

Peers and Parental Attachment and Emotional Intelligence among Delinquents in Rehabilitation Centers in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of parents and peers attachment on emotional intelligence among Malaysian delinquents in government rehabilitation institutions. There were 203 delinquents aged between 11 to 19 years old were randomly selected from six different rehabilitation centres in Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur (WPKL), Selangor and Malacca. Respondent's emotional intelligence was measured using the Assessing Emotional Scale instrument (AES; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, 1998), while attachment was assessed using the revised version of Instrument of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1989). Results revealed that mother, father and peer attachment were significantly correlated to emotional intelligence of delinquents in the rehabilitation centres. T-test analysis also indicated that there were no significant differences for mother attachment, peer attachment and emotional intelligence across gender. However, only father attachment was found to be significantly different between male and female delinquents.

Keyword: Attachment, Emotional Intelligence, Delinquents, Rehabilitation Institution

Introduction

Emotional Intelligence, at the most general level, refers to the 'abilities to recognize and regulate emotions in own selves as well as in others' (Bar-On, 2000). According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in our ourselves and in others for motivating oneself and for managing a relationship. Good level of emotional intelligence is very important for growing adolescents in order to avoid them from involving in behavioural problems.

Many previous studies agreed that emotional intelligence was negatively correlated to delinquency and problem behaviour. Siu (2009) found that individuals with low emotional intelligence level tend to involve more in behavioural problems, both internalizing (depression, anxiety, and stress) and externalizing (aggression, delinquency). Similar pattern can be observed in Malaysia. Liau, Liau, Teoh & Liau (2010) also found that emotional intelligence is negatively related to depression, stress, and aggression delinquency.

Individual with low emotional intelligence level also tend to express their emotions wrongly when faced with unfavourable situations, strain or stress in life. This group of people usually expresses their dissatisfaction in life by hurting themselves or other people around them in order to express their feelings and gain attention. This is among the reasons why adolescents involved in delinquency such as bullying, aggressive behaviour, stealing, robbery, drugs abuse, and prostitution. Moreover, based on fight-or-flight stress theory developed by Walter Cannon in 1932, when individuals have to face strain and stress in their life, they tend to avoid (flight response) the problem if they think that the problem is uncontrollable and is too much for them (Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung & Updagraff, 2000). However, individuals with good level of emotional intelligence will always find alternative ways to solve those problems and get help from people they trust.

According to Child Act 2001, delinquent is a child who is under 18 years old and in relation to criminal proceeding, means an individual who has attained the age of criminal responsibility as prescribed in section 82 of the Penal Code [Act 574]. The Child Act 2001 is “an act to consolidate and amend the laws relating to the care, protection and rehabilitation of children and to provide for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto”. This act applied through Malaysia, which served to consolidate the Juvenile Act Court 1947, the Women and Young Girl Protection Act 1973 and the Child Protection Act 1991. Therefore, adolescents under 18 years old who were involved in juvenile delinquency will be placed in the rehabilitation centres or approved school under the order from court. According to this same act, centre means “ a privately-owned shelter or institution approved by the minister, set up for the care, protection and the rehabilitation of children” while approved school defined as “ a school established or appointed under section 65 and includes a centre”. Commonly in Malaysia, these centres and approved school called as *Asrama Akhlak*, *Asrama Seri Puteri* and *Sekolah Tunas Bakti*.

Juvenile delinquency is a serious problem that needs consistent attention from everyone. Although in United States statistics showed a decline number of juvenile cases between 2006-2009, but delinquency rate in Malaysia fluctuates since 2005 until 2011. Statistics from Department of Social Welfare in Malaysia showed that even though there is a decline in juvenile cases from year 2005 to 2008, but the number is still high and in 2011, 5,547 crime cases were reported (Statistic Report, 2011). Most of the cases were property crimes such as drugs, burglary, vehicles theft, house breaking, theft, bully, and prostitution. Drugs abuse has been the most critical social problem in this country. Statistic from The National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) reported that majority of drug addicts were between 15-40 years old with an average percentage distribution of 85 per cent over the period of 2000-2008 while the total number of drug addicts aged eighteen years old and below is 4667 (Selected Social Statistic Series 12, 2010).

Literature Review

Past studies showed that one of the factors that can influence the level of emotional intelligence among adolescents is the attachment bonding between them, parents and peers. Attachment always been discussed based on attachment theory developed by Bowlby (1969).

Within this theory attachment refers to the affectionate bond or tie between an individual with an attachment figure regardless of time and distance constraints.

Attachment bonds to parents are treated by many adolescents more like ties that restrain rather than ties that anchor and secure, and an important task of them is to develop autonomy power, so they no longer need to rely on the support of parents when they make their own way through to the outside world (Allen & Land, 1999). Moretti & Obsuth (2009) also suggested that insensitive and negative parenting in childhood contributed to insecure attachment and child behavioural problems. However, Hamilton (2000) found that half of the unsecured infants did experience negative life events while still growing but end up to be securely attached adolescents. Perhaps later behavioural problems among adolescents can be avoided if they have a good level of emotional intelligence, which explain that not the insecure attachment itself that affect the behavioural problems among children but it lead the children to become negative thinker and emotionally less intelligent.

According to Brackett, Mayer & Warner (2004), which examined the relationship between attachment, emotional intelligence and routine behaviour among 330 college students, high level of emotional intelligence among students is a result of parental warmth and secured attachment between parents and child. This result explain that better quality of relationship between individuals and their parents will be positively correlated to better level of emotional intelligence and later impact their behaviour. Individual with high emotional intelligence level is always relate to pro-social behaviour while individuals with lower level of emotional intelligence tend to be involved more in smoking behaviour, alcohol consumption, drug abuse, and social deviance. A research done on attachment orientation and emotional intelligence abilities also suggested that secure attachment is positively related to the facilitation, understanding, and managing emotions abilities (Kafetsios, 2004).

By mid adolescence, relationship with peers begin to take on many of the functions that they will serve for the remainder of the lifespan, like providing important sources of intimacy and support, social influence and information, ultimately attachment relationship and lifelong partnership (Allen & Land, 1999) and by late adolescence, long-term relationship such as romantic partner and close friends can be formed among peers (Baumeister, 2005). Only few studies had been done to examine the relation between peer attachment and emotional intelligence compared to parents' attachment and emotional intelligence among delinquents. Moreover, most of researchers were more interested to study the relation between peer or parents attachment on delinquency directly without the intervention of the emotional part of delinquents. However, Rossen & Kranzler (2009) in their research related to peer attachment and emotional intelligence found that peer attachment is only correlate significantly to emotional intelligence after general cognitive ability and personality of the respondents had been controlled but there is no direct relationship between these two variables in their study.

For the past years, many researchers have concentrate on the relationship of emotional intelligence and delinquency or social problems among adolescents (Austin, Saklofske & Egan, 2005; Siu, 2009; Bonab & Koohsarb, 2011). But, most studies did not focus on the adolescents in rehabilitation centres, as this present study. Moreover, previous studies also viewed lack of emotional intelligence as the cause for delinquency but they did not discuss further on the

reasons behind the relationship between these two variables or any ways that can be applied to control the level of emotional intelligence in order to decrease rate of crimes. Therefore, this present study was carried out to investigate on this issue.

Purpose of Study

The main objectives of this study were to determine the relationships between parents' and peers' attachment with the level of emotional intelligence among delinquents in the rehabilitation centres.

Method

There were 203 delinquents aged between 11 to 19 years old from six rehabilitation centres managed by Department of Social Welfare in Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Malacca involved as respondents for this study. Stratified random sampling method was employed to choose sample. Among 203 respondents, 52.9% were males and 47.1 % were females aged between 11 to 19 years old. . Respondents consist of multiracial delinquents (84.6% were Malays, 10.8% were Indians, 2.9% were Chinese and 1.7% were from other ethnic groups).

The Assessing Emotional Scale (AES; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, 1998) or also known as the Emotional Intelligence Scale was used to measure emotional intelligence among respondents. Many past studies have used the AES and reported high values of alpha Cronbach (Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009) while the value of reliability for this present study is 0.89. The second scale used in this study was the revised version of Instrument of Parents and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1989). This scale was used to measure the attachments between parents-adolescents and peers-adolescents. The internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for this present study were 0.88 (mother), 0.88 (father) and 0.78 (peer).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Pearson Correlation showed that there were significant relationship between mother attachment ($r=0.167^*$, $p<0.05$), father attachment ($r=0.196^{**}$, $p<0.01$), and peer attachment ($r=0.328^{**}$, $p<0.01$) with emotional intelligence among delinquents. These findings showed that delinquents who have close attachment with mother, father and peers were more emotionally intelligent compared to those with lack of attachment with parents or peers. Finding on the relationship between parents' attachment and emotional intelligence was in line with the findings from previous researches, which suggested that parents' attachment is positively related to emotional intelligence among adolescents (Kafetsios, 2004). However, in contrast, Rossen & Kranzler (2009) in their study on 150 undergraduates in North Central Florida found that peer attachment did not directly explain the emotional intelligence trait of an individual.

Result of t-test revealed that there was a significant difference in father attachment ($t=2.414^*$, $p<0.05$) between male and female delinquents but not in mother's attachment ($t=1.581$, $p<0.05$) and peers' attachment ($t=-1.409$, $p<0.05$). These findings revealed that

compared to male delinquents (mean=12.96), female delinquents (mean=21.31) were more attached to their fathers but the level of mother and peer attachment for both male and female delinquents were almost similar. However, Song, Thompson & Ferrer (2009) found that females have stronger attachment ties with both fathers and mothers compared to males. Koen (2009) in a study regarding to parent-adolescent relationship and emotional well being also revealed that females experience more secure attachment and closer relationship with family than males.

Findings also showed that there was no difference of emotional intelligence level between male and female delinquents ($t=-0.019$, $p<0.05$). This present finding is in line with a study by Davis (2012), which reported that, no significant difference in emotional intelligence between male and female adolescents. However, most past studies on emotional intelligence reported inconsistent findings with this present research. Naghavi, Redzuan, Asgari & Mirza (2012) found that emotional intelligence between male and female are significantly different. They revealed that male have significantly higher interpersonal skills and can control emotions better than female. Koen (2009) also suggested a similar finding, but this study found that females are more emotionally intelligent compared to males. These findings may be explained by the facts that females are born to be more aware of their own emotions, more sensitive to others' emotion, always demonstrate empathy to others and have more interpersonal skill than males (Watson, 2002) but male and female delinquents in this present study were going through a similar program and environment (rehabilitation institutions under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development) for some period of times. These reasons may cause them to be almost similar in many aspects, including the way they use, control and regulate or react with emotions or the way they attach to people in their surroundings.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, based on the research objectives mentioned earlier, results of this study revealed that delinquents with good attachment with their mother, father and peers were more emotionally intelligent compared to those who were not. However, t-test analysis showed that there were no differences in mothers' attachment, peers' attachment and emotional intelligence between male and female delinquents. Only fathers' attachment was found to be different between male and female respondents. Researchers believed that the unique findings in this present study compared to past studies were contributed by the occurrence because of the different nature and environment of sample studied. However, because of limited past literature reviews delinquents in the rehabilitation centres, comprehensive comparisons with the present findings were inadequate and incomplete. Thus, researchers hope these findings may contribute to additional information on available research.

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