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The Influence of Emotions and Peers on Juvenile Delinquency

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Abstract. In recent years, juvenile delinquency has become a problem with high social attention. Emotional factors and peer influence are crucial determinants of behavioral choices. In order to clarify the impact of emotions and peers on juvenile delinquency, this paper centers on emotional regulation, emotional quotient, peer rejection and deviant peer for analysis based on the document analysis. Research shows that poor emotional management increases the attractive and deviance, which will increase the risk of juvenile delinquency. Peer relation also plays an important role in regulation. A negative influence of peer which is rising the peer rejection and promoting bad feelings. The interaction of emotions and peers' influence shape the cognitive judgement and pattern of behavior together. As the result, the government should enhance the healthy education and emotional guidance, and optimize the association of peer environment, building interventional mechanism around family, school, and society. It is a superior way to manage the emotions and peer environment and intervene the juvenile delinquency, improving the development of healthy socialization.

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency, emotions, peers, criminal psychology

1. Introduction

Juvenile delinquency has become a major social issue worldwide. It attracts considerable attention in families, schools, and society. Some previous research has confirmed that emotional factors and peer relationships are key variables affecting deviant behavior in adolescents. Delinquency associates with emotional regulation, emotional intelligence, and empathy, while poor emotional management and inadequate expression of negative emotions affect juvenile crime. At the same time, deviant behavior recognized peer influence widely as an external risk factors. However, most studies merely concentrate on single factors. Systematic combination of emotional mechanisms and peer effects are never enough. In order to fill this gap, paper examines the relationships between factors and juvenile delinquency, which analyzes the internal psychological mechanisms and external peer-driven processes underlying deviant behavior in adolescents, and then proposes targeted intervention strategies. This study aims to provide theoretical references and practical suggestions for preventing and reducing juvenile delinquency.

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2. Manuscript preparation

2.1. Core concept introduction

Peer influence is the process shaped by similar age and states through adolescents' attitudes, behaviors, emotions, values, and decisionmaking.

Deviant behavior is within a specific society or group in the adolescent research, actions, conduct, or patterns of behavior that violate moral standards, rules, laws, or institutional expectations.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive and manage one's emotions and the emotions of others, as well as to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior.

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to identify, manage, adjust, and control one's own emotional states.

2.2. Emotions, emotional regulation, emotional quotient and juvenile delinquency

In numerous studies, emotions play a vital role in psychological variables is confirmed. Juvenile delinquency has a substantial negative association with emotional regulation, emotional intelligence and emotional feedbacks. A deeper analysis of these psychological mechanisms can help prevent and intervene in the criminal behaviors of teenagers.

2.2.1. Emotional regulation

The ability of adaptive emotional regulation is closely related to active social judgement; it is an effective mental mechanism for reducing the incidence of juvenile delinquency. Adaptive emotional regulation can enhance individuals' level of social adaptation, thereby lowering the risk of peer rejection. Adolescents with strong emotional regulation skills are better able to manage negative emotions, which helps them maintain rational and appropriate behavior when they are facing interpersonal conflicts. Moreover, by responding calmly to social pressures and misunderstandings, they are more likely to establish positive peer relationships and avoid the alienation that often drives vulnerable youth toward deviant peer groups [1]. Oppositely, teenagers who are in well ability of adaptive emotional regulation can treat a plenty of negative stimulation study stress and interpersonal conflicts more rational. As a result, using reasonable way to manage emotions in order to form positive social cognition and behavioral judgement.

Meanwhile, emotional regulation ability has a pronounced impact on juvenile delinquency. As the two key protective factors identified in this literature—emotional regulation ability and empathy—improve, the rate of juvenile delinquency tends to decrease significantly. This may be because these capacities help adolescents navigate social challenges without resorting to antisocial behavior [2]. Therefore, the accumulation of bad behaviors and inappropriate ways of emotional release are the core reasons to push the underaged criminals crime directly. Deficiencies in emotional regulation make it difficult for adolescents to establish effective self-restraint mechanisms and increasing the proportion of irrational behaviors that result from emotional impulsivity. Because of that, Emotion regulation training has proven to be an effective approach to reducing recidivism risk, particularly for offenders whose criminal behavior is impulsive or emotionally driven. However, its effectiveness appears limited for premeditated or instrumentally motivated offenders—such as those who commit offenses for financial gain or ideological reasons—suggesting the need for differentiated intervention strategies [3].

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Further research shows that emotion regulation ability is significantly negatively correlated with juvenile delinquency rates. As emotion regulation ability and empathy improve, juvenile delinquency dramatically decreases .

2.2.2. Emotional intelligence

Research illustrates that emotional intelligence levels influence adolescents' behavioral decision-making tendencies directly. Among at-risk or delinquent adolescent populations, studies have found relatively lower levels of emotional intelligence and empathy, which are associated with heightened tendencies toward both active and reactive aggression. Low emotional intelligence ais primarily manifested in a diminished capacity to regulate adverse emotions and a deficiency in empathy, reducing adolescents' sensitivity to others' feelings. This combination impairs their social cognition and moral reasoning, making them more susceptible to moral disengagement and, consequently, to engaging in rule-breaking or illegal behaviors [4].

The core manifestation of insufficient emotional intelligence is a poor ability to regulate and control negative emotions such as anger, anxiety and irritability, as well as failure to identify and relieve one’s own negative emotions in a timely manner. On the other hand, the lack of empathy makes it difficult for adolescents to perceive others’ emotions and feelings, and deprivies them of respect, care and compassion for others. When facing conflicts, they tend to ignore the consequences of their actions and adopt extreme self-centered means to solve problems, which eventually leads to violations of laws and regulations.

Based on these findings, emotion regulation training has been widely applied in the field of criminal intervention. Practice has proven that such training can effectively reduce the recidivism risk of emotion-driven and impulsive offenders and help them rebuild their emotional control systems. However, its intervention effect remains somewhat limited for certain groups of premeditated and retaliatory offenders.

2.2.3. Negative emotions

The long-term accumulation of negative emotions, coupled with inappropriate outlets such as violence and impulsiveness, becomes a core driving force directly pushing adolescents to commit criminal acts. When adolescents lack basic emotion management skills, they fail to establish effective self-behavior restraint mechanisms. When exposed to external stimuli, they are easily dominated by emotions, engaging in impulsive, irrational and dangerous behaviors that may even cross legal boundaries [5].

2.2.4. Summary

Thus, previous studies have demonstrated that the immaturity of the development of adolescent emotions is an important interior incentive to juvenile delinquency. Paying attention to emotional problem of adolescence and foster them on time by facilitating emotional education and enhancing psychological counselling can help teenagers construct healthy emotional regulation mechanism, and then reduce the rate of crime by emotional outburst.

2.3. Peers and juvenile delinquency

In the numerous factors, peer influence is one of the most stable and the most crucial factor od juvenile delinquency. Peer rejection plays a particularly prominent role in inducing delinquent

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behavior among adolescents as an important risk trigger closely associated with antisocial personality. Adolescence is a critical period for the formation of self-cognition and the shaping of values during individuals who have a strong need for social interaction yet weak independent judgment. Peer rejection experienced in childhood leaves a profound psychological imprint, and it undermines adolescents' sense of self-worth and social belonging. Through some former mechanisms, these early experiences continue to shape social choices and behavioral trajectories well into adolescence.

2.3.1. Peer rejection

Research indicates the more severe peer rejection in childhood, the stronger an individual's feelings of loneliness and abandonment become. In pursuit of a sense of belonging and identity, such individuals are often more likely to actively associate with deviant peers. They gradually engage in rule-breaking and illegal acts during childhood or adolescence, and may even sink into the quagmire of crime influenced by these peers. Over time, repeated experiences of social exclusion can erode their trust in mainstream social norms and legitimate interpersonal relationships, pushing them further toward groups that validate their negative emotions. Once immersed in such deviant circles, adolescents tend to gradually abandon conventional behavioral standards and accept antisocial conduct as a normal way of gaining recognition and social connection [6].

2.3.2. The harm on deviant behavior

Deviant peer groups usually develop a distorted value system and rationalize and normalize deviant behavior through mutual reinforcement. Within such groups, members imitate and encourage one another, regarding misconduct such as truancy, fighting, and gradually lose respect for laws and regulations. This group effect promotes the spread of minor misconduct such as substance abuse and physical altercations, and also escalates into some serious criminal offenses [7]. Meanwhile, the level of tolerance for deviance within a group is correlated with the probability of criminal behavior: the higher the tolerance of the group for deviance, the less restrained individual behavior becomes, which generates the greater the risk of illegal and criminal acts.

2.3.3. The distortion of adolescents' self-identity and situational definition

The harm of peer influence can also reflect in the distortion of adolescents' self-identity and situational definition. Adolescents gradually adopt the behavioral norms of the peer group and internalize deviant conduct as their own habits through long-term peer interaction. Behavior may escalate gradually into serious crimes under the group's influence although peers initially display only minor deviance. This escalation is pronounced in contexts particularly where protective factors are absent: family supervision provides direct monitoring and correction of behavior; school discipline reinforces prosocial norms; and broader social guidance offers adolescents legitimate role models and behavioral expectations. Deviant peer norms fill the void without the buffers. This subtle influence is often more concealed and harmful than direct enticement, gradually eroding adolescents' correct values and leading them unknowingly toward the abyss of crime.

2.3.4. Trajectory

Peer influence also plays a crucial role in the development of trajectory of juvenile delinquency. Late-onset adolescents often observe and imitate the behavioral patterns of early-onset delinquent

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peers, which increases their own impulsivity and makes them more prone to illegal and rule-breaking acts. Notably, although early-onset adolescents generally outperform late-onset ones in indicators such as cognitive rhythm, impulse control, and depressive emotion regulation, their modeling and induction of late-onset peers still exacerbate the occurrence of juvenile delinquency [8].

Adolescents generally lack self-control, experience intense emotional fluctuations, and are susceptible to external environments. Consequently, they struggle to firmly resist misconduct when tempted by peers and are easily led into illegal and criminal behavior [9]. Furthermore, with the popularization of the internet, deviant online behavior has further strengthened adolescent delinquency. Many adolescents spread negative behaviors inappropriate information online without realizing the harm of their actions, and even viewing such behavior as "entertainment". These online misbehaviors not only reinforce distorted value systems but also contribute to a process of group polarization, wherein adolescents within shared online spaces increasingly validate and escalate one another's deviant attitudes. This dynamic amplifies the negative effects of peer influence at scale, lowering the threshold for engaging in real-world delinquent behavior and raising the overall risk of juvenile offending [10].

2.3.5. Summary

In conclusion, as the core driving factor of juvenile delinquency, peer influence operates throughout multiple stages of adolescent development. Peer rejection, group tolerance, insufficient self-control, and adverse online environments further intensify such negative impacts. Therefore, guiding adolescents to establish a correct view of friendship, strengthening collaborative supervision by families, schools, and society, purifying the online environment are essential to effectively curb the negative effects of peer influence and prevent juvenile delinquency.

3. Discussion and suggestion

This study reveals that emotional factors and peer influence shape juvenile delinquency jointly. Deficient emotional regulation and low emotional intelligence weaken adolescents' self-control, empathy, and social cognition, and finally leads to impulsive, aggressive, and even illegal behaviors, while peer rejection pushes vulnerable young people to affiliate with deviant peer groups where antisocial norms are normalized and deviant behaviors are reinforced. At the same time, negative online environments further amplify these harmful peer effects. In order to address these problems, comprehensive preventive and intervention measures must be implemented. Initially, schools and families should strengthen emotional education to improve adolescents' emotional management skills and empathy. In terms of the reduction of peer rejection and the promotion of positive peer rejection, peer guidance mechanisms should be established. Moving on to the online environment, it should be purified to curb the spread of harmful content and deviant peer influence. Finally, differentiated intervention strategies should be implemented for emotionally motivated impulsive offenders and premeditated offenders respectively.

4. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the influencing mechanism of emotional factors and peer relationships on juvenile delinquency. It concludes that insufficient emotional regulation and low emotional intelligence are important internal causes, while peer rejection and the influence of deviant peers are

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essential external drivers. The combined effect of internal and external factors increases the likelihood of deviant behavior in adolescents significantly. Based on these conclusions, this study proposes multidimensional preventive recommendations from the areas of emotional education, peer guidance, family-school-society collaboration, and online environment governance. This research enriches the theoretical understanding of the formation mechanism of juvenile delinquency and provides practical intervention pathways to reduce illegal and rule-breaking behaviors among adolescents. It also offers a reference for future research on the integrated prevention of juvenile delinquency.

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