AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF SELF-CONCEPT AMONG DELINQUENT ADOLESCENTS AND NORMAL ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

Positive self-perception is typically associated with overall adjustment. But many children develop unfavourable self-concept. As a result, they have difficulty in accepting themselves and making personal and social adjustments. The present study was carried out with the main aim of comparing self-concept between the delinquent adolescents and the normal adolescents. It was hypothesized that the delinquent adolescents have lower level of self-concept than the normal adolescents. To assess self-concept the self-concept questionnaire was administered on the delinquent adolescents and the normal adolescents selected from State Observation Homes and schools/college respectively. The findings of the research revealed that the delinquent adolescents have lower level of self-concept than the normal adolescents. It was also found in the present study that domicile has no significant influence on self-concept of the delinquent adolescents and the normal adolescents.

Key Words: Self-concept, Delinquent adolescents, Adolescents.

A widespread and theoretically motivated inclusion of the self-concept in analyses of deviance actually began to emerge during 1950’s when interactionist social psychology became a major thought in sociological viewpoint. Psychological and psychiatric theories argue that criminal behaviour originates primarily in the personalities of offenders rather than in their biology or in situation. Researches

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by Lemert (1951) and Cohen (1955) stand as prominent works on the use of self-concept in the study of deviance and they stress the importance of self-concept in delinquency. Reckless et al., (1956) demonstrated that the quality of self-concept may be an excellent predictor of delinquency. Their research suggested that poor self-concept leave boys vulnerable to delinquency.

Further, Reckless (1967) in formulating his containment theory he advocated that due to a favourable socialization in early life one develops a stronger self-concept, which directs an individual towards law-abiding behaviour. Unfavourable socialization results in poor self-concept resulting in weak inner direction that cannot help resist crime.

Self-concept may be defined simply as the total collection of attitudes, judgements and values which an individual holds with respect to his behaviour, his ability, his biology and his worth as person. In short, how he perceives and evaluates himself. Researchers have suggested that lower overall self-concept negatively affects social behaviour. Positive self-perception is typically associated with overall adjustment.

Self-rejection includes chronic attitudes of self-disapproval and self-disparagement, self-distrust, feelings of being unworthy, not being deserving of satisfactions, reward or success. In one of its more cruel forms, self-rejection includes severe guilt, viewing oneself as among the damned. The severely self-rejecting adolescent is considered to be his own enemy. Hence, in the present research an attempt is made to study self-concept of the delinquent adolescents in comparison with the normal adolescents.

Wells and Rankin (1983) points out that self-esteem is only one aspect of the multifaceted phenomenon of self-conception, there may be other aspects of self-concept that are more important causally than the overall level of self-esteem. Self-esteem being only evaluative dimension of self-concept, Kaplan (1978) found support for self-enhancement hypothesis conducting research on delinquents. But the present study aims to find out the global and dimension wise self-concept of the delinquent adolescents.

Levy (1997) hypothesized that higher self-concept would be related to lower delinquency. Specifically, it was hypothesized that self-concept scores would be highest for non-delinquents, followed by non-institutionalized delinquents and then institutionalized delinquents. The results were found according to the hypotheses and the relative self-concept scores of the groups indicated that more serious the delinquent behaviour more negative was the self-concept.

The subjects reporting high levels of delinquent behaviour had lower self-concept (Weist et al., 1998). Whereas, Oyserman and Markus (1990) argued that the self-concept may indeed emerge as a crucial factor in delinquency, but only if the self-concept is considered to include not just one’s global feelings of self-worth, but also one’s specific thoughts and feelings about the self and what is possible for self in particular domains.
Within the potentially delinquent group there were important differences in self-concept between boys who had previous legal involvement and those who had not had such conduct (Reckless et al., 1967).

Many sociological theories consider low self-esteem to be a strong factor in delinquent behaviour (Rosenberg et al., 1989). Self-esteem theory suggests that low self-esteem causes delinquency (Kaplan, 1980). Kaplan’s data are consistent with this view. He found that non-delinquents in the 7th grade with low self-esteem were significantly more likely than those with high self-esteem to become delinquent by the 8th grade. The behaviours ranged from minor acts like taking part in a social protest to many with more serious consequences such as engaging in fights, theft or robbery.

Although self-enhancement theory suggests that self-esteem and delinquency affect one another, it also suggests that self-esteem is expected to have a negative effect on delinquency.

Pertaining to the effect of domicile on self-concept the results of the study conducted by Ramazan et al., (2004) showed no significant difference in global self-concept between students from rural and urban areas. Hence, it appears that place of domicile is not a determining factor in global self-concept.

Objectives

1. To find out the level of self-concept among delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents.
2. To study the effect of domicile on self-concept of delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents.

Hypotheses

1. Self-concept of delinquent adolescents is significantly lower than normal adolescents.
2. Domicile has no significant influence on self-concept of delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents.

METHOD

Sample

To verify the above hypotheses a sample of 321 adolescents were selected for the research. Of the total sample, 150 institutionalized delinquent adolescents were selected from State Observation Homes located in Bangalore, Mysore, Shimoga and Dharwad city. For comparative analyses a sample of 171 normal adolescents were selected from Karnataka College, Basel Mission High School, K. E Board School. Age of the adolescents ranged from 14 to 18 years, with the mean age of 16.32 years.
Tools

Self-concept Questionnaire: The self-concept questionnaire constructed by Saraswat (1997) was administered for the subjects to assess the level of self-concept. The self-concept questionnaire consists of six dimensions such as:

1. Physical: Individuals’ view of their body, health, physical (additive) appearance and strength.
2. Social: Individuals’ sense of worth in social interactions.
3. Temperamental: Individuals’ view of their emotional state or predominance of his particular kind of emotional reaction.
4. Educational: Individuals’ view of themselves in relation to school, teachers and extracurricular activities.
6. Intellectual: Individuals’ awareness of their intelligence and capacity of problem solving and judgements, and
7. Global Self-worth: The scale norms also provide a global self-worth of the subject based on the added raw score of all 6 dimensions.

There are 8 items on each dimension and in all there are 48 items. The total score ranges from 48 to 240. A high score on this inventory indicates a higher self-concept and vice-versa.

Test-retest reliability was found to be .91 for the total self-concept measure and for dimensions it varies from .67 to .88. The content and construct validity were established by test author taking the opinion of psychologists.

Personal Data Sheet: A personal data sheet was constructed by the researchers to collect information regarding subjects’ age, domicile, type of offence, frequency of offence, period of stay in the institute, etc.

Statistical Analyses

1. Mean and SD were calculated for the groups.
2. ‘t’ test was carried out for the comparative groups for the dimensions as well as for the total score.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The above table reveals that on the total self-concept the delinquent adolescents have a lower mean score of 121.81 and the normal adolescents have a higher mean score of 185.33. The ‘t’ value is 36.10, which is significant at 0.01 level. The mean scores state that the delinquent adolescents have lower self-concept than the normal adolescents. This result is in accordance with Levy’s (1997) theoretical proposition and findings of earlier researches (Reckless, 1967; Kaplan, 1978). They featured that self-concept scores of the serious delinquents would be lower than the normal children.
TABLE 1
Shows Mean, SD and ‘t’ value of the delinquent adolescents and the normal adolescents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of Self-concept</th>
<th>Mean(SD) Delinquent Adolescents (n = 150)</th>
<th>Mean(SD) Normal Adolescents (n = 171)</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Physical</td>
<td>21.61(3.47)</td>
<td>30.82(3.75)</td>
<td>22.75**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social</td>
<td>18.67(3.46)</td>
<td>28.83(3.29)</td>
<td>26.97**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Temperamental</td>
<td>18.15(3.86)</td>
<td>32.04(3.73)</td>
<td>32.73**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Educational</td>
<td>20.74(4.88)</td>
<td>33.64(3.52)</td>
<td>27.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Moral</td>
<td>23.81(3.98)</td>
<td>32.04(3.14)</td>
<td>20.66**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Intellectual</td>
<td>18.83(4.06)</td>
<td>27.94(3.05)</td>
<td>22.92**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Total</td>
<td>121.81(7.91)</td>
<td>185.33(13.52)</td>
<td>36.10**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at 0.01 level

Personal and social adjustments are greatly influenced by the degree of stability of the self-concept. Persons with good self-concept are better adjusted. Those with stable self-concept, largely positive in nature, can be expected to behave in a socially approved manner in spite of environmental temptations to engage in delinquent behaviour and they are insulated against delinquency. On the other hand, those whose relatively stable self-concept is characterized by negative toward self can be ‘spotted’ as potential delinquents even before their behaviour becomes anti-social.

The analyses of scores on different self-concept dimensions explicated that the delinquent adolescents have mean scores lower than the normal adolescents. The ‘t’ values on all domains are highly significant at 0.01 level. The results on physical self-concept indicate that potential delinquents are more negative in perceptions of their physical characteristics and their overall perception is that they are not attractive. On the domain of social self-concept, they perceive that their social relationships are negative, dominated by negative emotions and express negative emotions in social situations. This is an indication that the delinquent adolescents are emotionally disturbed individuals. On the domain of educational self-concept, they also perceive that their educational or academic performance is lower than the normal adolescents. This implies that they underestimate their ability in the academic abilities. On the moral self-concept, the delinquent adolescents perceive that their moral self is deficient than the normal adolescents. The delinquent adolescents’ perception on the intellectual self-concept is that they have lower intellectual abilities. The above results clearly reveal that among the delinquent adolescents self-concept on different domains is lower than the normal adolescents.
Physical appearance is the best predictor of global self-worth. If a person does not see himself as having good physical appearance, the overall self-worth is affected. One’s sense of global self-worth is determined by successes or failures in areas that are deemed important (James, 1892). Whereas, Marsh’s (1989) work has noted that considering the importance of rating of particular domains does not significantly contribute to our understanding of global self-concept. However, the present research reveals that not only on global self-concept, but even on the other dimensions of self-concept the delinquent adolescents have poor self-worth than the normal adolescents.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Rural (n=23)</th>
<th>Urban (n=127)</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>123.91</td>
<td>121.43</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>19.81</td>
<td>17.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that on total self-concept the delinquent adolescents of rural domicile have a mean score of 123.91 and the delinquent adolescents of urban domicile have a mean score of 121.43, respectively. The ‘t’ value is 0.61, which is not significant. This reveals that there is non-significant difference in self-concept between the delinquent adolescents of rural and urban domicile and the domicile has non-significant influence on self-concept of the delinquent adolescents.

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Rural (n=89)</th>
<th>Urban (n=82)</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>183.81</td>
<td>186.98</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>14.15</td>
<td>12.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was also observed in the above table that the mean score (183.81) of the normal adolescents of rural domicile is lower than the mean score of (186.98) normal adolescents of urban domicile. The ‘t’ value is 1.54, which is not significant. This reveals that there is non-significant difference in self-concept between even among the normal adolescents of rural and urban domicile. Results of both the above tables related to domicile clearly indicate that domicile has no significant influence on self-concept of the delinquent adolescents and the normal adolescents.
CONCLUSIONS

1. The delinquent adolescents have significantly lower level of self-concept than the normal adolescents.
2. The domicile—rural and urban background has no significant influence on self-concept of the delinquent adolescents and the normal adolescents.

REFERENCES