails of Multan ($N = 70$), Faisalabad ($N = 60$) and Bahawalpur ($N = 70$). The age range of the sample was between 13-to-18 years ($M = 16.36$, $SD = 1.49$). The categories of crimes were murder to crimes like shoplifting, dacoits, and theft etc. Sample was selected through purposive convenient sampling technique. The criterion for selection of sample was that only those juveniles were included in the study (i) who were present during the time of data collection and (ii) who were willing to participate in the study.

Following instruments were used in this study. I- Index of Self-Esteem: The Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) is one of the nine scales of Clinical Measurement Package (CMP) developed by Hudson¹². This is designed to measure the degree; severity or magnitude of a problem the person has with his self-esteem. This scale has 23 items arranged on a 5-point Likert type scale, the possible score range of ISE is 23-115, and 30 is the cut off score. We dropped item no’s 16 and 23 in the main study, which had non-significant correlations in the pilot study. High scores on ISE indicates problematic self-esteem, whereas, the low scores indicate high self esteem. II- Index of Peer Relations: The Index of Peer Relations (IPR) was designed to measure the severity or magnitude of problems a person has in peer relationships. IPR consists of 25 items arranged on a 5-point Likert type scale. The score range of IPR is 25 to 125, and 30 is the cut off score. Reverse scoring is assigned to items nos. 1, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, and 22. High scores of IPR indicate severe problems of peer relations, whereas, low scores indicate lesser problems. Along with these instruments a separately developed demographic information sheet including information about age, family income, type of crimes, imprisonment jail, family environment like, single parents, child abuse and having criminal parents was also used. Procedure: The Study protocol comprised of cover letter, Index of Self-Esteem, Index of Peer Relations and Personal information sheet. The data were collected individually on a sample of 200 juveniles. Instructions to complete the scales were printed on the front pages of IPR and ISE. The sample of Juveniles were approached in the jails

with the permission of the provincial and local Jail authorities.

RESULTS

Reliability Estimates of Scales: The Alpha reliability coefficient of ISE was .85 and split-half reliability was .74, whereas, the Alpha reliability of IPR was .91 and split-half Reliability estimates was .74, respectively. The relationship between the scores of self esteem and peer relations is calculated as follows:

There was a highly significant correlation between index of self esteem and index of peer relations values for these variables. The correlation of ISE with IPR was $r = .69$, ($**p < .01$). Which implies that peer stressors are significantly correlated with problematic self-esteem (low self-esteem).

The impact of variations in Juvenile's self esteem (high and low self esteem) upon their peer was analysed by calculating t-test values for these variables, shown in table 1.

Table 1

Means, Standard deviations and t-value of scores of high and low self-esteem groups on IPR (Index of peer relations) (N=200)

Groups	N	M	SD	t
High self-esteem	102	60.95	17.23	6.76***
Low self-esteem	98	74.29	9.35	

$df = 198$, $*** p < .0001$

The findings in the table 1 suggest that both groups of juveniles differed significantly on IPR ($t = 6.76$, $df = 198$, $***p < .0001$). The findings indicate that juveniles who have high self-esteem, experience relatively lesser peer problems ($M = 60.95$, $SD = 17.23$) compared to those juveniles who have low self-esteem ($M = 74.29$, $SD = 9.35$). The findings also indicate that juveniles with low self-esteem find difficulty in maintaining long-term friendship with their peers.

In order to see the effect of income on the variables of study, the sample of juveniles was divided into low and high-income groups. Group 1 comprised of 133 juveniles belonging to low-income group (Rs.1500 to Rs.5000), whereas, group 2 comprised of 67 juveniles belonging to high-income group (Rs.8000 to Rs.15000). Following table presents the comparison of juveniles belonging to high and low income groups on their scores of ISE.

Table 2

Means, Standard deviations and t-value of scores of high and low income group juveniles on ISE (Index of Self-esteem) (N=200)

Groups	N	M	SD	t
Low income group (Rs.1500 to Rs.5000)	133	67.23	14.10	2.84***
High income group (Rs. 8000 to Rs15000)	67	60.52	18.60	

$df = 198$, $*** p < .005$

It is evident from this table that there is highly significant difference between the two income categories of juveniles on ISE ($t = 2.84$, $df = 198$, $*** p < .005$). The findings suggest that juveniles belonging to lower income group report more problems with their self-esteem and they have relatively more problems about their self ($M = 67.23$, $SD = 14.10$) as compared to the high-income category group ($M = 60.52$, $SD = 18.60$).

Results also indicate that there is highly significant difference between low and high-income group of juveniles on the scores of IPR ($t = 3.86$, $df = 198$, $***p < .0001$). The findings suggest that juveniles belonging to low income group also have more problems with peers ($M = 66.14$, $SD = 18.24$) compared to the high-income group juveniles ($M = 54.81$, $SD = 22.13$). These results indicate that juveniles belonging to low income group find it difficult to maintain good relationship with their peers.

The effect of juvenile's family problems, including single parent, history of child abuse and having criminal parents on the scores of ISE and IPR was also calculated. These are shown in table 3.

Results in table 3 show that there are non-significant effects of single parent ($t = 1.15$, $df = 96$, $p = n.s$) and criminal parents ($t = 1.20$, $df = 110$, $p = n.s$) on the scores of ISE. Whereas, the scores of juveniles having history of child abuse differed significantly on ISE ($t = 2.00$, $df = 102$, $**p < .005$) from those who had no history of child abuse. These results suggest that self-esteem of juveniles is significantly affected by the history of child abuse compared to those juveniles who had no history of child abuse. The findings of the study also suggest that problems including, single parent and having criminal parents did not have any marked effect on the self-esteem of juveniles. We also found that there are non-significant effects of single parent juveniles on IPR ($t =$

Table 3

Means, Standard deviations and t- values of the scores of juveniles reporting family problems and juveniles having non problematic family environment on ISE (Index of Self-Esteem) (N=200)

Family problems	N	M	SD	df	t
Single parents	41	64.49	16.97	96	1.15
Both parents	57	68.28	15.51		
Abused	55	62.27	16.43	110	2.00**
Non abused	57	68.28	15.51		
Criminal parents	47	64.66	14.96	102	1.20
Non-criminal parents	57	68.28	15.51		

p=n.s, **p<.005

1.39, $df = 96$, $p = n.s$) and criminal parents of juveniles on IPR ($t = .61$, $df = 110$, $p = n.s$). However, there were significant differences in the scores of peer problems of those juveniles who were the victim of child abuse ($t = 2.46$, $df = 102$, $*p < .01$) compared to non-abused.

DISCUSSION

Our findings show that juveniles having low self-esteem reported higher peers stressors as compared to the juveniles having high self-esteem. This findings suggest that our sample of juveniles is unable to maintain long-term friendship with their peers. They are lacking in their self-confidence, and as a result they face more problems with their peers. Their low self-esteem seems to creates many complexes in their personality. Many of these juveniles also reported informally to the researcher (during data collection) that they often felt that their peers thought of themselves as inferior, low and considered them as a boring personality and they always felt uncomfortable in the company of friends and strangers). This group perhaps faced difficulty in making new friendships within their peer groups.

One view is that "the adolescent boy's stake in conformity effects his choice of friends rather than the other way round. Any theory of delinquency must be modified, to include some notion of the effect of peer group processes and possibly the importance of delinquency in contributing to an adolescent's self-esteem"¹³. It is also

argued that "...the impulsivity, aggressiveness, self-interest, and criminality of the juveniles are learned, but that the juvenile's individual becomes juvenile not so much because of his learning but because of failure to learn self-concept"¹⁴.

Regarding the influence of low-income group, results support our hypothesis, that juveniles belonging to higher income group will have lesser peer problems as compared to those juveniles who belonged to low income group. Our findings suggest that juveniles belonging to low-income group had difficulty in gratifying their needs due to the limited family income. This finding is supported by some studies that due to the factors like family poverty and negative life events, delinquents feel and project strong tension. This tension makes them feel and think badly for others. This behavior leads them towards the problems with peers¹⁵.

Our findings support the hypothesis that juveniles having the history of child abuse, reported more problems with their self-esteem, and peers problems compared to those juveniles who have no history of child abuse. Researchers have begun to delineate prenatal, child and environmental characteristics increase the risk of child abuse. Parental anxiety and poor parenting skills, children with mental, physical or behavioral abnormalities are also the prime cause of child abuse^{16,17}. The findings of our study do not support the hypothesis, that single parent and having criminal parents have significant effects on the self-esteem, and peer problems of the juveniles. The findings show that these factors remain neutral on the self-esteem and peer relations of the juveniles.

The present research has identified the role of peer relations upon the self esteem of Juvenile delinquents. We feel that there is need of further exploration of the childhood environment of juveniles (single parents, history of child abuse, criminal parents etc) in a future prospective study, which should explain the dynamic impact of early childhood environment upon the later development and shaping of personally of juveniles.

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