

The Self-Perception of Delinquent Children in Turkey

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Abstract: This study identified the level of self-perception in delinquent children and determined the factors that may influence their self-perceptions. The study sample includes 206 children were aged 12 to 15 and included juvenile delinquents (n = 103) and non-delinquents (n= 103) in Ankara in Turkey. The data were collected via the General Information Form and Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents. Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents has nine dimensions as scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioral conduct, close friendship, global self-worth. The data was analyzed via MANOVA, ANOVA. The findings of this study indicate that some self-perception dimension vary depending on the age and gender of the child ($p < .01$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, for delinquent children migration affected some self-perception dimension ($p < .01$, $p < .05$).

Key words: Delinquency, self-perception, delinquent children, migration

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence can be a very difficult time. The onset of adolescence is marked by many physiological changes as well as new behavior patterns, attitudes and reactions. In order to cope with these tremendous changes, adolescents need to support of understanding parents. Otherwise, their social and emotional development may be hampered by poor familial communication, a deep yearning for independence and a great effort for self-assertion (Alonzo, 1989; Demuth and Brown, 2004). During this difficult period, adolescents usually value their peers more than their family and they let their behavior be shaped by their peers as well (Rebellion, 2006). When faced with negative feelings such as loneliness, anxiety or depression, socio-economic problems and self-affirmation efforts, cope with problems, relax, or merely out of peer pressure, adolescents may resort to crime (Buchholz and Catton, 1999; Olsson *et al.*, 2006).

There has been increasing concern, both by the police and the general public on the increasing seriousness of adolescent crime and conduct problems. Although greater emphasis has been placed on educating the young to prevent them from going astray, the reasons resulting in adolescents becoming delinquent are still not

very clear. Some studies of personality profiles of delinquent children may be found in the literature. In recent years, researchers have paid more attention to the self-perception, crime and delinquency in adolescence. The link between self-esteem and delinquency is currently being debated by researchers and in the popular media (Baumeister *et al.*, 2000; DuBois and Tevendale, 1999; Donnellan *et al.*, 2006). Researchers on one side of the debate have argued that individuals with low self-esteem are prone to real-world externalizing problems such as delinquency and antisocial behavior (Donnellan *et al.*, 2005; Fergusson and Horwood, 2002; Sprott and Doob, 2000). However, others have questioned this claim, noting that several studies have failed to find a relation between low self-esteem and delinquency and antisocial behavior or between low global self-esteem and laboratory measures of aggression (Twenge and Campbell, 2003; Rosenberg *et al.*, 1989).

Statistics have shown a rise in juvenile delinquency by almost 40-60% in the past decade in Turkey (Hancý and Ege, 1993; Dizman *et al.*, 2005; Gürpýnar, 1994). As adolescents are the future leaders of tomorrow, we are highly concerned with the rising adolescent conduct problems and crime rates in Turkey and hope that with a greater understanding of this subject, we will be able to highlight the importance of migration and concern in the development of children. Many studies have been

done on the negative effects of migration on adolescent delinquency (Karagöz and Demirein, 1996; Aydın *et al.*, 2005). This study identified the level of self-perception and characteristics in delinquent children and determined the factors (age, gender and migration) that may influence their self-perceptions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Population and sample: The study sample includes 206 children were aged 12 to 15 and included juvenile delinquents (n = 103) and non-delinquents (n = 103) in Ankara in Turkey. Juvenile delinquents were admitted to Ankara Courthouse, Child Department. The second group was of the same age and sex of those in the first group, admitted to school in Ankara in Turkey.

Instruments: In order to collect data Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, developed by Harter in 1988 were employed. It has nine dimensions; scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioral conduct, close friendship, global self-worth (Harter, 1988). Şahin and Güvenç (1996) analyzed the validity and reliability of this scale with in Turkey.

Application: The implementation of the study was undertaken with the consent of the Ankara Courthouse, Public Prosecutors. First, it was applied to delinquent children. Children were asked to respond honestly and

were given the option to remain anonymous if they so wished. The same process was carried out with school children who were of the same age and sex of those in the first group.

Data analysis: The data were assessed using SPSS 10.0 (Statistical Package For Social Science) and analyzed via one-way analysis of variance, two-way analysis of variance. We analyzed the self-perception score of delinquent and non-delinquent children based on their age and gender according to two-way analysis of variance. The one-way analysis of variance of the delinquent children was based on the migration. For cases where a difference was identified among groups subject to the variance analysis, the Scheffe Test was employed with the aim of finding out the grading based on the degree of importance involved in these differences (Büyükoztürk, 2002).

RESULTS

In relation with self-perception, Table 1 shows a significant difference between the delinquent and non-delinquent children at a rate of .01 (p<.01) in terms of Scholastic Competence (SC), Social Acceptance (SA), Athletic Competence (AC), Global Self-worth (GSw), Close Friendship (CF) and Romantic Appeal (RA) and at a rate of .05 (p<.05) in terms of Physical Appearance (PA). The score averages note that the score averages of delinquent children are lower than those of non-delinquent children

Table 1: Variance analysis for delinquent and non-delinquent children based on age

		Self-perception Scores M±SD																	
Group/age	n	SC	SA	AC	PA	GSw	CF	BC	RA	JC									
Delinquent children																			
12years	12	6.67±2.02	6.33±1.92	7.75±1.60	6.50±2.02	5.67±2.23	10.75±1.66	7.25±1.60	6.92±1.62	6.75±1.55									
13years	14	9.36±1.60	8.71±1.77	10.14±1.61	7.86±1.61	6.07±2.20	11.50±1.99	7.86±2.11	6.29±1.64	7.64±1.98									
14years	26	9.85±1.64	9.85±1.87	9.92±1.90	8.00±1.88	7.11±2.53	11.38±2.55	8.65±1.92	6.08±2.13	7.62±2.08									
15years	51	9.96±2.40	10.86±2.74	10.98±2.57	8.69±1.87	8.16±2.46	11.51±2.52	10.80±2.62	6.22±2.20	9.06±3.40									
Total	103	9.47±2.31	9.79±2.73	10.22±2.40	8.15±1.96	7.32±2.57	11.39±2.36	9.45±2.66	6.27±2.04	8.23±2.87									
Delinquent children																			
12years	12	9.92±1.78	0.08±1.68	7.25±1.60	7.25±2.18	8.33±2.57	8.67±1.67	7.42±2.15	9.17±1.19	6.92±1.51									
13years	14	10.57±1.60	10.07±2.27	8.57±1.50	8.21±2.64	11.50±2.31	8.64±1.34	8.57±2.24	10.43±2.79	8.86±2.85									
14years	26	11.62±2.16	10.80±3.36	8.65±1.79	9.50±2.34	10.89±3.06	9.23±2.08	9.08±2.26	12.38±1.60	8.58±2.89									
15years	51	10.41±2.54	11.27±2.64	9.84±2.09	9.35±2.28	7.92±2.50	11.53±2.09	9.69±1.57	13.16±1.09	8.98±2.47									
Total	103	10.68±2.30	10.85±2.72	9.07±2.06	8.99±2.42	9.20±3.02	10.22±2.34	9.12±2.04	12.12±8.00	8.62±2.59									
Genera																			
12years	24	8.29±2.49	8.21±2.60	7.50±1.59	6.88±2.09	7.00±2.72	9.71±1.94	7.33±1.86	8.04±1.80	6.83±1.49									
13years	28	9.96±1.69	9.39±2.11	9.36±1.73	8.04±2.15	8.79±3.54	10.07±2.21	8.21±2.17	8.36±3.08	8.25±2.49									
14years	52	10.73±2.10	10.33±2.73	9.29±1.93	8.75±2.23	9.00±3.37	10.31±2.55	8.87±2.09	9.23±3.69	8.10±2.54									
15years	102	10.19±2.47	11.07±2.68	10.41±2.40	9.02±2.10	8.04±2.47	11.52±2.30	10.25±2.22	9.69±8.69	9.02±2.96									
Total	206	10.07±2.38	10.32±2.77	9.65±2.30	8.57±2.24	8.26±2.95	10.81±2.41	9.28±2.37	9.19±6.52	8.43±2.74									
Variance analysis results																			
Groups	df	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p
Ag	3	7.04**	.00	9.78**	.00	14.11**	.00	7.44**	.00	4.12*	.01	7.63**	.00	16.87**	.00	.75	.53	4.84**	.00
Groupsx	3	3.07*	.03	2.84*	.04	.3	.82	.61	.61	13.10**	.00	5.16**	.00	2.40	.07	1.28	.28	70	.55
Age																			
Error	198																		

Table 2: Variance analysis for delinquent and non delinquent children based on gender

		Self perception scores M±SD																		
Group/gender	n	SC	SA	AC	PA	GSw	CF	BC	RA	JC										
Delinquent children																				
Girl	21	9.10±2.61	8.24±1.73	9.95±3.20	8.14±2.46	6.38±2.54	10.00±1.73	8.19±2.64	5.76±2.02	8.76±3.33										
Boy	82	9.56±2.23	10.18±2.81	10.29±2.17	8.15±1.83	7.56±2.53	11.74±2.37	9.77±2.59	6.40±2.04	8.10±2.75										
Total	103	9.47±2.31	9.79±2.73	10.22±2.40	8.15±1.96	.32±2.57	11.39±2.36	9.45±2.66	6.27±2.04	8.23±2.87										
Delinquent children																				
Gir	21	9.24±1.81	10.57±2.27	8.24±2.23	9.52±2.66	9.10±3.45	8.90±1.58	8.43±1.94	11.33±2.74	7.81±1.36										
Boy	82	11.05±2.28	10.93±2.83	9.28±1.98	8.85±2.35	9.23±2.92	10.56±2.39	9.29±2.03	12.33±8.87	8.83±2.79										
Tota	103	10.68±2.30	10.85±2.72	9.07±2.06	8.99±2.42	9.20±3.02	10.22±2.34	9.12±2.04	12.12±8.01	8.62±2.59										
General																				
Girl	42	9.17±2.22	9.40±2.32	9.10±2.86	8.83±2.62	7.74±3.29	9.45±1.73	8.31±2.29	8.55±3.69	8.29±2.56										
Boy	164	10.30±2.37	10.55±2.83	9.79±2.13	8.50±2.13	8.40±2.85	11.15±2.45	9.53±2.33	9.37±7.07	8.46±2.79										
Total	206	10.07±2.38	10.32±2.77	9.65±2.31	8.57±2.24	8.26±2.95	10.81±2.41	9.28±2.37	9.20±6.52	8.43±2.74										
Variance analysis results																				
	df	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p			
Groups	1	4.38*	.04	11.04**	.00	12.52**	.00	7.51*	.01	20.56**	.008	.53**	.00	.08	.77	32.18**	.00	.06	.82	
Gender	1	8.53**	.00	6.17*	.01	3.22	.07	.77	.381	.85	.18	18.99**	.009	.22	.00	.65	.42	.14	.71	
Groups	1	2.98	.09	2.94	.09	.83	.36	.78	.381	.16	.28	.01	.91	.79	.38	.03	.86	3.19	.08	
XGender																				
Error	202																			

in terms of Scholastic Competence (SC M: 9.47), Social Acceptance (SA M: 9.79), Physical Appearance (PA M: 8.15), Global Self-worth (GSw M: 7.32), Romantic Appeal (RA M: 6.27) and Job Competence (JC M: 8.23).

Findings concerning age show that the age of the child create a meaningful difference in terms of Scholastic Competence (SC), Social Acceptance (SA), Athletic Competence (AC), Physical Appearance (PA), Close Friendship (CF), Behavioral Conduct (BC), Job Competence (JC) ($p < .01$) and Global Self-worth (GSw) ($p < .05$). The score averages show that the self-perception scores in terms of Social Acceptance (SA M: 11.07), Athletic Competence (AC M: 10.41), Physical Appearance (PA M: 9.02), Close Friendship (CF M: 11.52), Behavioral Conduct (BC M: 10.25), Romantic Appeal (RA M: 9.69) and Job Competence (JC M: 9.02) are at the highest level in children at the age of fifteen. It further notes that the scores in terms of Social Acceptance (SA), Physical Appearance (PA), Close Friendship (CF), Behavioral Conduct (BC) and Romantic Appeal (RA) increase in proportion with age.

The interaction between delinquency and age create a significant difference in scores of self-perception in terms of Scholastic Competence (SC), Social Acceptance (SA) ($p < .05$), Global Self-worth (GSw) and Close Friendship (CF) ($p < .01$).

The findings in Table 2 show that the gender of the child create a significant difference in scores in terms of Scholastic Competence (SC), Close Friendship (CF), behavioral conduct (BC) ($p < .01$) and social acceptance (SA) ($p < .05$).

The score averages reveal that the averages of the scores of boys are higher than those of girls in terms of Scholastic Competence (SC M: 10.30), social acceptance

(SA M: 10.55), Athletic Competence (AC M: 9.79), Global Self-worth (GSw M: 8.40), Close Friendship (CF M: 11.15), Behavioral Conduct (BC M: 9.53), Romantic Appeal (RA M: 9.37) and Job Competence (JC M: 8.46) while only the Physical Appearance (PA M: 8.83) score averages of girls are higher than those of boys.

It's been concluded that the interaction between delinquency and gender does not result in any meaningful difference in the scores in terms of self-perception ($p > .05$).

The study further reviews the self-perceptions of delinquent children in terms of migration. It's been noted that the migration create a significant difference in scores in terms of Scholastic Competence (SC), Social Acceptance (SA) ($p < .01$) and Behavioral Conduct (BC) ($p < .05$). It's noteworthy that 97 out of 103 delinquent children are children who came to Ankara via domestic migration. Particularly, the children who migrated to Ankara from Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia Regions have the lowest self-perception scores in terms of scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, global self-worth, behavioral conduct and job competence.

DISCUSSION

Although it is unpleasant to express the terms "child" and "crime" together, juvenile delinquency is still one of the major problems in many countries (Pellegrini *et al.*, 2000). Recent studies revealed that childhood delinquency has tended to increase not only in developing countries but also in many developed countries. Theft, purse-snatching, violent behavior, sexual crimes, drug abuse and truancy come out as being the top delinquencies (Loeber and Farrington, 2000;

Madsen *et al.*, 2001; Taylor *et al.*, 2001). As laws and regulations of different countries are shaped according to their own social, cultural and political experiences, the age of criminal responsibility varies in each country. Turkish law system evaluates juvenile delinquency according to three different age-group categories:

- If the child is younger than 11 years old at the time of the committed crime, he/she is not considered as being responsible for his/her act.
- If the child is between 12 and 15 years old, the child is examined by an expert for his/her psychological status for the responsibility of the crime.
- If the child is between 16 and 18 years old, punishments are applied with some reductions (Ozan *et al.*, 2005).

This study identified the level of self-perception and characteristics in delinquent children and determined the factors that may influence their self-perceptions. Our study of a total 103 juvenile offenders, 82 (79.6%) were boys, 21 (20.4%) were girls and 97 (94.17%) were immigrants. Of these juveniles, 11.7% were 12, 13.6% were 13, 25.2% were 14 and 49.5% were 15 years old when they committed offence.

This study reveals that delinquent children have lower self-perception than non-delinquent children. In adolescence, it's important for the adolescent to know the perceptions of others about him/her. Self-affirmation efforts, inability to foresee the consequences of his/her actions, the search for excitement may result in some devastating behaviors. Adolescent may leave the rules aside and show problem behaviors that can be defined as crimes. Our findings are supported by many studies noting that the self perception of delinquent children is more negative than that of non-delinquent children (Baumeister *et al.*, 2005; Suner, 2000; Öztürk, 2005; Küçükaksoy, 1993; Maxwell, 2002; Warr and Stafford, 1991). The increase in self perception scores in proportion with age may be due to more accurate self assessment of the child as a consequence of the increase in the cognitive skills of the child together with his/her growth and development. Many studies on this subject note that self perception display more positive features together with the increasing age (Donnellan *et al.*, 2005; Rosenberg *et al.*, 1989; Aydın *et al.*, 2005; Şahin and Güvenç, 1996; Ynanç, 1997). The social structure of the society in Turkey result in different raising of boys and girls and within this context, boys are more independent inside and outside home. This fact may trigger the boys to join various peer groups, to be affected negatively and to be more delinquent (Hancý and Ege, 1993;

Aydın *et al.*, 2005; Özen *et al.*, 2005). There are findings in literature which reveal that boys are more delinquent than girls (Aydın *et al.*, 2004; Özen *et al.*, 2005; Farrington and Loeber, 2000; Rantakillio *et al.*, 1995).

Migration is a great reason for the pressure on children and adolescents and generally creates difficulties in adaptation to a new environment and making new friends. Domestic migration brings about some social problems. Problems such as failures in urban services, unemployment, inadaptability of immigrants in society and inter-culture conflicts may be experienced due to increase in squatter's houses.

It's noted that migration and increase in squatter's houses bring social tensions, conflicts between social groups and particularly crimes against properties in big cities (Yçli and Ozan, 1992). Children and adults migrating from rural areas to the cities bring their older behaviors and habits, traditions and customs together with them, may find the urban values odd and may even sometimes experience conflicts. This inadaptability may negatively influence the self perceptions of children and factors such as self-affirmation, imitation of their rural peers and insubordination against authority may lead the children to crime as a reaction. Juvenile delinquency in families suffering from social isolation mostly reveals itself as an attempt of rebellion and protest of environment (Hanci *et al.*, 1993).

Juvenile delinquency is generally considered incorrectly as an individual concept and social aspects of the case is not effectively taken into account. However, some children may perform activities that can be considered as crime in order to reach the standard of the group. The success of juvenile delinquency mitigation efforts depends on considering the crimes in relation with group behaviors rather than individual acts. Involvement of professional gangs in concepts of juvenile delinquency that has been increasing recently in our country shows the necessity to take the issue into account on a larger scale. Public investments should be made and support of non-governmental organizations should be provided in order to produce child focused crime avoidance programs. It should be noted that inadequate programs will fail to solve the problem and merely result in waste of labor, money and time. Violence should not be encouraged in mass communication tools which have a significant place in socialization of the child as much as the family has. The reasons behind the domestic migration should be studied, the conditions producing the migration should be improved and subsequently the pace of migration to big cities should be reduced.

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