Emotional Competence and Aggressive Behaviour of Institutionalised Delinquents and Normal Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

In the present study, it was hypothesised that the emotional competence of delinquent adolescents would be comparatively lower than normal adolescents and would they have higher level of aggressive behaviour. To test this, the present study was conducted on 25 delinquent adolescents from Observation Home and equal number of adolescents for control group from a high school and Pre-university college. Emotional competence and aggression scales were administered individually for them. The self-reported responses of the subjects were recorded, scored and subjected to ‘t’ analysis. It was found that the institutionalised delinquent adolescents had lower emotional competence and expressed higher level of aggressive behaviour in the social situations as compared to their normal counterparts.

There has been much theorising about the links between emotional competence and externalising psychopathology, particularly aggressive behaviour (Dodge & Garber, 1991). Emotional competence is a complex phenomenon consisting of a number of distinct, yet interrelated component skills including emotion appraisal, emotion expression and emotion understanding (Saarni, 1990, 1999). While inefficient skills may cause serious consequences in the dynamics of human behaviour. how an individual handles his emotions, whether competently or incompetently, would be a question of

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immense importance in explaining the growth of personality. Emotional competence works as a constructive force in shaping the individuals behaviour.

EMOTION APPRAISAL

Cognitive models of emotion suggest that appraisals of events, in contrast to the event itself, are more important in determining emotion (Lazarus, 1991). Social information processing work examining appraisal strategies suggests that children with aggressive behaviour more often make errors in interpreting situations and attend selectively to hostile social cues than do their non-aggressive peers (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

EMOTION EXPRESSION

The control, modification, and management of emotional reactivity and expressivity are important components of emotional competence. The complex interplay between emotion and behaviour suggests that children might be less prone to aggressive outbursts if they are successful at managing their emotions and expressions than if they are unsuccessful at doing so (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, Murphy, Maszk and Holmgren, 1996).

EMOTION UNDERSTANDING

One of the basic aspects of emotional competence is the ability of an individual to recognise what he is feeling (Saarni, 1999). Emotion understanding consists of the ability to identify causes and correlates of emotional states (Harris, 1993). A common premise within clinical settings, recently supported by several investigations, is that children with higher levels of aggressive behaviour have more difficulty identifying and understanding their emotions than do children with lower levels of aggressive behaviour. For example, pre-schoolers with higher levels of aggressive behaviour exhibited less ability to identify others’ emotions than did those with lower levels of aggressive behaviour (Arsenio Cooper, and Lover, 2000).

Children exhibiting good inhibitory control may be protected against the negative behavioural outcomes associated with negative emotions (Eisenberg Valiente, Fabes, Smith, Shephered and Hosoya, 2003). Hudson, Marshall, Wales & McDonald, (1993) determined whether violent and sex offenders have great difficulty in correctly identifying emotions. It was found that violent non-sex offenders were the most emotionally sensitive and the most accurate at identifying the emotional states of others, while sex offenders displayed the least sensitivity to emotional stimuli. Psychopathic offenders have more difficulty in processing emotional information than non-psychopathic offenders (Christianson Forth, Hare and Strachan, 1996).
Aggression may be defined operationally in terms of rude answering to elders, irritation, feeling unfairness, carrying grudges, frequent quarrelling, broken engagement, impulses to take revenge and reactionary attitudes to tradition and beliefs. Juvenile delinquents had been more aggressive than adolescent delinquents. Among those convicted, recidivists were more aggressive than first time offenders (Hamalainen & Pulkkinen, 1995). The study conducted by Caprara, (1996) uncovered that emotional responsivity and positive evaluation of violence accounting for nearly 60 per cent of the variance in propensity towards aggression. Aggressivity factor scores were significantly higher for violent offenders than for property offences. Negative affectivity scores did not differ between property and violent offences (Howell, Raddon and Enns, 1997). Pro-actively aggressive boys are prone to externalising problems and criminality and exhibit conduct problems in adolescence (Pulkkinen, 1996). Children rated as exhibiting high levels of aggressive behaviour have difficulty regulating their emotions (Shields and Ciccehetti, 1998).

**OBJECTIVES**

1. To find out the emotional competency of delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents.
2. To measure the aggressive behaviour of delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents.

**Hypotheses**

1. The level of emotional competence and its competencies are significantly lower in delinquent adolescents than normal adolescents.
2. The magnitude of aggressive behaviour is significantly more in delinquent adolescents than normal adolescents.

**METHOD**

**Sample:** The sample consisted of 50 male adolescents. Of the total sample, 25 delinquent adolescents, who were institutionalised for custodial reason, were selected using random sampling technique, from Observation Home, Bangalore. The normal control subjects were selected from a high school and a pre-university college of Karnatak University, Dharwad. The same random sampling technique was used to select them. The adolescents selected were of the age between 14-18 years, with the mean age of 16.18 years.

1. **Emotional Competence Scale:** In order to measure emotional competence the scale developed by Sharma and Bharadwaj (1995)
was used. The scale consists of five different emotional competencies. They are as below:

1. **Adequate Depth of Feeling**: A feeling of being confident or capable with all reality assumptions may be termed as adequate depth of feeling specifically associated with effective judgement and personality integration, which ensures vigorous participation in living.

2. **Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions**: It refers to a tendency marked by adequate emotional expressiveness based on fulsome expression and control of emotions. Any form of inadequacy in either expression or control of emotions may lead to uncontrolled and disorganised emotionality.

3. **Ability to Function with Emotions**: Emotional competence requires that the individual should develop a characteristic pattern of emotional reactivity which should not let him be influenced in his adequate mode of functioning that helps in performing actions of daily routine properly.

4. **Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions**: Emotional competence requires an understanding of the role of sensitivity and detrimental effects of such emotions in the beginning and also a development of the ability to resist their harmful effects thereafter.

5. **Encouragement of Positive Emotions**: It refers to the ability of the person to develop a predominance of positive emotions in the personality make up of him to ensure a meaningful and fairly well integrated life.

Emotional competence scale is a five-point scale based on the lines of Likert having five alternatives for each item. Scoring of these five alternatives followed a system of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 from upper end to lower end. The obtained five competency scores were converted into Z scores. Later the T scores were determined by referring to the table.

2. **Aggression Scale**: Aggression scale developed by Roma Pal and Tasneem Naqvi (1981) was used to measure the aggression level. A scoring pattern of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0 was followed and total score was obtained.

3. **Personal Data Sheet**: The researchers constructed a personal data sheet to collect the subjects’ demographic details such as age, SES, domicile, period of stay in the remand home, type of offence, etc.
PROCEDURE

The English version scales were translated into Kannada and verified by the experts. The researcher orally read the scale items for the delinquent adolescents and the responses were carefully recorded. For the normal adolescents after instructions were given, the scales were personally given to them. After answering, the scales were taken back and analysed using the statistical methods.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

1. Mean and SD were calculated for the comparative groups.
2. ‘t’ test was carried out for the comparative groups to find out the significance level of difference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE-1

Mean, SD and ‘t’ value obtained for delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents on total and different emotional competencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No.</th>
<th>Emotional Competencies</th>
<th>Sample Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>‘t’ Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Delinquent Adolescents</td>
<td>46.68</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td>3.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Normal Adolescents</td>
<td>56.32</td>
<td>11.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AEG</td>
<td>Delinquent Adolescents</td>
<td>44.24</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>4.79**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Normal Adolescents</td>
<td>53.32</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>AFE</td>
<td>Delinquent Adolescents</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>4.46**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Normal Adolescents</td>
<td>57.24</td>
<td>6.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>ACPE</td>
<td>Delinquent Adolescents</td>
<td>47.36</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>5.68**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Normal Adolescents</td>
<td>57.64</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>EPE</td>
<td>Delinquent Adolescents</td>
<td>52.60</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>6.11**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Normal Adolescents</td>
<td>61.64</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Total Emotional Competence</td>
<td>Delinquent Adolescents</td>
<td>47.64</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>6.92**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Normal Adolescents</td>
<td>60.44</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** P< 0.01

Table-1 shows comparative results of the delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents. The mean scores obtained on different emotional competencies and on total emotional competence reveal that there is significant difference between delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents. The competency scores are lower for delinquent adolescents as compared to normal.
adolescents. The ‘t’ scores obtained on total emotional competence and its competencies are significant at 0.01 level. This replicates that the delinquent adolescents have low emotional competence on total ability as well as on its different competencies. The delinquent adolescents lack adequate depth of feeling, they feel lacking confidence and capable with all reality assumptions. They are highly prone to aggressive outbursts as they are not successful at managing their emotions and expressions. This may lead to aggressive behaviour and delinquency. They are also less capable of functioning with highly emotional situations, which in turn becomes difficult to carry out routine work. They are also not successful to cope with problem emotions. Hence certain problem emotions play a destructive role and pose a potential damage to the life orientations of the individual’s course of life. They also lack in coping with problem emotions. Lastly, the delinquent adolescents are also less capable of encouraging of positive emotions; hence it exhibits a destructive influence on their behaviour.

The above results indicate that the delinquent adolescents have lower ability on total emotional competence and its competencies.

**TABLE-2**

Mean, SD and ‘t’ value obtained for delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents on aggression variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>‘t’ Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delinquent Adolescents</td>
<td>92.80</td>
<td>15.69</td>
<td>3.77**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal Adolescents</td>
<td>75.56</td>
<td>16.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** P< 0.01

Table-2 depicts the comparative results of the delinquent adolescents and normal adolescents. There is significant difference in the mean scores between these two groups. The ‘t’ value found for the mean difference between these two groups are highly significant at 0.01 level. This result reveals that the delinquent adolescents exhibit higher level of aggressive behaviour in the social situations. They express aggressive behaviour such as rude answering to elders, irritation, feeling of unfairness, carrying grudges, frequent quarrelling, broken engagement etc. The delinquent adolescents reported while interviewing that they feel highly aggressive for the mild provocation also, few of them expressed that they feel as if to kill the persons who provoke anger, sometimes they lose control and harm other individuals. This is an indication that they express higher level of aggressive behaviour due to lack of emotional management and control.

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The above results shows that the delinquent adolescents who were rated as possessing lower emotional competence express higher level of aggressive behaviour. Hence, it is reasonable that because of lower emotional competence and higher level of aggressivity delinquent adolescents indulge in delinquent activities and recidivistic behaviour.

**CONCLUSIONS**

1. Delinquent adolescents have lower level of emotional competence as compared to normal adolescents.
2. Delinquent adolescents also have higher level of aggressivity as compared to normal adolescents.
3. Low emotional competence is a precursor for higher level of aggressive behaviour.

**Implications of the Study:** Emotional competence and aggression are important aspects of personality. As delinquent adolescents lack emotional competency and prone for higher level of aggressive behaviour, they need counseling and therapy to achieve the positive side of the same to lead a normal life and in turn reduce the recidivism in the society.

**REFERENCES**


