

Examining the effect of irrational beliefs and family functioning on delinquency

Abstract

This research explored the influence of family functioning on delinquency among male adolescents aged 15 to 18 in Tehran, Iran. The study employed a non-experimental causal-comparative design, employing a sample of 30 normal and 30 delinquent individuals randomly selected from the overall population of boys within the 15-18 age range. The McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD) was used to collect data, comprising 35 questions administered individually and in group settings to evaluate family functioning. Descriptive statistics, independent group t-tests, and Pearson's correlation coefficient were applied for data analysis. The findings revealed a noteworthy distinction in family functioning between the two groups of families, consisting of those with normal adolescents and those with delinquent adolescents. Specifically, families with normal adolescents exhibited greater proficiency in problem-solving and emotional expression compared to families with delinquent adolescents.

Keywords: *Delinquency, Family functioning, Delinquent, Teen boys*

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Introduction

As the smallest unit of society, the family holds significant importance in establishing and maintaining societal structures. Within this intimate human group, individual growth and development occur, forming the foundation for the relationship between individuals and society. Consequently, the family exerts considerable influence on the development of its members' personalities and contributes to the overall stability of society by fostering an environment of peace and security. No other social institution can replace or replicate the role of the family in this regard. However, external factors such as political, economic, cultural, and moral influences can impact the values and norms within the family community, potentially undermining its boundaries and eroding family privacy. These detrimental influences disrupt the sense of comfort and tranquility within the family environment, leading to disobedience and disregard for familial relationships. Such boundary violations may originate from sources external to the family. Additionally, the absence of strategic planning, control, supervision, and proper education for individuals of both genders and age groups within the family structure also threatens its stability and overall strength.

The diminishing and weakening of the educational function in the family has a profound impact, leading to crises as a consequence of the expansion of materialistic values despite the scarcity of spiritual resources within the family unit. Under such conditions, the awareness of family members in instilling strong moral values in the younger generation becomes an imperative concern. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that excessive parental supervision and control over children's behavior can give rise to discouragement, conflicts, and moral and behavioral predicaments. Conversely, striking a balance between knowledge acquisition and appropriate, moderate

supervision and control establishes a more effective educational role for the family in the face of escalating crises that continue to proliferate (Afzalnia, 2006).

In recent years, there has been a notable rise in behavioral and moral transformations, as well as reflective responses, leading to divergent perspectives among children and the younger generation. These individuals have shown a propensity for embracing diverse cultures and exhibiting disobedience toward societal norms. Such circumstances have raised concerns and instigated a crisis regarding the future of teenagers and young adults. Consequently, authorities must address these issues by comprehensively analyzing the emerging generation (Golkarian, 2012, pp. 14-16).

Concurrently, the family unit constitutes the primary environment wherein an individual's physical, emotional, and personality foundations are established. It assumes a pivotal role in safeguarding the mental well-being of individuals, particularly in terms of coping with psychological pressures. Moreover, families serve as centers of love, affection, education, and cultural transmission, as the fundamental catalysts for personal growth and attaining psychological and social equilibrium (Stoudeh, 2000). In response to two essential requirements, the family institution must fulfill dual roles of providing psychological and social support, as well as facilitating an individual's adaptation to the external environment. Therefore, due to the pressures exerted by the aforementioned factors, the family must serve as a secure and dependable haven for its members; otherwise, the mental health of individuals and the whole society will be jeopardized (Shoaerinejad, 2017).

Family functioning encompasses the family's capacity to adapt to life changes, navigate conflicts, foster unity among its members, establish disciplinary structures, respect

interpersonal boundaries, and adhere to the governing rules and principles that safeguard the overall stability of the family system. Coping, on the other hand, denotes the process of confronting difficulties and striving to overcome them. Coping skills refer to the repertoire of techniques available to individuals for handling various situations. Coping entails active endeavors to alleviate tensions and devise solutions, proving effective and practical in meeting the challenges and demands inherent in each transformation phase. Notably, coping comprises three essential components: the subjective interpretation of the problematic situation, the implementation of appropriate actions to resolve the issue, and the experience of intense emotional reactions (Mashkani, 2012).

Sayadi (2011) conducted a study investigating behavioral disorders and underscored the influential role of education in addressing such disorders. The study highlighted a direct association between the behavioral patterns of adolescents and the occurrence of behavioral disorders. Likewise, Bagheri (2008) explored behavior disorders among students attending Imam Sajjad School and identified a significant correlation between life skills training and the prevalence of behavior disorders among the participants. Furthermore, Hosseinian and Khodabakhshi examined the relationship between family functioning and the mental well-being of runaway teenagers from normative family environments. The researchers concluded that adolescents hailing from families demonstrating effective functioning exhibited higher levels of mental health compared to those from dysfunctional family settings. In addition, a report from Cologne University in Germany revealed a rise in crime rates attributed to factors such as immigration, financial constraints, and the integration of immigrants into the labor force (Golkarian, 2008). Similarly, Hesnard, Jarnes, and Ashihorn propose a perspective that characterizes crime as a manifestation of dynamic human behavior. According to their viewpoint, individuals who experience psychological and spiritual distress tend to repress their desires, inadvertently leading to antisocial acts and delinquency (Golkarian, 2013).

Delinquency is a state wherein individuals violate the legal requirements applicable to their circumstances, leading to their classification as a criminal and subsequent imposition of punishment. The term "delinquency" encompasses diverse forms of law-breaking, including theft, fraud, illegal acts, financial improprieties, etc. Consequently, behavior deviating from the accepted societal or group expectations is considered distasteful, inappropriate, or delinquent. Delinquents exhibit a disregard for values, norms, and social regulations, often marked by an absence of a sense of responsibility. Many individuals estrange themselves from the familial sphere due to repressive experiences, leading them to engage in deviant behaviors such as running away from home and severing

family ties. Delinquents, often possessing extroverted personalities, may resort to various wrongdoings, including substance abuse and alcohol consumption (Sotoudeh, 2009).

The prevailing social system is frequently attributed as a significant factor contributing to criminality. Poverty, in particular, can create an environment conducive to delinquent behavior among teenagers and young adults. Moreover, hereditary factors exert influence on delinquency occurrence, with disturbances in chromosomal structures during fetal development potentially yielding anomalous effects on the child's future behavior (Mashkani, 2017).

The phenomenon of delinquency is characterized by complex and multifaceted causes, encompassing various social, economic, and psychological factors. These factors often interrelate and coexist, contributing to the emergence of delinquent behavior. Among these influential factors are social dynamics, interpersonal conflicts, substandard living conditions, high population density, adverse economic circumstances (with poverty being a pivotal determinant), low levels of literacy and development, lack of awareness, the persistence of superstitious beliefs, inadequate hygiene practices, the prevalence of mental and physical ailments, and even the occurrence of armed conflicts. Additionally, the upbringing styles employed by parents, flawed patterns of communication, peer influence, peer identification, and psychological elements play significant roles in delinquency (Stoudeh, 2005).

Consequently, the urgency to explore the underlying causes of delinquency has intensified due to the rise in behavioral changes and moral transgressions, particularly among teenagers (Golkarian, 2012). In light of this, the objective of the present study was to examine the impact of family functioning on delinquent tendencies among boys aged 15 to 18 residing in Tehran.

Method

The current study adopts an applied research design with a descriptive survey method. The target population consists of male adolescents aged 15 to 18 in Tehran, Iran, encompassing both individuals without a history of delinquency and those who have engaged in delinquent behavior. The sample size comprises 30 non-delinquent teenagers chosen randomly from high schools and another 30 delinquent teenagers selected from correctional facilities using an available sampling technique.

Instrument

Family Assessment Device 1 (FAD1)

The McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD), developed by Epstein Bishop and Baldwin in 1983, provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing families' organizational and structural characteristics. FAD 1 specifically focuses on examining exchange patterns among

family members, allowing for the differentiation between healthy and dysfunctional family dynamics.

Suri (2003) undertook the task of standardizing the McMaster FAD1, utilizing three key dimensions to assess family functioning:

1) Roles: This dimension primarily pertains to the roles and responsibilities assumed by family members, as well as the equitable distribution of such duties within the family unit. The establishment of clear roles and responsibilities is essential for fostering an efficient and harmonious family environment. Moreover, the comprehension of assigned roles, fairness in task distribution, and consistent monitoring of role fulfillment contribute to the overall effectiveness of family functioning. Rules and roles play a pivotal role in maintaining order within the family system, allowing family members to anticipate and exert some control over changes in the familial environment. Cultural and religious values significantly influence the establishment and interpretation roles and identities within the family. Tradition, culture, and societal customs govern an individual's position and worth inside the familial structure while influencing the sense of familiarity, anxiety management, and control within the family unit.

2) Problem-solving: The second facet of efficiency primarily addresses the resolution of issues, encompassing a) the family's capacity to employ innovative approaches in solving their problems, b) providing support to one another during crises, engaging in problem-solving, evaluating the efficacy of strategies employed, maintaining clear communication, fostering mutual trust and responsibility, developing regulations, and being mindful of the concerns of other family members, and c) expressing emotions primarily for the purpose of establishing emotional communication, involving awareness of others' emotions and expressing emotions towards one another. The expression of emotions typically takes a verbal form. However, the aspects related to emotional matters within the construct of "roles" also bear practical significance. In addition, the scale developers have introduced a supplementary dimension of overall effectiveness.

3) Overall efficiency: This dimension encompasses the cumulative assessment of the two aforementioned dimensions. It gauges the degree of success or failure of the family in relation to the dimensions. The FAD1 questionnaire consists of 35 items, with 2 items related to roles, 17 items related to problem-solving, and 8 items related to expressing emotions (Najarian, 1995). The items in FAD1 describe the family of the subject under study. It employs a four-point Likert scale to evaluate the extent of agreement with the described attributes in relation to the respondent's own family, ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree." FAD1 is a written assessment and can be completed in approximately 15

to 20 minutes, making it a practical and time-efficient instrument for evaluation.

FAD1 has been designed to be applicable to any family member aged 12 and above, with the age limit tailored specifically to American culture. A higher score on the FAD1 indicates a healthier and more efficient family functioning. It is a questionnaire that assigns a score of 1 to 4 for each response option, with reverse scoring employed for items that indicate unhealthy performance. The development of the FAD1 was based on McMaster's model of family functioning. Initially developed by Einstein Baldwin and Bishop (1983), its purpose was to describe the organizational and structural characteristics of families and examine their ability to meet family responsibilities. In Iran, Asdalahi (1997) conducted the first attempt to standardize this tool, employing factor analysis and identifying three constructs within the test. The internal consistency coefficient for the test was reported to be 93%.

In a subsequent study by Sayadi (2011), the revised version of the questionnaire was examined, and the internal consistency of the entire scale was estimated to be 93%. Furthermore, Jones' illogical thinking test is also based on Ellis's theory.

FAD1 has demonstrated a significant correlation of 66% with irrational behavior tests, as well as correlations of 70%, 77%, and 59% with anxiety, depression, and violence tests, respectively, all of which were statistically significant at the 99% level.

Using a sample of 106 students from Allameh Tabatabai University, Naghipour (1994) achieved a reliability coefficient of 71% through the application of Cronbach's alpha method. In a subsequent study, Jones himself conducted a re-implementation of the test and reported an overall reliability of 92%, with each of the ten scales demonstrating reliabilities ranging from 60% to 80%.

FAD1 comprises a total of 35 questions that can be completed individually or in a group setting. Participants in this research evaluated their own family performance.

Data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics, independent groups t-tests, and Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Results

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of family functioning in the normal and delinquent groups

Group	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation
Delinquent	113	131	118.10	4.389
Normal	86	11	105.17	4.969
Total	86	131	111.63	8.008

According to Table (1), the average family functioning in the delinquent group is significantly lower compared to the normal

group. In addition, the standard deviation within the normal group surpasses that of the delinquent group.

Table 2: Family functioning test in normal and delinquent groups

	Equality of variance test		t-test	Degree of freedom	Significance level
	Frequency	Significance level			
Family functioning	0.513	0.423	-7.5	58	0.001

Based on the findings presented in Table (2), there was no notable disparity in the variance of family functioning between families with normal and delinquent teenagers. However, a statistically significant contrast in family functioning emerged when comparing the groups ($p < 0.05$, $t = -7.5$, $d = 58$).

Table 3: t-test for family efficiency in delinquent and normal groups

	Levene's test		t-test		
	Frequency	Significance level	t-test	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Family efficiency	1.450	0.227	-3.441	58	0.001

Based on the findings presented in Table 3, the variance in family efficiency does not exhibit a significant disparity between families with normal children and families with delinquent children. However, the t-test results reveal a significant distinction in family efficiency between the two groups ($p > 0.05$, $d = 58$, $t = -3.44$). The average family efficiency is recorded as 28.20 in the normal group and 25.04 in the delinquent group, indicating a higher level of efficiency in the normal group.

Table 4: t-test for problem-solving in families with normal and delinquent teens

	Levene's test	t-test

Family functioning	Frequency	Significance level	t-test	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Problem-solving	1.015	0.417	-1.88	58	0.001

Based on the data presented in Table 4, there is no notable discrepancy in the variance of problem-solving abilities between families with normal teenagers and families with delinquent teenagers. However, the t-test analysis indicates a significant difference in problem-solving capabilities between the two groups ($p > 0.05$, $t = -1.88$, $d = 58$). The mean problem-solving scores in the normal group and the delinquent group are recorded as 20.32 and 5.29, respectively, suggesting a higher level of problem-solving proficiency in normal families.

Table 5: t-test for the expression of emotions in families with normal and delinquent teens

	Levene's test		t-test		
	Frequency	Significance level	t-test	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Emotion expression	0.004	0.838	1.78	58	0.001

Based on the findings presented in Table 5, there appears to be no significant difference in the variance of emotional expression between the groups under study. However, the t-test analysis reveals a statistically significant difference in the expression of emotions between the groups ($p < 0.05$, $t = 1.78$, $d = 58$). The mean emotion expression scores are recorded as 10.30 and 30.28 in the normal and delinquent groups, respectively, indicating a higher level of emotion expression in the normal group.

Conclusion

In conclusion, delinquency and a propensity for criminal behavior in children are regarded as conditions that can be treated. It is important to acknowledge that societal treatment of the child, alongside the emergence of societal transformations, value contradictions, and social disparities among teenagers, can sometimes contribute to their engagement in criminal activities, thereby posing risks to themselves and the community. (Beh Pajoh, 2002). It is crucial

to recognize that humans, especially teenagers, are emotional beings who react to their surroundings. Consequently, the behavior of individuals is influenced by the actions and behavior of others. Thus, it can be inferred that no individual is inherently sinful or criminal, but rather, it is the circumstances and events they experience that contribute to their inclination towards criminality and delinquency.

In general, it is important to acknowledge that violence, intense anger, revenge, jealousy, and similar behaviors are inherent aspects of human nature. It would be unjust to condemn or disregard these phenomena that exist within human existence. Additionally, it should be recognized that every individual strives to seek and maintain their blessings and resources. In certain instances, individuals may resort to displays of affection, while in other cases, they may resort to violence to fulfill their desires and needs. Therefore, it is imperative for governing authorities in any country to address the underlying causes of delinquency, focus on meeting the fundamental needs of individuals within society, bridge the gap in welfare between different social classes, and facilitate an environment conducive to the mental and physical well-being of adolescents. By doing so, delinquency can be mitigated (Yavozar, Halog, translated by Golkarian, 2008).

The findings of the study indicate a significant difference in family functioning between the two groups under investigation. Specifically, there is a notable disparity in the mean scores of family functioning between the two groups. Overall, the independent t-test, with a degree of freedom of 58 and a significance level of 0.01, rejects the null hypothesis and confirms the research hypothesis. This finding aligns with prior research conducted by Javadi (2003), who reported lower levels of family functioning within delinquent families.

Moreover, the findings indicate that families with non-delinquent children exhibit higher levels of efficiency compared to families with delinquent children. The independent t-test, with a degree of freedom of 58 and a significance level of 0.001, highlights a significant difference between the two groups. These results are consistent with the findings reported by Nikjam (2007), emphasizing the role of family functioning in adolescent delinquency.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable discrepancy in problem-solving capabilities between families with non-delinquent children and families with delinquent children, with the former demonstrating superior performance. The independent t-test, with 58 degrees of freedom and a significant level of 0.001, unveils a significant difference between the two groups. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, affirming the research hypothesis. This outcome aligns with the findings of Seif (1991) in the examination of emotions within families.

However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of the study. Accessing delinquent males aged 15 to 18 posed

various difficulties, and despite psychological advancements, the cooperation of schools and centers remains suboptimal.

To further enhance the understanding of teenagers and their families, it is recommended that future investigations be conducted utilizing a larger sample size that represents both genders, including males and females.

Conflict of interest:

None.

Financial support:

None.

Ethics statement:

None.

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