JUVENILE DELINQUENTS: PERCEPTIONS AND ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

The present research attempts to study the perception of juvenile delinquents about themselves and the society which they consider as their peers, family. The study further highlighted the intellectual capacity, personality of juvenile delinquents and their preferences towards job related factors. A sample of 67-72 juvenile delinquents were selected through purposive convenient sampling technique from the Observation Home located in the region of North India. The findings reveal that majority of the juvenile delinquents have average intellectual capacity and were slightly introvert. Among the eleven job related factors, co-workers and sub-ordinates were given maximum ratings by the juvenile delinquents. The results also threw open perception of juvenile delinquents about themselves and various issues concerning their families, peer group.

Keywords: Juvenile, delinquent behaviour, perceptions, adolescent, aggression.

INTRODUCTION

Delinquency is a global problem. It is not confined to a particular region of the world, country, race, religion, caste, creed, gender etc. In the world of materialism, the time tested social relations and dynamics that ensured smooth process of socialization are degrading. Globalisation, industrialisation, individualism, materialism, commercialisation, extensive exposure through the multimedia and so on is influencing the lifestyle which is becoming varied and less predictable. The privatisation, insecurity of the job market, highly competitive job market, is often the cause of high stress level and aggressive behaviour in the youth of today. The above said factors are not only influencing the youth individually but also have a strong impact on the relationship of youth with one's family in particular and immediate and larger society in general. Arguably limited opportunities to become self dependent, educational opportunities and choices, leisure activities, lifestyle, to a great extent, are influencing the behaviour of a child. In developing countries, there are new pressures on young people who are undergoing transition from childhood to adult. According to World Youth Report, 2003 there are many pressures on today's youth, which are caused due to, rapid population growth, poverty, unemployment and underemployment, migration from under-developed areas, overcrowding in poor urban areas, ineffective educational system, and disintegration of the family, the authority of local communities.

As stated by many researchers , the above said factors often cause the youth of today towards fast money and/or to gain individual opportunities, some are beneficial and some potentially harmful. Quite often, they, indulge into illegal activities like robbery, dacoity, theft, murder, chain-snatching, rape, sexual abuse, substance abuse , violence and assault, and so on.

Juvenile delinquency, in this way, needs to be taken as serious challenge to the well-being of the society. The juvenile delinquents, if not handled at the right time in the proper way, may grow into the hardened criminals causing major problems to their society and humanity at all.

Therefore, efforts are needed to be taken at the earliest possible to root out the disease and at most channelize it before getting it out of hand.

For this purpose, one must have clear understanding and genuine insight into the nature of juvenile delinquency. The term delinquency has different meanings in different realm of knowledge. It is named as anti-social

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behaviour in sociology, disruptive, oppositional and problem behaviour in psychology and delinquent or criminal behaviour in legal world. Norval Morris and Gordon Hawkins (1960) submitted in their report to US Congress on Juvenile delinquency.

Juvenile delinquency is not a simple term. It means different things to different individuals, and it means different things to different groups. It has meant different things in the same group at different times. In popular usage, the term Juvenile delinquency is used to describe a large number of disapproved behaviours of children and youths.

In India before the commencement of Juvenile Justice Act 2000, there were sex differences in respect of fixation the upper age which would determine the disruptive behaviours considered to be covered in the juvenile offences or not. For example, as per Juvenile Justice Act 1986, "Juvenile meant a boy who has not attained the age of sixteen years or a girl who has not attained the age of eighteen years". The Juvenile Justice Act, 1986 was amended in the year 2000 mainly to incorporate the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC).

According to this Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 "A Juvenile is the person who has not completed 18 years of age. In this way, India now have no anomalies with regard to the prescription of the age limits to the children and adolescents referred to as delinquents without any gender discrimination. Hence in the context of our country, Juvenile Delinquency refers to all those undesirable and unsocial behaviour of a child or youth, minor in age (below eighteen years) capable of being adjudged as a punishable offense or crime as per provisions of the Indian penal code (IPC).

The problem of juvenile delinquency is becoming more complicated and universal. This may be due to varied factors which are influencing the juvenile's behaviour either solely or in the integration with other factors. From time to time, psychologist and social scientists have been engaged themselves in discovering the possible explanations or causes for delinquency. As a result of which various theories of delinquency propagated to conclude the explanation for delinquent behaviour.

There are many theories which discussed the reasons and other issues related to juvenile delinquency. These theories may be broadly classified as individual theories and sociological/environmental theories (Regoli and Hewitt,2006).

The possible causes/explanations for delinquent behaviour that comes under individual theories and sociological/ environmental theories can be summarized through a table as given below.

Individual theories	Sociological/Environmental theories
• By own choice • Heredity trnasmission • Constitutional/physiological factors • Intellectual deficiency • Learnt behaviour • Problem with super ego	• Stress/Strain • Inequality/disparity in the society • Unhealthy relationship within family, school, neighbourhood and community • Labelling • Conflicts within various groups of society • Poverty • Uncongenial family environment

Individual theories include all those theories of delinquency that hold an individual and the factors lying within the individual responsible for his/her delinquent behaviour.

Sociological theories include all those theories of delinquency that hold the environment responsible for the delinquent character formation.

Studies done on the primary causes of delinquency have highlighted that the juvenile homes or neighbourhood environment, inadequate social experience, lack of job opportunities as well as the effect of labeling.

The review of literature related to delinquency have focussed on some of the issues as highlighted below include low literacy rates, family dynamics, peer and adult criminal

influence, rapid social change, employment as deterrent, social criminal networks, rehabilitation, love-sex related crimes.

Mindee O'Cummings Sarah Bardack Simon Gonsoulin (2010) highlight in their research work that literacy skills positively influence social, academic, and postsecondary outcomes. Their study further emphasizes that those children who do not feel attached to their school and the school programme are more likely to join gangs which indulge in delinquents activities.

A longitudinal study by Joan McCord (1991) over a span of thirty years has given interesting insights. The study indicates that maternal behaviour has more influence on juvenile delinquency whereas paternal behaviour has a greater influence on adult criminal behaviour. According to the study the mothers competence and expectations influence the juvenile delinquents behaviour far more than the fathers competence and expectations. Yet as the juvenile grows older, the father's influence and the interactions gain importance towards delinquent behaviour of the youth.

In one of the study by Gonzales, Schofield and Schmitt sponsored by National institute of justice (2005), it has been brought into notice that co-offending may increase the likelihood that offenders will commit violent crimes. It further highlighted that youthful offenders are most at risk for subsequent crimes if they commit their crimes with accomplices which suggests that young offenders pick up attitudes and values from their companions. It seems that peer delinquency is more than a training process for learning how to be delinquent. Co-offenders may learn through the influence of violent accomplices that violence can be an effective means for getting money or satisfying other desires.

In another study by Armengol and Zenou (2004), the role of social networks and social structure have been emphasized in facilitating criminal behaviour. It was highlighted that delinquents compete with each other in criminal activities but benefit from being friends with other criminals by learning and acquiring 'proper know-how' on the crime business.

Social change have a great impact on the lifestyle and perception of the person especially among adolescents. The rapid market and social changes provide an opportunity to adolescents to experience wide range of exposures including to materialistic products, changes in human relationships, wide range of commodities for leisure and this results in transformation in the thought processes. This ultimately leads to conflict in the mindset of the adolescents as well as the social structure of which the adolescent is a part. These conflicts sometimes move towards a positive, constructive direction leading to better adjustment with self, peer group , family and the larger society. However, sometimes these conflicts lead towards the negative direction leading to deviant behaviour. This is supported with the study by Boehnke and Winkels (2002) which focused upon the juvenile delinquency under conditions of rapid social change. The study assumed that youth living under changing conditions will experience more acute feelings of public injustice and a substantial reduction in parental control and nurturance. However, the results of the study, as contrary to the assumption bring to light that social change did not always function in the way of a stressor. The study stated that "more" or "more negative" change condition sometimes co varied with more justice, more parental caring, and/or less delinquent drift. Therefore, rapid social change is not per se a risk factor, but can also offer chances for improved adolescent adjustment.

Imai and Krishna (2004) in their research emphasized the role of future unemployment as an important factor holding people back from committing crimes. The results of the study agree with many past results insofar as unemployment and wages have small direct effects on crime. However, the study does reveal that early

intervention through individual and family related programmes act as deterrent to further crime as compared to redemption after the arrest of the criminal. The government employment and wage policies could change criminal behavior, mainly through changing peoples' anticipations about their future.

According to Greenwood (2008), it is very necessary to prevent delinquent behaviour among adolescents at early stages, otherwise, it may lead to beginning of adult careers. It helps the youth to make their lives more meaningful. The research work highlighted that the accomplishment of the prevention and invention programmes lie on the period of its implementations. Those programmes that prevent the juvenile from engaging in delinquent behaviours in the first place proved to be more successful. He focused upon home visits programs and community-based programs in his study.

McCarthy and Casey (2008) have highlighted that adolescence romantic love offers a closeness that often felts the void which begins to emerge in the adolescents with reference to weakening of the bonds with the parents. This according to the authors is the onset of the adult's attachment and it may discourage a number of negative outcomes including the adolescents involvement in crime. However Meier (2007) has highlighted the correlation between loving versus loveless context in which sex occurs and its relation to delinquency. Thus the studies stated above highlight that in the case of romantic relationship which involve loves has a negative correlation with crime whereas a sexual relationship without love may have a positive correlation with crime.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study tends to know the perceptions of juvenile delinquents about themselves and the society, of which they are a part. The study also highlights the variables such as personality, intellectual capacity, the preferences towards job related factors of the juvenile delinquents. It is expected that the findings of this study would feed into the suggestions for rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents in the Indian context.

METHODOLOGY

The participants under study were 67-72 juvenile delinquents who were found guilty and acquainted in different types of crimes. The crimes included murder, steeling, rape, family disputes, robbery and dacoity. The participants were male from age group 11 to 18.the number of juvenile delinquents at any point of time in the observation home keeps fluctuating as some may get bailed while others might be released and still others may be admitted on that particular date. The participants were taken from Observation Home located in the region of North India.

The sampling technique used was Purposive Convenient Sampling. Projective activities were conducted to study the perception of juvenile delinquents about themselves and the society in which they live. Data on personality, preference to job related factors, intellectual capacity was collected through standardized tests namely Kundu's Introversion Extraversion Inventory, Job Value Questionnaire and Raven's Progressive Matrices respectively.

The tests were administered individually on the sample. After the completion of data collection, analyses were conducted using statistical techniques and content analysis.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study have been categorised into perception of Juvenile delinquents about themselves and the society, as well as the intellectual capacity, personality type of Juvenile delinquents and their preferences to job related factors.

PERCEPTION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENTS ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THE SOCIETY

The participant were given different pictures from the Thematic Apperception test (TAT) modified by Uma Choudhary for Indian settings and asked to develop their own story. They were to discuss what they thought had happened before the picture was taken, what was happening in the picture, what they thought would happen afterwards and finally they were also asked to comment upon the relationships in the picture.

The major findings that emerged were that according to juvenile delinquents taken for the study, it is very important to be able to control ones anger and that anger was the major cause of all aggression.

As this was an adolescent group, it is but obvious that the issues of 'girl-boy' relationships emerged. What needs to be given attention is that rejection by a girl often lead to extremes of anger. This was obvious in the analysis of the stories wherein rejection mostly cumulated into revenge and violence against the girl or her family. It may be noted that all the Juvenile delinquents of this group were boys.

Another important finding that emerged across different pictures and which has a direct link to gender issues was the perception of violence towards women (sisters, mothers, wives). According the juvenile delinquent's stories and reflections, that whatever the situation, it was ultimately the women who was considered in the wrong and eventually it is the women who apologise to their fathers, husbands or even sons.

They all agreed that violence should not be done on girls/women. The reasons given as to why it should not be done needs to be highlighted. All answers indicated that violence should not be done on women because if the woman dies due to the violence, the boy or the man would be punished by the law and that would spoil the life of the boy/man. Hence the focus is upon what would happen to the boy/man and not so much on what would it cause to the life of the women.

The content analysis also highlighted that the subjects realised importance of hard work and that it leads to progress. Other things that were highlighted were that it is important to focus ones thinking and gain knowledge and have prior and detail planning in order to be able to do something. They understood the need that in order to do a job first one must be determined to do it and then through repetition and hard work one will be able to reach success. Also that learning from others is possible. Another interesting point that emerged from content analysis was that the subject realized and they were quite articulate about the fact that from a distance all skills appear to be simple but on close observation and when one attempts to do it one realises that it requires lot of practice and hard work.

When the study looked at the perception of the relationship of the mother and child, all the boys in different ways indicated in their stories about the all empowering and all giving mother's love and how their mother loved them so much. They also said that they wanted to complete their mother's dreams for them. It was interesting to note that all of them spoke about not their mother's dream for herself but rather the mother's dream for them. Nearly all of the boys stated that they wanted to keep their mother happy. Most of them have realisation that they have committed something wrong which had hurt their mother's sentiments. Now they want to become a good boy.

In most relations ships the hierarchical order between the elder man and the younger man/boy was obvious. What was also obvious was the superiority of the man/boy over the women, be it the sister, the mother, the wife, the girlfriend.

Yet when the mother was not in the household because she had died, the house according to them no longer remained a home and the sons said that life just went on but the vacancy caused by the mother's death could not be completed. To the extent that two of the boy's

whose mother had died stated that now they both, the father and the son were unable to see a future for themselves. Hence there was a dichotomy in the perception of the women. As a women she was perceived as much lower in the hierarchy but as a mother she was indispensable.

The helplessness of women at large and hence the need of a man/boy in a women's life emerged again and again in their stories. The helplessness of the mother and the mother's incompleteness without the son was again and again highlighted by the participants. Here gets reflected the dependence on the mother and yet the women in the mother being at an inferior position to the male member of the family. What also emerged was the thought process of most of the boys that it is the man on whose shoulder the financial functioning of the home rests. And if the woman takes to contribute towards the financial responsibility of running the home it is beyond her call of duty. A woman is helpless without a family and that in that case the only resemblance of some respite is at the doorstep of God.

Another cause of not being able to see a future was the poverty of their family. An important issue that emerged was that even when the family in their stories managed to get adequate resources and where now living adequately well they continue to work but now they worked happily. The general thinking often goes that when one is rich and has resources, one does not need to work but enjoys life. Here however the adolescents have said something different i.e. that even when one gains the resources and has elevated about the poverty the process of work continues but now one works with happiness. Lastly as one child stated 'everyday is not the same, sometime there is happiness and sometime there is sadness.'

General observations by the researchers indicate that the families that came to visit their children were definitely affectionate towards their child. While interacting with the staff of the observation home, "those children whose parents are giving importance to education anyway come and try hard to get bail for their children". It is those children who are not studying and their parents also have not given importance to education are the one's who do not seem to get bail."

On further probing by the researchers, the staff members of juvenile home as to why they do not get bail replied, "these parents themselves are uneducated and do not attempt hard enough to get them bail."

Hence while interacting with the juvenile delinquent it comes with no surprise that nearly all of them realizes the importance of education for a brighter future

Although all the children in the Observation home were convicted and for such serious crimes like dacoity, murder, rape etc yet nearly all of them said that their family loves them especially they were completely convinced of their mother's love towards them. Through another assessment tool it was found that nearly 80% of juvenile delinquent felt that they are lovable although clumsy. This validates and is in continuation with the above statement that their family loves them.
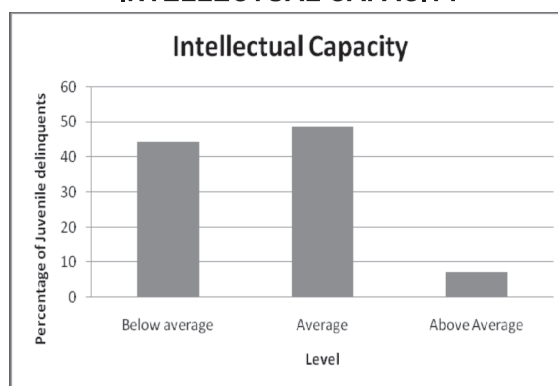
Another projection that emerged is that at times because of one's difficult circumstances one has to do things which are not legitimated by the law, as according to the juvenile delinquent in certain cases there are no alternatives. For example having to kill a drunken and violent husband and being forced to move to another city or coming to the observation home after committing murder. There were some adolescents who stated that there were no way out when one leaves the observation home, for when they go out again, either they would be killed or they would have to killed for their own survival. One is left wondering what should be the society's role in preventing/breaking the cycle of violence or how can one empower this child who is a juvenile delinquent to get out of this cycle of violence even if society is as yet not ready to change.

It is interesting to know that 70 % of the juvenile delinquents agreed that they are a bully which shows the acceptance of negative behaviour in themselves, which may be one of the reason that encouraged them to involve in illegitimate activities.

Nearly 47 % of the students consider themselves as 'slow learners'. If we look at the analysis of the data collected by Raven's Progressive Matrices, the intellectual capacity of nearly 44% of the juvenile delinquents was below average. Even if we consider limitations in administration of the test and other factors, still the correlation between the juvenile delinquent's perception about themselves and assessed intellectual capacity seems to have high level of correlation. Another finding that seems to have meaning in addition to the above statements is that nearly 40% of the juvenile delinquents consider themselves as innocent in the ways of the world. Further individual and group interactions highlighted that the juvenile delinquents have been influenced by their peer groups and friends and that was the major reason for them committing the crime. During these interactions they repeatedly stated that next time they will not let their friends who are in bad company influence them. Yet some of them also have apprehensions as to whether they will be able to ward off those, not so good friends. The researchers are left with the question as to the innocence and inability to keep away from the influence of the wrong company can be related to normal adolescent characteristics or is it predominantly related to certain other situational attributes of these delinquents adolescents or would this be a combination of both?

The limited educational qualifications of the juvenile delinquents may be one of the reasons why they considered themselves as a slow learner. It was worthy to note that nearly 60% of the juvenile delinquents stated that they were generally happy. Very few of the juvenile delinquents felt that they are clever or they are boring, loser, gossip or successful. More than 60% find themselves attractive and handsome.
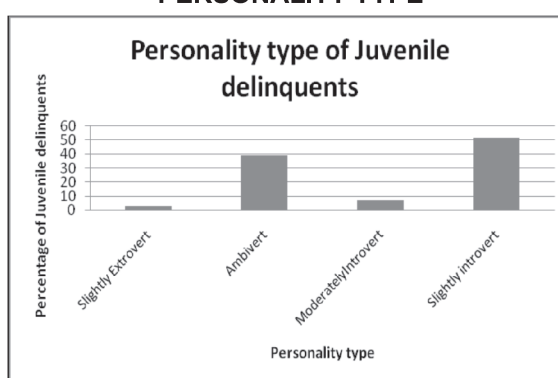
INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY

Graph 1: Level of intellectual capacity of Juvenile delinquents

Earlier studies on juvenile delinquency have linked it to low intellectual capacities. However the contemporary studies do not state a strong co-relation between the juvenile delinquency and low intellectual capacity. In this study, when intellectual capacity of juvenile delinquents were assessed through Raven's Progressive Matrices, nearly 44% of the juvenile delinquents were below average while majority of them i.e 49% have average intellectual capacity. Only 7 % of the juvenile delinquents were above average.
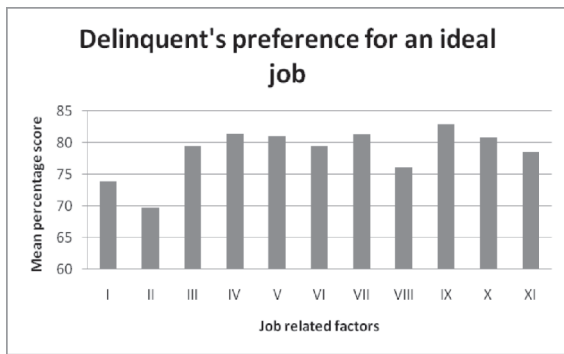
PERSONALITY TYPE

Graph 2: Personality type of the Juvenile delinquents

The Kundu's Introversion Extraversion Inventory on personality was administered to the juvenile

(114)

delinquents of this study. It was interesting to know that only 3 % juvenile delinquents were slightly extrovert. A general conception that one would expect from delinquents is that they would have extrovert kind of personality but the results indicated a completely reverse finding. The majority of them i.e 51 % were slightly introvert while 39% of them were ambivert and only 7% were moderately introvert.

Juvenile delinquent's preference for Job related factors

Delinquent's preference for an ideal job

Graph 3: Juvenile delinquent's preference for different job related factors

The job related factors which were assessed by this test (Job value questionnaire by Seema Sanghi) are as follows:

I   Financial Benefits
II   Non-Financial Benefits
III   Opportunities for development and promotion
IV   Opportunities for Responsible and Independent Action
V   Job and Personal Security
VI   Type or kind of work
VII   Job according to interest and abilities
VIII Supervisor- Supervision and Management
IX   Co-workers and Sub-ordinates
X   Recognition and Appreciation for accomplishment of job
XI   Working Conditions

When the Job value questionnaire was administered on the juvenile delinquents in the Observation home, it was found that the maximum percentage (83%) of the subjects stated that in their job they would give most importance to relationships with their co-workers and sub-ordinates. The next importance (81%) was given equally to opportunities for responsible and independent action, job and personal security, recognition and appreciation for accomplishment of job and job according to interest and abilities. What is most interesting that non-financial benefits (70 %) and also the financial benefits (74 %) received the lowest rating. This seems to contradict the general perception that anyone who is a delinquent would give a high preference to material benefits, financial or non-financial. A larger look at the graph, however shows that the adolescents does expects a lot from one's job. All the rating were the range of 70 % to 83 %.

CONCLUSION

Delinquent behaviour among adolescents is a big problem, not only for the family they belong to but for the whole society in which they live. Hence it becomes imperative to take appropriate initiatives at not only the parental and family level, but also at the teachers, school and community level. This would lead to holistic develop of the adolescent and evolve them into well-adjusted human beings.

The conclusions from this study emphasis, that the perception of self in the juvenile delinquent seems to border around one's self, one's peer group and the family. The neighbourhood and the larger society do not seem to figure in the world view of the perception of self in this adolescent visibly. The peer group which for any adolescent is an important group has tended to take up an even larger importance with the juvenile delinquents as seen in the study. Within the family the mother seems to be the centre of adolescent's world. However the

perception of Juvenile delinquents reveals that girl/women have lower status in the hierarchy of a family.

The majority of the juvenile delinquents were slightly introvert and have average intellectual capacity. The results also indicated that co-workers and sub-ordinates is an important factor for an ideal job.

The Juvenile delinquents perceives aggression, poverty, influence of bad company, difficult circumstances as the main reason for one to involve in criminal activities. However, they realises the importance of education and hard work to achieve success in life. Thus, as an implication delinquents should be given opportunity to continue their study within the observation home through open schools. The vocational trainings should be imparted to juvenile delinquents to realise the importance of manual work. This will help to utilise their energy in positive direction.

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