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Psychological and Behavioural Impact of Negative Peer Influence on Youth Offenders: A Survey Investigation

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ABSTRACT:

The adolescent years are a crucial time when people are most susceptible to participating in criminal activities since their brains are still developing throughout this period. Peer influence is believed to encourage teenagers to engage in delinquent behaviour. Juvenile delinquency is a serious social problem that has a significant impact on society and having an adverse effect on the mental health of teenagers. The purpose of this research is to determine that negative peer influence and youth gang involvement anticipate juvenile delinquency. A sample of 276 juvenile delinquents, ages 14 to 18, were included in the study in order to meet the intended goal of the research. Questionnaire method was used for statical analysis. The results give a clear idea about the impact of peer influence on juvenile delinquents.

Keywords: Juvenile offence, peer influence, school students, mental health.

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1. Introduction

There are so many complex issues in the society but juvenile delinquency is the most disturbing. Studies conducted in the last few years have shown that young people are becoming involved in criminal activity. A young person is classified as a juvenile delinquent when they are involved in a criminal case. He reaches the age at which he is held accountable for a crime, known as criminal responsibility. A young person who has not yet attained the age of criminal responsibility cannot be prosecuted for a juvenile offence. However, the child can undoubtedly face criminal charges if he is not a minor.

It is extremely important to recognise that a child does not have criminal tendencies from birth. Juvenile criminality is always caused by a number of variables that put young people in risk. Criminal mischief, theft, and misbehaviour are the most prevalent categories of adolescent crimes.

The child's nurturing environment, the state of economic conditions, a lack of education, peer influence and lack of access to appropriate prenatal care could all be contributing factors to the rising crime rate. These are a few of the fundamental causes of the rise in juvenile criminality. The most terrible thing is that youngsters are exploited as tools to commit crimes since, at this age, their minds are immature and easily swayed. Due to the incapacity of their developing minds to comprehend the diverse situations of life, youngsters are now more likely to commit crimes than they were a few decades ago. Peer pressure and negative influences from peer groups, particularly when it comes to school children, might cause them to neglect their schoolwork and run into disciplinary issues. Until students believe that obeying school regulations is burdensome and unnecessary, or that they are unimportant, peer pressure remains a significant effect in their lives (Olalekan, 2016).

A youngster who has a good upbringing will grow up to be a valuable member of society. On the other hand, an unwholesome setting and a dearth of positive peer interactions lead to a child's engagement in antisocial activity. It's becoming obvious that hanging out with other deviant youngsters without boundaries is one of the main ways that criminal youngsters grow even more deviant.

The Juvenile Justice Care and Protection Act of 2015 states that any person between the ages of 16 and 18 who commits a serious offence would be considered an adult and will be evaluated by the Juvenile Justice Board.

People who are antisocial have been a huge global concern since the dawn of human socialisation. Numerous governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations are working to steer the youth population in the correct direction. Despite all of these initiatives, juvenile delinquency is becoming a bigger concern quite rapidly.

Peer Influence

Peer groups are social groups that are mostly made up of individuals with common interest, backgrounds, ages, and social statuses. The person's beliefs and attitude are probably influenced by the people in these groups. Teenagers typically emulate the actions, appearance, and behaviours of their role models. If the teen's role model is unfavourable, it's likely that they may either readily succumb to peer pressure or conduct crime on their own.

(Mcord, 2001) said that adolescent antisocial behaviours are associated with factors such as peer pressure, connection to or criticism of peers, acceptance and rejection of peers' delinquent behaviour, and time spent with peers. The dynamic structure of their brains makes adolescents quickly agitated, and they frequently engage in deviant behaviour (Ciranka & van

den Bos, 2019). Over many years, people have battled to overcome the negative effects of peer pressure, learn about social circles, and stop using force against one another. Teenagers may initially underestimate the seriousness of a criminal offence since it is difficult for them to comprehend the implications of the law and the rules surrounding specific behaviours.

Adolescents experience substantial physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development, rendering them more vulnerable to the impact of their social connections (Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald, & Aherne, 2012). Additionally, Peers play the most important role in forming children's mindsets, particularly those of students, by acting as social agents in their lives and encouraging them to participate in activities with one another and share similar beliefs, values, and social classes (Coleman, 2014).

During adolescence, peer groups are particularly essential and adolescents spend more time with peers and less time under parent supervision. Peer pressure is the effect of a peer group on an individual to alter one's beliefs, values, or conduct in order to adhere to group standards (Steinberg, 2007). Adolescents' actions and beliefs were shaped to align with peers' opinions and behaviours as a specific response to the pressure to further engage in delinquent behaviours (Yusuf, M. N., & Sakiru, 2021).

Studies have reported on the impact of peers on an individual's personality and behaviour in numerous instances. It is impossible to ignore how a peer group can encourage someone to alter their personal attitude, values, and behaviour in order to fit in with the group standards. This influence can be either positive or harmful. According to sociologists and social psychologists, one of the most important variables influencing how adolescents behave with other teenagers their own age and finally become self-sufficient is peer group influence, especially during adolescence.

Adolescents who are exposed to negative peer pressure are more likely to engage in illegal behaviours on a regular basis. Initially, they could face bullying in order to integrate into the peer group, failing which they could face social exclusion and labels of "uncool." They thus cave in and start taking part in order to fit in. Additionally, they adapt their beliefs to the norms of their peer group and get their ideas validated by them.

One way to think of the peer group is as an unofficial association of people who are roughly the same age. Peers are therefore people that a young person shares issues and experiences with. When it comes to meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed children who are unable to fulfil the requirements necessary to participate in regular groups, the peer group is a practical structure. Peer groups provide possibilities for youngsters to commit crimes outside of their familial environment, which makes them a risk factor for crime.

Teens are constantly exposed to peer pressure, whether they realise it or not. There are two sorts of peer Influence:

Constructive Peer Influence- Peers that urge others to grow in constructive ways or who support positive activities are said to be exercising positive peer influence. A few instances of constructive peer influence are encouraging a friend to study more in order to improve their grades, obtaining a job after school and persuading peers to do the same, setting aside cash for a major purchase, rejecting prejudiced rumours or jokes discouraging harmful or unlawful behaviour, such as smoking or under age intoxicated.

By being aware of each other's needs and desires as well as their strengths and shortcomings, the compassionate peers can serve as a resource and support network for their friends (Brown & Larson, 2009). Additionally, being among high-achieving peers can help youngsters become more interested in and motivated to learn. They can also work together to improve their self-skills and participate in extracurricular activities to attain both academic and non-academic goals (Kilford, Garrett, & Blakemore, 2016).

Detrimental Peer Influence- Conversely, negative peer influence entails social pressure to take risks or take actions that could endanger oneself or others. The following are a few instances of harmful peer influence e.g. persuading a friend to miss class, pushing a friend to engage in violence or harassment, convincing friends to participate in illegal activities, coercing a friend into using drugs or alcohol.

The term "peer's negative influences" also refers to students' engagement in juvenile crimes as young offenders, such as robbery, kidnapping, and joining socially illegal groups. These crimes can endanger students' lives, lead them to fall into social traps, and make them doubt their future (La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Additionally, selecting inappropriate peers among students can also result in them falling behind in class activities and the educational process, which could ultimately lead to academic failure (Landau, 2012). As a result, teens who are negatively impacted by their peers may also act in ways that defy social norms, which may cause them to commit crimes or other social concerns that result in school dropout problems (Robert, Aprile, & Barbara, 2012).

Adolescent Gang Involvement

Youth gangs and street gangs are the most commonly used terms. Groups of young people, adolescents, and adults who engage in illegal or delinquent behaviour and have a shared identity are referred to as gangs. The majority of gang members are typically young adults or teens, but new statistics show that children are joining gangs at much younger ages—some as early as elementary school. Gang activity has historically been limited to urban regions; however, gangs are now found in smaller towns and rural locations as well as big cities. People of all sexes, races, cultures, and financial backgrounds can be found in gangs.

Children from low-income and dysfunctional homes are more likely to become gang victims. For a sense of belonging or to forge a new identity, certain teens and children are driven to join a gang. Some are driven by the desire to succeed financially, by peer pressure, by the need to defend themselves and their families, or by the fact that a family member is a gang member and several other reasons like to gain respect, financial gains, for protection, poverty, for power, boredom and being pressured to join.

Being in the gang exposes one to violence, which is one of the worst repercussions. It is possible for gang members to face pressures to join the group by committing a crime. The majority of juvenile crimes are perpetrated by groups, according to early research on juvenile delinquency. Even when antisocial activity is done alone, it still has the backing or influence

Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to define peer influence and youth gang involvement. The study aims to find out that the youth gang involvement and negative peer influence are the determinants of juvenile delinquency.

2. Research Methodology

The sample population is the juvenile inmates residing in the juvenile homes of the State of Haryana for different offences they have committed, and total 276 inmates from three governmental observation homes and place of safety are selected for analysis. These are observation homes Ambala and Hisar and one place of safety Karnal respectively. Out of (n=276) inmates, (n=26) inmates are from observation home Ambala, (n=90) from observation home Hisar and (n=160) from Place of Safety Karnal. To select the participant simple random sampling technique is used. The total sampling size for the analysis is 276 juveniles. Prior written consent was taken to conduct the study from Women and Child Development Department, Haryana.

The questionnaire was distributed among these selected participants in the observation homes. To meet the research objective standardized questionnaire instrument was adopted, and open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. The inmates were asked to provide information that how they have committed the crime, whether they committed the crime alone, with other juveniles and with other adults. After the data collection the results are analysed. Graphs and tables have been used to represent the data and descriptive method is used to explain the results. Simple percentages were used.

3. Results

The results of this study identified two perspectives, the education level of juvenile inmates when they have committed the offence and how they get involved in criminal activities.

Table I. Education level of the juveniles in conflict with law in the State of Haryana

	AMBALA (N=26)	HISAR (N=90)	KARNAL (N=160)	TOTAL (N=276)
ILLITRATE	0	7 (7.78%)	12 (7.50%)	19(6.88%)
PRIMARY	1 (3.85%)	1 (1.11%)	10 (6.25%)	12(4.35%)
MIDDLE	17 (65.38%)	25 (27.78%)	41 (25.62%)	83(30.07%)
SECONDARY	6 (23.08%)	40 (44.44%)	60 (37.50%)	106(38.41%)
SENIOR SECONDARY	2 (7.69%)	6 (6.67%)	31 (19.38%)	39(14.13%)
DROPOUT	0	11 (12.22%)	6 (3.75%)	17(6.16%)
TOTAL	26	90	160	276

Table I. reveals that out of 276 inmates only 19(6.88%) were illiterate, 12(4.35%) have education level up to primary, 83(30.07%) had studied until the middle level. The secondary school category has the maximum number of respondents 106(38.41%) followed by, senior secondary 39(14.13%) and only 17(6.16%) of the respondents were dropout. District wise analysis reveals that there was no illiterate inmate in Ambala, 7(7.78%) were illiterate in Hisar and 12(7.50%) were in Karnal. Only 1(3.85%) in Ambala, 1(1.11%) in Hisar and 10(6.25%) inmates in Karnal had education level up to primary. Those who had studied up to middle were 17(65.38%) in Ambala, 25(27.78%) in Hisar followed by 41(25.62%) in Karnal. Inmates with secondary level of education were 6(23.08%) in Ambala, 40(44.44%) in Hisar and 60(37.50%) in Karnal. Inmates who had senior secondary level of education were 2(7.69%) in Ambala, 6(6.67%) in Hisar and 31(19.38%) in Karnal. There was no dropout inmate in Ambala, only 11(12.22%) dropouts were in Hisar and 6(3.75%) were in Karnal.

Figure No. I How was the offence committed by the juvenile in conflict with law in the State of Haryana

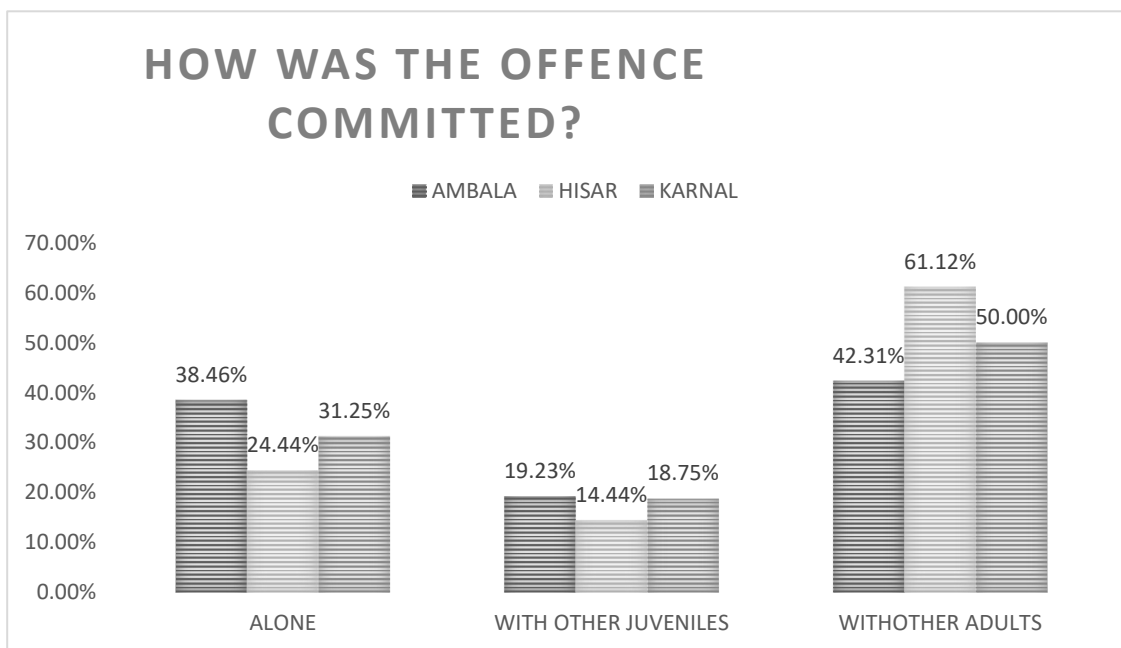


Table II. How was the offence committed by the juvenile in conflict with law in the State of Haryana

	AMBALA (N=26)	HISAR (N=90)	KARNAL (N=160)	TOTAL (N=276)
ALONE	10 (38.46%)	22 (24.44%)	50 (31.25%)	82(29.71%)
WITH OTHER JUVENILES	5 (19.23%)	13 (14.44%)	30 (18.75%)	48(17.39%)
WITH OTHER ADULTS	11 (42.31%)	55 (61.12%)	80 (50%)	146(52.90%)
TOTAL	26	90	160	276

Table II. /Figure I. reveals that out of 276 inmates of the three districts most juveniles committed the offence with other adults 146(52.90%) whereas 82(29.71%) juveniles committed the offence alone and 48(17.39%) of the juveniles committed the offence with other juveniles. District wise analysis shows that the inmates who had committed offence alone were 10(38.46%) in Ambala, 22(24.44%) in Hisar and 50(31.25%) in Karnal. In Ambala 5(19.23%), 13(14.44%) in Hisar and 30(18.75%) in Karnal had committed the offence with other juveniles. Inmates who had committed offence with other adults were 11(42.31%) in Ambala, 55(61.12%) in Hisar and 80(50%) in Karnal.

4. Discussion

Table I. clearly indicates that a majority of inmates had some form of education, the percentage of illiterate juveniles is less as compared to literates. The maximum number of inmates were literate and had education level up to secondary school. The years spent in secondary school are crucial in the life of a teenager. Students are choosing their courses, as well as their future goals for school and careers, at this time (Deepika & Prerna, 2017). Adverse peer pressure causes pupils to get distracted during the teaching and learning process, which results in difficulties in their studies and, ultimately, they get involved in criminal activities. This leads to the emergence of juvenile delinquency. Thus, in schools, the

teachers and other school authorities should monitor the company children keep and encourage them to learn and perform well in a cordial environment in schools.

The parents should also monitor their wards and inspire them to focus on career advancement and future employment. As (Johnson, 2012) stated that it is the duty of the family, the school, and other social agencies to plan self-development courses for pupils. These programmes should help them improve their social and life skills, which will help them resist peer pressure and misconceptions. Therefore, comprehensive counselling methods that take a holistic approach should be used with students to help them develop self-discipline, self-worth, confidence, and the ability to go forward academically and engage in worthwhile activities (Erath, Flanagan, & Bierman, 2007).

The data presentation under Table II. /Figure I. gives a clear idea about the impact of peer influence on juvenile delinquents. Adolescents who did not receive proper parenting and emotional support had more antisocial friends and indulged in antisocial behaviour. The data indicates that most juveniles committed offences in groups (with other adults), these adults are the members of gangs that instigate adolescents to commit crime. The adult influence on juveniles in committing offence, far greater than juvenile influence (peer influence). Hence, unrestricted interaction with deviant classmates is clearly one of the main ways that deviant youngsters become even more deviant.

Studies have demonstrated a correlation between increased rates of criminogenic behaviour in teenagers and the amount of time they spend engaging in unsupervised, peer-oriented activities (Chrysoulakis, 2020). Peers take on the role of an adolescent's main source of support during this developmental stage. The current study shows that peer pressure is the primary cause of delinquent behaviour among adolescents, who prioritise receiving peer approval. (Davis & Allen, 2021) research has provided evidence for this phenomenon, indicating that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer acceptance and rejection.

It makes sense that gang members would be more vulnerable to victimisation given the link between gang organisation and criminal activity, as demonstrated by the research' findings on delinquent behaviour and closeness to them. In fact, associations between victimisation and organisation were discovered by (Decker & Katz, 2008) as well as (Pyrooz, Fox, Katz, & Decker, 2012). The results of the study demonstrate that delinquent behaviours are mostly learned within groups, especially peers and adult gangs, and that most people who become delinquent do so by hanging around with other delinquent peers who view the behaviour as a way of life.

Research indicates that adolescents' delinquent behaviours are significantly influenced by their fellow adolescents. The findings indicated that peer pressure significantly promotes juvenile criminal conduct. The current study's findings corroborated those of other experts in the field who assert that there is a strong link between peer influence and adolescent inappropriate behaviour.

Implications of the Study

The study has implications for families, including educating people about the importance of families in addressing concerns about children's well-being and psychological health, reprimanding misbehaviour and responsibilities within the family, offering familial support during the rehabilitation process, and sifting the characteristics of peers. Parents can learn from this study how important it is to provide their teenagers with the proper kind of schooling from a young age. In order to stop teenagers from breaching the law and becoming involved in criminal activity, parents should be actively connected with their young children. Additionally, parents should spend time with children since it can lower the likelihood that they would engage in delinquent behaviour. It is important for parents to set an example for their children. Parents can teach their children coping mechanisms for handling the pressures

of both the household and society. It will also have an impact on how the kids view and value themselves.

The results of this research will also increase public awareness of the impact of peers and adult gangs on adolescent delinquency. Furthermore, the study offers insightful direction for creating curricula in schools that discourage teenagers and/or youngsters from participating in unlawful conduct. In addition, schools have a responsibility to trust and support young people who engage in criminal activity by offering them support and direction towards the proper path.

Limitations of the Study

The sample is limited to males exclusively, based solely on gender. Variable statistics similar to rural/urban differences, socio-economic profile of the juveniles was not investigated that might produce useful findings.

Recommendations

In order to mitigate the impact of harmful peer and gang behaviours, teenagers ought to get psychological and instrumental preparation. The family, the community, professionals such as counselling psychologists, and other relevant stakeholders should attend them, help them make the best friend choices. In conclusion, it is important for the government, counselling psychologists, and other relevant parties to raise community awareness of the negative impacts of inadequate socialisation, violence, drug addiction, and substance consumption on teenage conduct.

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