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The Prevalence Of Learning Disabilities Among Delinquents: A Glimpse Into Significant Familial Variables

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ABSTRACT

Delinquency being the worldwide phenomenon is probably one of the most serious threats to society today. The recent researches have shown that the delinquents tend to be neuro psychologically different from others and one of the main indices is the existence of learning disabilities in this group. In this context, the present study attempted to assess the prevalence of learning disabilities among delinquents. The study also investigated significant familial and personal variables related to delinquency. For this purpose, Standard Progressive Matrices test, Bender Gestalt test, Stroop Colour and word test were used. Besides a proforma was prepared to obtain information about their family composition and other demographic details. The percentage and chi square analysis were carried out on data and the results revealed that a significant percentage of delinquents were learning disabled. They haled from disrupted families with low education level of parents and raised by criminal, addict and alcoholic fathers.

INTRODUCTION

Delinquency refers to a large variety of disapproved behaviours of children and adolescents which the society does not approve of and for which some kind of admonishment, punishment or corrective measure is justified in the public interest. A growing number of psychologists approach the issue of crime and delinquency with an emphasis on developmental and cognitive processes. Over the past few decades, the learning disabilities in adolescents have been identified as contributing significantly to delinquent behaviour (Evans, Clinkinbeard & Simi,2015).

The link between learning disabilities (LD) and delinquency has been explained differently by different researchers. The significant among these explanations are: school failure hypothesis, differential treatment hypothesis and susceptibility hypothesis. The school failure view point postulates that LD leads to school failure which leads to negative self image resulting in school dropout and delinquency (Hirschi, 1969). Secondly, the differential treatment hypothesis advocated by Broder et al. (1981) states that youth with LD and non-learning disabled youth engage in the same rate and kind of delinquent behaviours; however police and other officials treat LD youth differently so as to increase the incidence of adjudication. Thirdly, the susceptibility hypothesis given by Murray (1976) contends that LD are frequently accompanied by a variety of socially troublesome personality characteristics which directly contribute to the development of delinquency.

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Similarly, family is an important agent exerting a great impact on the child's behaviour and on whether he becomes normal or delinquent. A dysfunctional family can be a center wherein delinquency grows; on the other hand, a strong family can nurture and protect when peers and school fail (Azeredo, Moreira, Figueiredo, & Barbosa, 2019). Other significant familial variables in delinquency research are size of the family, birth order, parental education, alcoholism and criminality in parents. Mack,et al. (2007) studied that a typical delinquent hails from a rural and poor economic background, his family is large and his parents are divorced. Möllerstedt (2019) studied that the children of alcoholic and criminal fathers were more vulnerable to delinquency. In the backdrop of above review of literature, the present research aims to find the prevalence of learning disabilities in delinquents along with investigating significant familial variables.

OBJECTIVES

The present study has the following objectives:

1) To assess the prevalence of learning disabilities in delinquents.

2) To study the link of delinquency with significant familial variables like birth order, family structure, literacy of parents, alcoholism and criminality in parents.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: In the present study, the sample consisted of 115 male delinquents of age ranging between 13 to 17 years, taken from Observation Home situated at Ludhiana in Punjab (India). To draw comparisons among delinquents and non-delinquents on selected variables, non-delinquent subjects were also studied. A total sample of 130 non-delinquents comprised of school students, dropouts and workers was taken. Efforts were made to maintain inter-group homogeneity on the variables of education, socioeconomic status, gender and age. For the selection of the sample, following aspects were taken into consideration: a) Only literate delinquents and non-delinquents were taken into the sample who could read words printed in Hindi or Punjabi. b) The subjects having visual/ hearing problems and other physical handicaps were not taken into the sample. The above mentioned considerations were important to meet the criterion for the diagnosis of LD (Poikkeus et al., 1999).

Psychological Measures: The following tests were used in the present study to collect the required information from the subjects: 1) Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM; Raven, Court and Raven, 1983) 2) The Bender-Gestalt Test (B-G; Pascal and Suttell, 1951) 3) Stroop Color and Word Test (Golden and Freshwater, 1998)

Besides, the above tests, other demographic details of the participants and their families were collected on a separate form along with the administration of psychological measures. The information pertaining to subjects' birth order, literacy of parents, family structure, alcoholism and criminality in parents was collected.

Procedure: The words printed on the word page of Stroop Color Word test were translated into Hindi and Punjabi. Moreover, the delinquents were extended complete cooperation in grasping the test items. To meet this criterion of average and above average intelligence in learning disabled individuals, the subjects in the present study were controlled on intelligence as reported earlier. Because the neuropsychological correlates of learning disability potentially include visual-spatial abilities,motor skills and lingual skills (Borrani 2019), therefore, the Bender-Gestalt test and Stroop Color and Word test were used to measure LD. Then following criterion was used to classify the subjects into learning disabled and non-learning disabled categories. (1) The subjects having raw score above 46 were screened out for visual perceptual deficits (Pascal and Suttell, 1951). (2) Interference score of the Stroop Color Word test was used as a key score to assess learning disabled subjects (Criterion given in the manual). The subjects exhibiting deficits in one of these measures were screened out for learning disabilities (Poikkeus et al., 1999).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To ascertain the proportion of subjects on the variables under study, the percentage analysis was carried out. And for variables on nominal scale, chi-square analysis was done to compare the delinquents and non-delinquents on the indices of learning disabilities (LD), familial, parental and personal information. The results have been presented in tables 1.1 to 1.6. A perusal of the table 1.1 suggests that in the delinquent group (N=93), a total of 83 (89.2%) delinquents have been found to be learning disabled while only 10 (10.8%) delinquents have been found to be non-learning disabled. On the other hand, in the non-delinquent group (N=106), only 23 (21.5%) adolescents have been found to be learning disabled while the rest 84 (78.5%) adolescents have been found to be non-learning disabled. The significant association between learning disabilities and delinquency is further corroborated by chi-square analysis shown in table 1.2. The table 1.2 suggests that the value of chi-square is coming out to be significant (χ^2 = 91.65; p < .01) which suggest that LD occur with significant frequency in delinquent population.

This link between LD and delinquency can possibly be attributed to the fact that learning disabled children, owing to their disability, face rejection by their peers, teachers and family due to which their tendency to join delinquent gangs increases because these gangs might help them in restoring their identity and raising their lowered self-esteem. In a previous study by Mosotho & Joubert (2017) , a significant number of subjects exhibited some kind of perceptual disturbance in BG test.

The table 1.1 further shows that among the learning disabled delinquents (N=83), 57 (68.7%) delinquents have been found to have language deficits, while 81 (97.5%) delinquents have been found to have visual perceptual deficits. The number and percentage of delinquents having deficits in both the spheres is 55 (66.3%). On the other hand, in learning disabled non-delinquents (N=23), all the 23 (100%) adolescents have been found to have visual perceptual deficits and only 2 (8.7%) among them have been found to have language deficits. The results put forward the fact that a significant proportion of subjects in both the groups (learning disabled delinquents and learning disabled non-delinquents) have been assessed to have visual perceptual deficits but language deficits have been found more in the delinquent group than the non-delinquent group. It conveys that the learning disabled non- delinquents develop lingual skills through their school education and supportive family environment.

Moreover the delinquents with language deficits have greater chances of being detected because their poor lingual skills might hinder their expressive and comprehension capabilities owing to which they can't deal cleverly with the judicials. Supporting it, Munoz et al. (2008) also found that the low verbal ability is the most common in the adjudicated delinquents.

The table 1.1 further indicates that 29 (31.2%) delinquents have intact family structure while 64 (68.8%) delinquents have disrupted families. On the contrary 100 (93.5%) non-delinquents report their families to be intact and only 7 (6.5%) of them describe their families to be disrupted. The chi-square value (χ^2 = 84.27; p<.01) as shown by the table 1.3 depicts an important link between family structure and delinquency. It suggests that a healthy and cordial relation between both the parents have a positive impact on the development of child. The parental monitoring, supportiveness and warmth provided by both the parents is related to the well being of adolescents. On the contrary, in disrupted family structure where both the parents are not living together due to death, divorce, remarriage or some other conflict, the children are more vulnerable to behaviour problems and delinquent acts due to lack of proper guidance and adequate support to be provided by both the parents. Studies have also demonstrated that children from single parent and reconsisted families may be more susceptible to problems than are children from intact families. Demuth and Susan (2004) also studied that adolescents in single parent families are significantly more delinquent than their counterparts residing with two biological, married parents.

Table 1.1

Showing the Number and Percentage of Delinquents and Non- Delinquents on the Indices of Learning Disabilities, Familial, Parental and Personal Information

Indices	Categories	Delinquents	Non-Delinquents
Learning Disabilities (LD)	Learning disabled	83 (89.2%)	23 (21.5%)
	Non-learning disabled	10 (10.8%)	84 (78.5%)
Types of LD	Language deficits	57 (68.7%)	2 (8.7%)
	Visual Perceptual Deficits	81 (97.5%)	23 (100%)
	Both	55 (66.3%)	2 (8.7%)
Birth Order	1st born	30 (32.3%)	42 (39.3%)
	Later born	63 (67.7%)	65 (60.7%)
Family Structure	Intact	29 (31.2%)	100 (93.5%)
	Disrupted	64 (68.8%)	7 (6.5%)
Education Level of fathers	Illiterate	21 (22.6%)	-
	School Education	56 (60.2%)	54 (50.4%)
	Beyond School Education	16 (17.2%)	53 (49.6%)
Education Level of Mothers	Illiterate	28 (30.1%)	-
	School Education	57 (61.2%)	55 (51.4%)
	Beyond School Education	8 (8.7%)	52 (48.6%)
Parental & Personal Information	Criminality in parent	36 (38%)	-
	Alcoholic parent	69 (74.19%)	-
	Drug abuse	63 (67.7%)	-
	Previous arrests	59 (63.4%)	-
Nature of Crime	Theft	51 (54.84%)	-
	Murder	4 (4.3%)	-
	Sexual Assault	9 (9.68%)	-
	Assault/ vandalism	29 (31.18%)	-

Table 1.2 Showing Results of Chi-Square Analysis Applied on Learning Disabilities and Delinquency

Learning disabilities	Delinquents	Non-delinquents
Learning disabled	83	23
Non-learning disabled	10	84

χ^2= 91.65 (P < .01)

Table 1.3

Showing Results of Chi-Square Analysis Applied on Family Structure and Delinquency

Family Structure	Delinquents	Non-delinquents
Intact	29	100
Disrupted	64	7

χ^2= 84.27 (P < .01)

Table 1.4

Showing Results of Chi-Square Analysis Applied on Education Level of Fathers and Delinquency

Education level of Fathers	Delinquents	Non-delinquents
Illiterate	21	-
School Education	56	54
Beyond School Education	16	53

χ^2= 40.08 (P < .01)

Table 1.5

Showing Results of Chi-Square Analysis Applied on Education Level of Mothers and Delinquency

Education level of Fathers	Delinquents	Non-delinquents
Illiterate	28	-
School Education	57	55
Beyond School Education	8	52

χ^2= 59.59 (P < .01)

Table 1.6

Showing Results of Chi-Square Analysis Applied on Birth Order and Delinquency

Birth Order	Delinquents	Non-delinquents
Ist Born	30	42
Later Born	63	65

χ^2= 1.05 (P > .05)

Similarly the education of the parents can be a significant contributor of children's well being. Table 1.1 depicts that the education level of the parents' of delinquents is lower than the education level of the non-delinquents' parents. The chi- square values shown by table 1.4 (χ^2 = 40.08; p < .01) and table 1.5 (χ^2 = 59.59; p< .01) also show the significance of education of the parents.

The education of parents has a positive impact on the development of child. Educated parents can plan the appropriate upbringing strategies which are congruent to the needs of the children. Such parents, being familiar with the critical stage of adolescence, can teach the adolescent to cope effectively with various physiological, mental and emotional changes accompanied by this stage. Moreover the educated parents can inculcate better moral standards and values in the child which can stop him from indulging in unlawful behaviour. The educated parents also promote the child's overall development by making him participate in growth-oriented intellectual, achievement and recreational activities. Similar results have been reported by Nourollah, Fatemeh & Farhad (2015).

A further perusal of table 1.1 reveals that 30 (32.3%) delinquents are first born while 63 (67.7%) are later born. Whereas 42 (39.3%) adolescents in non-delinquent group are first born and 65 (60.7%) are later born. The chi-square value (χ^2 = 1.05; p > .05) as indicated by table 1.6, is coming out to be insignificant which suggests that birth order does not account for delinquency significantly.

The effects of birth order do not stem merely from biology. Rather they depend on the part of the parents. Many of the characteristics resulting from child's birth order and family position actually stem from their early relation with their parents.

Since siblings must compete for their parents' attentions, they carve out their own family niches relative to their brothers and sisters, a niche that is often defined by birth order. So birth order does not influence the behaviours of the children directly. Rather the relation between birth order and behavioural problems is moderated by the role of parents. Research on birth order and delinquency has generated mixed results Breining, et al. (2020).

Besides, the information pertaining to criminality and alcoholism in parents, history of drug abuse in subjects, their history of previous arrests and the nature of crime committed by them was also collected from the delinquent sample. This information could not be obtained from the control group i.e. the non-delinquents due to denial of permission by the school authorities to ask such sensitive questions and due to non applicability (nature of crime, history of previous arrests) of some of these aspects in this sample.

Further looking at other familial aspects, the table 1.1 suggests that 36 (38.7%) delinquents have been found to have a criminal parent. The parents are the main socializing agents for the child. A male child learns the roles and values of life by identifying himself with his father and internalizing his codes of conduct. So identification with a criminal parent might easily raise the possibility of criminality in children too.

A glance at the table 1.1 suggests that 69 (74.19%) delinquents have been found to have an alcoholic parent. An alcoholic parent may not contribute to his child's well being and development in a way, a normal parent can. The children in such families do not get the required care, affection and support which makes them more vulnerable to illegal behaviours.

Table 1.1 also shows that 63 (67.7%) delinquents reported of taking drugs. Drug addiction is itself a delinquent act in which harm is inflicted on self and it can be one of the significant factors leading to other criminal activities. A juvenile, to fulfill his dependence on drugs, might indulge in decoity and burglary. Similarly, Wojtowicz et al. (2007) studied that most incarcerated juveniles are driven to crimes by drug abuse.

Regarding the nature of crime, table 1.1 indicates that 51 (54.8%) delinquents were involved in theft cases, 29 (31.1%) were involved in vandalism, 9 (9.6%) delinquents were arrested due to sexual assaults and only 4 (4.3%) had indulged in fatal assaults. The child delinquency usually begins with stealing habits, fights with peers, running from school and home, violence at home or school etc. These delinquents acts are continued in their adolescence years and assume a grave proportion. The results also show that majority of delinquents were involved in theft and destruction. While a very few delinquents were adjudicated due to sexual and fatal assaults which are considered to be the serious offenses but such delinquents with serious offenses stand at greater chances of becoming life-course persistent offenders.

A look at the table 1.1 further reveals that 59 (63.4%) delinquents had the history of previous arrests. The frequency of arrests also suggests that the young offender has an increased probability of becoming an adult criminal. The juvenile offenders are sent to the reformatories and observation homes for their crimes where efforts are made to reform them so that they can be prevented from becoming criminals. If the juvenile gets arrested time and again, it indicates that he might have become an incorrigible and hardcore offender who doesn't want to improve his acting out behaviours. Iratzoqui (2018) also found that repeat victimization was significantly associated with delinquency recidivism.

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