

The Relationship of The Type of Alleged Crime with Self-Esteem and Depressive Symptoms in Juvenile Delinquents

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ABSTRACT

The relationship of the type of alleged crime with self-esteem and depressive symptoms in juvenile delinquents

Objective: Stemmed from the idea of "there is no juvenile delinquent, but rather there are juveniles dragged to crime"; the children and adolescents who have been referred to Mus State Hospital Child and Adolescent Psychiatric outpatient clinic with different alleged crime types were examined retrospectively, in terms of depression, self-esteem, and various socio-demographic factors.

Method: The study was conducted retrospectively on children and adolescents who were referred to Mus State Hospital between February 2012 and February 2013 for the purpose of forensic psychiatric examination to assess their criminal responsibility regarding the alleged crimes. The children formed three groups of alleged crime types; theft, malicious wounding and terrorist propaganda. Child Depression Inventory (CDI) and Coopersmith Self-Esteem Scale (CSEI) scores were compared.

Results: There was a difference between the CDI and CSEI scores of the groups. In post hoc comparisons, the CDI score of the alleged malicious wounding group was lower than the other two groups. CSEI score was significantly higher than the alleged theft group, and almost significantly higher than the alleged terrorist propaganda group.

Conclusion: It is observed that there is a difference in terms of CDI and CSEI scores between the groups of alleged crime type. In particular, the CDI scores of the alleged malicious wounding group were lower and their self-esteem was higher than the other two groups. This finding suggests that diverse etiologies may have been effective in directing different crime types in juvenile delinquency.

Keywords: Adolescents, children, depression, forensic psychiatry, juvenile delinquency, self esteem

ÖZET

Çocuk ve ergen adli vakalarda karşıldığı iddia olunan suç tipleri ile benlik saygısı ve depresif belirtiler arasındaki ilişki

Amaç: Bu çalışmada "suçlu çocuk yoktur, suça sürüklenen çocuk vardır" fikrinden yola çıkılarak farklı suçlar ispat edilerek Çocuk Ergen Ruh Sağlığı ve Hastalıkları Polikliniğine getirilen çocuk ve ergenler depresyon, benlik saygısı ve çeşitli sosyodemografik faktörler açısından incelenmiştir.

Yöntem: Şubat 2012-Şubat 2013 tarihleri arasında Muş Devlet Hastanesi Çocuk ve Ergen Ruh Sağlığı ve Hastalıkları Polikliniğine adli psikiyatrik muayene amacıyla getirilen, işlemiş oldukları iddia edilen suçlara yönelik cezai ehliyeti olup olmadığı sorulan çocuk ve ergenlerin dosyaları geriye dönük olarak taranmıştır. Hırsızlık, kasten yaralama ve terör örgütü propagandası yapma suçlamalarıyla getirilen çocuklar üç gruba oluşturulmuştur. Çocuklar için Depresyon Ölçeği (ÇDÖ) ve Coopersmith Benlik Saygısı Ölçeği (CBSÖ) puanları karşılaştırılmıştır.

Bulgular: Gruplar arasında ÇDÖ ve CBSÖ puanları arasında farklılık olduğu izlenmiş, yapılan post hoc karşılaştırmalarda kasten yaralama iddiası ile getirilen grubun ÇDÖ puanının diğer iki gruba göre daha düşük olduğu, CBSÖ puanının ise hırsızlık yaptığı iddiası ile getirilen gruptan anlamlı olarak daha yüksek olduğu, terör örgütü propagandası yapmış olma iddiası ile gönderilenlerden ise anlamlılığa yakın düzeyde yüksek olduğu saptanmıştır.

Sonuç: Olguların gönderilme nedenleri ile ÇDÖ ve CBSÖ puanları arasında farklılık olduğu izlenmektedir. Özellikle kasten yaralama iddiası ile gönderilenlerin depresif belirtilerinin daha az, benlik saygılarının daha yüksek olduğu, bu çalışmada izlenmektedir. Bu bulgu, aslında çocuk suçluluğunda çok farklı etiyolojilerin farklı suçlara yönelme konusunda etkili olabileceğini düşündürmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ergenler, çocuklar, depresyon, adli psikiyatri, çocuk suçluluğu, benlik saygısı



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INTRODUCTION

Crime is defined as the acts and practices that are clearly described in the law and recognized by the legislator as harmful or dangerous to the public (1). Juvenile delinquency is defined as delinquency before adulthood. According to Article 6 of the Turkish Criminal Code (TCK), a juvenile is a person who has not yet reached the age of 18. Article 31 of TCK categorizes childhood into three age groups; 0-12, 12-15, and 15-18. Accordingly, the children who are under 12 years old at the time of criminal offense have no criminal responsibility. Those who are over 12 but under 15 years old at the time of the act have no criminal responsibility if the person has not developed the ability to perceive the intendment of law and consequences of the criminal act; or the ability to direct his/her acts. In the case of presence of the ability to perceive the intendment of law and consequences of the criminal act and the ability to direct the behaviors in relation to this act, there will be a remission of sentence for these persons. If the person is over 15 but under 18 at the time of criminal act, again a remission of sentence may well be considered (2).

As in all developed societies, the common view in our country is that; there is no "juvenile delinquent", but rather there are "juveniles dragged into crime". Juveniles dragged to crime have not been guilty from the time they were born, but life experiences they had, make them prone to commit offenses. Children, who have been subjected to physical, emotional or sexual trauma and neglect, start regarding people with distrust and fear to avoid further damage (3). Over the years, a variety of traumas that they have been exposed to or witnessed may disrupt neural processing in their brains, making them more aggressive (4,5).

Juvenile-adolescents' dragged to crime has been linked to multifactorial etiology; it is considered to result from the interaction of the individual characteristics with the family, peer relations, school environment and the characteristics of the society (6). Antisocial behavior pattern, which manifests with behavioral disturbances during childhood, is the most prominent of the individual factors on the way to criminal offense (7).

Familial risk factors for antisocial behavior have been shown as poor parental supervision, parental conflict and divorce, the presence of antisocial parental patterns at home, maternal age at birth of the child, low socioeconomic level, large family life, parental addiction, maternal psychiatric disorder and domestic violence (8,9). Some factors in childhood can account for the persistence of criminal offenses (3,10).

A great deal of studies has dealt with juvenile delinquency as a whole (11). However, studies investigating different risk factors according to the type of criminal offense are few and most of them are focused on substance abuse and sexual offenses (12-14). For example, it has been shown that substance abuse is associated with violent crimes (15,16), and is a predictor of chronicization of delinquency (17). The hypothesis of this research is that juveniles dragged to different crimes may have different sociodemographic characteristics and that these children may also be different in terms of depressive symptoms and self-esteem.

Thus in this study, child-adolescents were grouped according to the type of the alleged crime, and were examined in terms of sociodemographic characteristics, depression, and self-esteem.

METHOD

The study has been carried out by retrospectively examining the files of the children and adolescents who have been referred to Mus State Hospital Child and Adolescent Psychiatric outpatient clinic between February 2012 and February 2013; for the purpose of forensic psychiatric examination to assess their ability to detect the intendment of law and consequences of the alleged crimes were investigated. For all school-aged children referred to psychiatric examination, sociodemographic data form was filled out by the clinician; the Child Depression Inventory (CDI) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) were filled out by literate subjects. Among the children referred to forensic psychiatric examination, 17 subjects who were unable to fill out the inventories were excluded, thus a total of 129 subjects who filled out the scales were included in the study. Alleged

crimes of these cases were; 40 thefts (31.0%), 39 malicious wounding (30.2%), 32 terrorist propaganda (24.8%) and 18 other offenses (14.0%). Other offenses included damage to property, unlicensed driving, money counterfeiting, aggravated sexual abuse of the child, blackmailing, and fraud against the public authority. Statistical evaluations were made using data from child-adolescents allegedly involved in theft, terrorism and malicious wounding. The other 18 cases allegedly committed different crimes were not included in the statistical analysis.

Measures

Sociodemographic Data Form: It is a semi-structured interview form filled in routinely for every child admitted to the child and adolescent psychiatric outpatient clinic. The form includes age, gender, and education level of the cases; and regarding the parents: age, education level, occupation, smoking data, presence of consanguineous marriage, number of siblings, birth order of the case in the family, whether the home is rental or owned, the number of people living at home, and substance abuse and employment status are questioned.

Children's Depression Inventory (CDI): A self-reporting scale for children between the ages of 6 and 17 years. It is used in studies of childhood depression (18). The adaptation of this scale into Turkish was done by Oy (19) in 1991. The scale consists of 27 items and offers three choices for each item. The child is asked to choose the sentence that is most appropriate to describe his or her state during the past two weeks. Cut-off point has been established at 19.

Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI): It is a 25-item self-assessment inventory developed by Coopersmith which is evaluated on a two-step response (20). The lowest score is "0", and the highest score is "100"; the higher the score is achieved, the higher the self-esteem is. The validity and reliability study in Turkey was carried out by Turan and Tufan (21).

Statistical Analysis

The data obtained in the study were statistically analyzed in SPSS 17.0 software. The Chi square test was used to compare some of the sociodemographic characteristics between the groups. The Kolmogorov Smirnov test was applied to evaluate distribution of the continuous variable such age, parental age, the number of siblings, the order of birth, and the mean scores of the CDI and CSEI with regard to alleged criminal offenses. Then, ANOVA was applied for comparison of the data with normally distributed. The mean scores of CDI and CSEI are different between groups. Tukey HSD test was applied as post hoc analysis. For the not normally distributed variables Kruskal Wallis tests were used.

RESULTS

There was no significant difference between the ages of the juveniles dragged to crime ($p=0.90$). Socio-demographic characteristics of the cases with respect to the alleged crimes are presented in Table 1 (Table 1).

Of the children who were alleged to commit a theft, 3 had separated parents, 5 had the father passed away, and 2 had the father in prison. Three of the

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the subjects with respect to alleged crime type

| | Theft | | Malicious Wounding | | Terrorist Propaganda | | χ^2 | p |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|--------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------|------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | |
| Male Gender | 40 | 100.0 | 38 | 97.4 | 30 | 93.8 | 2.645 | 0.26 |
| Drop out from school | 12 | 30.0 | 5 | 12.8 | 9 | 28.1 | 3.803 | 0.14 |
| Consanguineous Marriage | 11 | 27.5 | 15 | 33.4 | 9 | 28.1 | 2.393 | 0.66 |
| Living with parents | 30 | 75.0 | 31 | 79.4 | 28 | 87.5 | 1.218 | 0.54 |
| Smoking | 26 | 65.0 | 23 | 58.9 | 18 | 56.2 | 0.617 | 0.73 |

Table 2: Comparison of subjects in terms of age, parental age, number of siblings, order of birth, and mean scores of CDI and CSEI, with respect to alleged crime type¹

| | Theft | | Malicious Wounding | | Terrorist Propaganda | | F or χ^2 | p |
|--------------------|-------|------|--------------------|------|----------------------|------|---------------|-------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| Age | 13.7 | 1.4 | 13.8 | 1.1 | 13.8 | 1.7 | 0.793 | 0.90 |
| Maternal age | 39.7 | 7.3 | 40.2 | 6.8 | 42.4 | 8.5 | 0.393 | 0.40 |
| Paternal age | 45.9 | 6.9 | 46.1 | 8.5 | 44.7 | 8.6 | 0.948 | 0.80 |
| Order of birth | 4.2 | 2.4 | 3.9 | 3.0 | 3.5 | 2.6 | 2.726 | 0.26 |
| Household size | 7.2 | 2.5 | 6.6 | 2.0 | 7.2 | 2.3 | 0.315 | 0.44 |
| Number of siblings | 6.6 | 2.5 | 6.2 | 2.7 | 6.5 | 2.5 | 1.808 | 0.71 |
| CDI | 13.7 | 8.4 | 9.2 | 7.4 | 14.6 | 7.1 | 0.082 | 0.01* |
| CSEI | 60.3 | 20.0 | 70.8 | 16.1 | 61.2 | 17.6 | 0.127 | 0.02* |

¹ANOVA or Kruskal Wallis Test administered. ²F values for variables administered ANOVA, χ^2 for variables administered Kruskal Wallis. *p<0.05, SD: Standard deviation, CDI: Child Depression Inventory, CSEI: Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory

Table 3: Results of the Post hoc analysis of the differences in CDI and CSEI mean scores¹

| CDI | Criminal offense | p |
|----------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Theft | Malicious wounding | 0.03* |
| | Terrorist propaganda | 0.90 |
| Malicious wounding | Theft | 0.03* |
| | Terrorist propaganda | 0.01* |
| Terrorist propaganda | Theft | 0.90 |
| | Malicious wounding | 0.01* |
| CSEI | | |
| Theft | Malicious wounding | 0.03* |
| | Terrorist propaganda | 0.97 |
| Malicious wounding | Theft | 0.03* |
| | Terrorist propaganda | 0.08 |
| Terrorist propaganda | Theft | 0.97 |
| | Malicious wounding | 0.08 |

¹Tukey HSD post hoc analysis performed. *p<0.05, CDI: Child Depression Inventory, CSEI: Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory

children allegedly involved in malicious wounding had parents separated, the mother of 1 and the father of 3 passed away, 1 had the father in prison, and 2 had bigamous fathers. Of the children allegedly involved in terrorism related offenses, one had separated parents, mother of one and father one passed away, one had the father in prison, and 2 had bigamous fathers.

The cases were compared in terms of age, parental age, number of siblings, birth order, mean scores of

CDI and CSEI with respect to the type of alleged crime. The results are presented in Table 2. Mean CDI and CSEI scores were found to be statistically different between the groups. Tukey HSD post hoc analysis was used to determine which groups differed and the results are presented in Table 3. The CDI scores of the group that allegedly committed malicious wounding are significantly lower than the groups allegedly committed theft and terrorist propaganda. CSEI scores of the group that allegedly committed malicious wounding are significantly higher than the group allegedly committed theft, almost significantly higher than the group allegedly committed terrorist propaganda.

DISCUSSION

In this study, children and adolescents were grouped according to the type of alleged crime and were examined in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, depression, and self-esteem.

Juveniles who allegedly committed different criminal offenses and were referred to the psychiatric outpatient clinic to be evaluated in terms of whether they had enough developed the ability to perceive the intentment of law and the ability to direct their behaviors, were examined in this study. Most of the subjects are referred to the child-adolescent psychiatric outpatient clinics to be evaluated in terms of presence of their criminal

responsibility (22). It was observed that when the referred subjects were grouped according to alleged crime types, there was no difference between groups in terms of age and gender; majority of them were male. It is reported in the literature that generally males commit more criminal offenses (10,23) and more offenses related with aggression and violent behavior (24). It is known that the most common ages of offenses are 14-16 years (10).

Although not statistically significant, it is observed that almost one third of the children allegedly committed theft and terrorist propaganda have dropped out of school. This may be in part due to low socioeconomic levels of the subjects with low parental education. Besides, research has shown that literacy skills and receptive and expressive language skills of juvenile offenders are lower than those of their non-offending peers (25,26).

Almost a quarter of the cases in all three groups live with single parent, for any reason. It has been shown in previous studies that chaotic family situations such as parental divorce or impaired family functioning increased the risk of repetitive crimes (27-29). Situations leading to live with a single parent, such as parental loss and parental divorce, is remarkable in this study as well. In addition, there are subjects in all groups with the father in prison.

The average number of siblings is over 6. Living in crowded, multi-child families is common to all groups. Studies have shown that it is common to have 4 or more siblings in juvenile offenders, especially in those with psychiatric disorders (30). Living in large families increases the risk of juvenile's push to crime (31,32). In multiple-children families, the time parents can spare for each child is limited.

Smoking rate is over 50% in all groups. It is known that smoking is closely related to juvenile delinquency (33). Smoking poses a risk for both health and substance abuse (34). It has been suggested that smoking in juveniles dragged to crime is associated with an inadequate social support (35).

The CDI scores of alleged malicious wounding group were significantly lower than the other two

groups. Their CSEI scores were higher than the alleged theft group. Both theft and terrorist propaganda may be the acts that have been committed with the environmental push. However, having malicious wounding as the first offense may be related to weakness in emotional control of the individual. It should be wise to consider it in terms of impulsive behaviors. Theft, especially vehicle theft has been shown to be the most constant predictor in chronic criminal career (36). The frequency of chronic criminal career is five times higher in property offenders than violent offenders (36).

In a study on male sexually offenders, it was determined that those who committed property offense as a first crime were more likely to commit crimes at earlier ages, committed crimes for longer time, and were more psychopathic than those with a violent crime and sexual offense as a first crime (37). It was seen that those who committed property offense as a first crime experienced more problems in elementary school, expressed more antisocial behavior in adolescence, and had more alcohol and substance use before their first crime.

Although the three groups examined in the study did not differ much from each other in terms of sociodemographic characteristics, the main result of this study is that those having malicious wounding as the first alleged crime had less depressive symptoms and higher self-esteem.

This finding suggests that in juvenile delinquency, diverse etiologies may have been effective in directing different crimes. Individually tailored rehabilitation programs can be planned by examining the alleged crime types of individuals involved with the juvenile justice system.

Because of the retrospective design of the study, other factors that could affect the type of the alleged crime were not evaluated. Another limitation is that the study was conducted only on juveniles dragged to crime who were referred to the hospital.

In order to reveal different etiologies in juveniles dragged to different crimes, there is a need for further prospective studies evaluating several other factors on larger samples.

| Contributions category | Authors name |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Development of study idea | S.T.H. |
| Methodological design of the study | S.T.H. |
| Data acquisition and process | S.T.H. |
| Data analysis and interpretation | S.T.H. |
| Literature review | S.T.H. |
| Manuscript writing | S.T.H. |
| Manuscript review and revision | S.T.H. |

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