



Educere
BCM Journal of Social Work

ISSN 2249-1090

Vol. 19, Issue 1

June 2023

<https://bcmcollege.ac.in/publications/educere>

Role of forensic Social Workers in behaviour shaping of early adolescents delinquency prevention: A case study

Edness Rutta¹ and Chittaranjan Subudhi²

Abstract

The study intended to assess the role of forensic social workers in behaviour shaping of children in delinquency prevention. The study employed a descriptive case study design where by 25 students and 2 staff purposively chosen participated in the study. The information was gathered by using the likert scale questionnaire and the same measure was used for interview to complement the data and observation. The study found out that behaviour change at young age is possible. Behaviour being a replication of individual feelings, thinking and emotions at young age it is easy to change a person's ideas, perceptions and opinions. Collected data and living experiences of teachers who admitted children with deviant behaviour that with proper help and guidance children implicated positive changes of behaviour. The study also found out that school environment can be a place to build or break the child. If the school environment is warm where children can feel safe, loved and accepted as unique individuals they are it can bring out good unique individualities of a child. And the vice versa is true if a school becomes a daunting place it brings

1 (Corresponding Author) Research Scholar Central University of Tamil Nadu, India. Email: ednesrutta@gmail.com ; Contact: +91 9995594384

2 Assistant Professor, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, Tamil Nadu, India. Email: chittaranjan.subudhi@gmail.com ; Contact: +91 9658639979

out wickedness out of children hence hardened criminals. Schools need be places of leisure for young children. Children are natural learners, very eager to explore new experiences and in the process of exploring they can find themselves in conflict with the law. This explains the need for proper guidance during early adolescence. Children at the age of five years to 18 are mostly in school so if schools can be made secure, and offer required assistance the problem of juvenile delinquency can be reduced to high extent.

Key Words: *early adolescence delinquency; self-esteem; juvenile delinquency*

Introduction

Future of any nation lies in the hands of its young generation (Susan et al., 2017). Protecting children means protecting national heritage. Children like normal human beings experience challenges and circumstances and because of their immaturity end up in conflict with the law. Juvenile delinquency has become an issue of concern to various practitioners due to its rate of increase (Susan et al., 2017). The increase in juvenile delinquency is a phenomenon experienced in different developed and developing countries. Juvenile delinquency escalates due to different reasons (Susan et al., 2017) and attempts are made to assist the children through legislation but without proper plans to curb social, political, economic, cultural, moral, and other developmental challenges, it becomes difficult to deal with the issue of juvenile delinquency (Susan et al., 2017).

Causes of juvenile delinquency

According to Ryan et.al (2013) juvenile delinquency results from family, mental issues, welfare and school-related issues. Studies show that 20% of adolescents face mental issue challenges, and 16.5% to 40.8% face emotional and behavioural challenges. In India, the rate of problems ranges from 13.7% to 50%.

Furthermore, studies indicate that low self-esteem, poor performance, impulsiveness, failure to delay gratification, aggression, lack of empathy and restlessness have a high chance of juvenile delinquency (Daigle et al.,2007).

A conduct disorder can develop during childhood and manifest itself during adolescence (Moffitt, 2006). Furthermore, studies show during adolescence some children develop deviance due to age. Age-specific offender normally stops after maturity but some adolescents started early but manifest to a higher level as they grow (Moffitt, 2006).

Concept of social work and the role of forensic social workers in schools

Social work is a helping profession where by individuals, families and communities are helped to improve their well-being. Social workers understand and observe individual uniqueness, cultural and ethnic diversity of their clients in the helping process (National Association of Social Workers, 2018).

Forensic social work is a very broad and diverse field of practice that include micro, mezzo and macro level social work to assist individuals involved in the criminal justice or legal systems, explains the national organization of forensic social work (NOSFW). Social work is a very much diversified field, and in different areas of practice, they perform different duties. Social workers can be found in hospitals, schools, juvenile justice, industries and other fields (McCulloch, 2005). Juvenile justice social workers have multiple roles which are normally outlined by legal frameworks. For example in Scotland, a social worker was authorised as a probation officer and was appointed to investigate the increase of juvenile offending (Kilbrandon, 1964).

The nature of work and level of practice determine the duties of a social worker. The role at a domestic violence crisis centre will differ from the roles of another social worker in correctional facility. The populations served by forensic social workers include incarcerated youth and adults, recently released inmates, and children who are victims of neglect, and domestic and sexual abuse (McCulloch, 2005). Forensic social workers help their clients with emotional, advocacy, connect with referral services where necessary for mental issues, guidance and counselling for individual level and policy advocacy at macro levels (McCulloch, 2005). Clients are helped and guided in making informed decisions, guide them to understand their strength and

how to use them on their best interest and improve their life and that of others around them (McCulloch, 2005).

Forensic social workers in schools are involved in identifying behaviour signs of delinquency to children, proposal to terminate parental rights, corrections, referral and recommendations for further assistance, advocate for the oppressed, marginalised and criminalization of children in schools (McCulloch, 2005).

Role of school in behaviour shaping

School being among the major socialization agents for children has an important role in building and shaping the behaviour of children. Most children enrolled in school at the age of five which is a very young age. During this age molding of a child is very high as research proves that the immediate environment of a child has so much impact on the behaviour and personality of an individual (Siegel et al., 1997). School settings can have so much influence on individual behaviour some of the challenges which are highlighted that can contribute to delinquency behaviour among children is punishments. The study conducted by Vera Institute of Justice showed children with suspension history were 68% likely to drop out of school (Raine, 1993). Measuring intelligence based on class performance tend to demoralise those who perform poorly hence lowers their educational aspiration and attachment (Brown, 1998). Students feeling of belongingness and acceptance is weakened hence some start to develop truancy and participation in status offences (Brown, 1998). If school are well equipped with forensic social workers who can assist behaviour shaping of children the issue of delinquency can be reduced.

Early Adolescence Delinquency justice overview

Early adolescence delinquency is not a new phenomenon it has been in existence ever since. In past years juvenile delinquents were treated as normal lawbreakers until in 1760s. Blackstone British lawyer identified people who are incapable of committing crime where children were also included. In his view children under seven years were excluded, children of seven to four-

teen years before judged as criminals their mental abilities was to be assessed (Blackstone, 1760). Ever since there have been several movements to protect the rights of children. In 1800s Thomas and Griscon started to organise societies to oppose juvenile offenders being treated as adult offenders (Murray, 2011). Their work brought changes in the legal justice of juveniles. In 1825 the first refuge house was established and in 1899 juvenile courts started (Murray, 2011).

Juvenile delinquency in Indian context

India like any other country, juvenile delinquency is a living reality (Kunjana & Rajni, 2015). Juvenile cases range from minor to heinous crimes. In dealing with the problem, the reformatory school Act was established in 1897 to oversee issue pertaining children in conflict with the law. Since then several amendments has been made in the law as a way of addressing the problem.

Due to the increase in cases of juvenile crimes especially the gang rape in Delhi which involved a minor, it called for law review. And the Juvenile Justice (care and protection) Act 2015 was enacted. Act apart from other amendments it made clear regarding the facets of offences, meaning there by that categories were made terming the offences as heinous, serious and petty. Specifications regarding juveniles aged 16-18 if any crime is committed by them after thorough analysis of their mental capacity, they can be tried as adults.

According to the (NCRB Report, 2021) Most of the juvenile came from homes headed by both parents which indicate presence of problem in proper upbringing of children. Research has proved the effect of environment on behaviour shaping (Shanmugam, 1980). In dealing with the problem the government of India has done so much by imposing harsh laws aiming to be a lesson for youth. But still juvenile delinquency marks an increase where by in 2021 according to NCRB India marked an increase of 4.7 which calls for intervention to reduce problem growth (NCRB Report, 2021). Therefore the study aims to assess the role of forensic social workers in schools in behaviour shaping of early adolescents in juvenile delinquency prevention.

Methodology

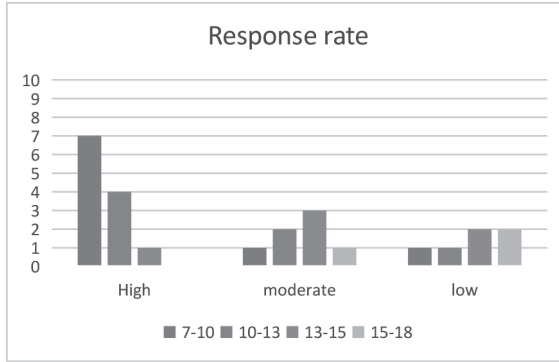
The study employed a qualitative approach and a case study design was employed. As explained by Yin (2003) that a case study serve best an enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within real life context. The study aimed to measure ability of children to change and accept new teachings, belief, opinions, perception and thinking of the children, where a qualitative approach fits most. The study was conducted in Thiruvavarur district, where 25 children and 2 staff who were chosen purposively participated in the study.

In this study both primary and secondary data were gathered. Secondary data was taken from school records on student's behaviour and primary data was collected by using a likert scale questionnaire with three levels and the same tool was used to measure attitude change of children of different ages. The triangulation of methods was used to increase credibility of collected information and validity. The collected information was thematically analysed.

Demographic Information of the respondents

Table indicating Distribution of Students according to their Age and level of attitude change

age	No of students	Response rate		
		High	moderate	low
7-10	9	7	1	1
11-13	7	4	2	1
14-15	6	1	3	2
15-18	3	0	1	2



The table above indicate the relationship between age and attitude change.

Children in the age group of 7 to 13 (early adolescence) years marked high attitude change after receiving new teachings and the children between 14 to 18 (late adolescence) years implicated difficult in accepting new ideas. Children aged 14 to 18 tend to have so much doubts on issues which they already have knowledge about. Changing of the existing knowledge is not easily welcomed until proven wrong. This level of questioning authenticity of new information is less to children of young age they can receive new information but with doubt. This proves that first knowledge acquired has so much power especially when it is daily lived. Once children develop knowledge and put it into practice they believe it to be the right knowledge.

Findings

Study found out that behaviour change at young age is possible. Behaviour being a replication of individual feelings, thinking and emotions at young age it is easy to change a person's ideas, perceptions and opinions. From the collected data and with living experiences of teachers who admitted children with deviant behaviour but through proper help and guidance they implicated positive changes of behaviour. This proves behaviour change at young age can be easily done compared to those in late adolescence.

The study also revealed that school environment can be a place to build or break the child. School environment can be a place to shape a person. If the school environment is warm where children can feel safe, loved and accepted as unique individuals they are it can foster growth of children to their full potentials. And the vice versa is true if a school becomes a daunting place the wickedness will be brought out of children hence hardened criminals

Discussion

Schools need be places of leisure for young children. Children are natural learners, very eager to explore new experiences and in the process of exploring they can find themselves in conflict with the law. This explain the need for proper guidance during early adolescence. Children at the age of five years to 17 are mostly in school so if schools can be made secure and offer required assistance the problem of juvenile delinquency can be reduced to high extent. Due to the nature and setting of the schools, most act as sources of stress, depression and low self-esteem. Most schools does not provide supportive environment to students with multiple needs, the poor performers in intelligence tests are labelled as slow learners, those with behaviour deforms they meet with severe punishments which devastates them more hence some end up as drop outs if not expelled by zero tolerance.

In most of the schools intellectual ability is the only ability insisted and most valued, this in some way affect the self-esteem of children who cannot compete in this ability. Children are born with different abilities but in schools only those with intellectual abilities are appreciated and regarded as intelligent and others can be named as slow learners and such denotations which can hurt a person's ego and lowers self-esteem of a person. The theory of multiple intelligence should be used in schools and children should be accepted and appreciated, and developed in their abilities.

Conclusion

Prevention is better than cure in addressing issues of juvenile delinquency (Kauffman, 2005). As approved by other researchers like Moffit, 2006, Brown,

1998, and Raine, 1993 early interventions during early adolescence can have a very positive impact in curbing the issue of juvenile delinquency. Schools need to employ forensic social workers who can have the duty of studying behaviour of students and offer them with the required assistance.

Adolescence being the period of many children indulgence in deviance it is somehow difficult to predict future offenders. It is hard to know who will desist and who will persist till adulthood. The period of adulthood to adolescence is a dynamic one, as explained by Moffitt (2006) schools need to have effective programs and effective tools for screening of behaviour before intervention. As well explained in the theory of psychosocial development that deviants are sometimes face difficulties in decision making which leads to improper practice this can be used as a measure of identifying students with chronic deviant characteristics. That in the levels of judgement it ends on either first or second level of judgment. Schools being among major places where deviance or delinquency can be prevented, schools need to have proper plans and programs to develop self-esteem of students. The school settings has a high chance of determine the level of self-esteem of students. If the environment is favourable makes it easy for students to cope and develop positive outlook toward schooling.

References

- Blackstone, W. (1960). *A Treatise on the Law of Descents in Fee-simple*. By William Blackstone.. Richard Watts.
- Brown, T. A., Chorpita, B. F., & Barlow, D. H. (1998). Structural relationships among dimensions of the DSM-IV anxiety and mood disorders and dimensions of negative affect, positive affect, and autonomic arousal. *Journal of abnormal psychology, 107*(2), 179.
- Committee on Adolescence, Braverman, P. K., & Murray, P. J. (2011). Health care for youth in the juvenile justice system. *Pediatrics, 128*(6), 1219-1235.
- Daigle, L. E., Cullen, F. T., & Wright, J. P. (2007). Gender differences in the predictors of juvenile delinquency: Assessing the generality-specificity debate. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 5*(3), 254-286.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2013). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. Springer Science & Business Media.

- Kilbrandon, L. C. J. D. S. (1964). *Children and Young Persons, Scotland: Report by the Committee [on Children and Young Persons, Scotland]*. HM Stationery Office.
- McCulloch, T. (2005). Probation, social context and desistance: Retracing the relationship. *Probation Journal*, 52(1), 8-22.
- Moffitt, T. E., Caspi, A., & Rutter, M. (2006). Measured gene-environment interactions in psychopathology: Concepts, research strategies, and implications for research, intervention, and public understanding of genetics. *Perspectives on Psychological science*, 1(1), 5-27.
- Raine, A. (1993). Features of borderline personality and violence. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 49(2), 277-281.
- Raine, A. (1993). Features of borderline personality and violence. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 49(2), 277-281.
- Siegel, R. S., & Brandon, A. R. (2014). Adolescents, pregnancy, and mental health. *Journal of pediatric and adolescent gynecology*, 27(3), 138-150.
- Susan, Y. & Greer, B & Church, R. (2017). Juvenile delinquency, welfare, justice and therapeutic interventions: A global perspective. *BJPsych Bulletin*. 41. 21-29. 10.1192/pb.bp.115.052274.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [22].