



PERSPECTIVES ON COPING MECHANISMS IN ADOLESCENT TEENAGERS

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Abstract

Juvenile delinquency is due to the inability of the adolescent to adapt satisfactorily to the environment by adopting dysfunctional coping strategies. The improvement of delinquent vulnerabilities is done by learning new coping strategies following the application of a psychological intervention program. In this article we present the data of the ascertaining experiment regarding the results obtained following the application of a psychological intervention program regarding the improvement of dysfunctional coping strategies in delinquent adolescents. The effectiveness of the psychological intervention program demonstrates the validity of those theories of personality that claim that the individual is capable of change and that coping styles can be learned. These factors are involved in the perpetration of juvenile delinquency and therefore psychological intervention programs can change the destinies of young people who, in this way, have increased chances of adequate, non-delinquent adaptation to social life.

Keywords: *adolescence, delinquency, dysfunctional coping.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The behavior of the juvenile delinquent often reflects the status and socio-professional category (age, sex, presence of criminal record in other family members, schooling, family composition), convergence or divergence from work rules, family relations (antagonistic or conciliatory, homelessness), race, religion, individual conception of existence (follower of sociability or individualism), behavioral disorders (caused by physical or mental accidents), the existence of the normalizing law and the possibility of its categorical application, the stage of one's own morality and even the ways of coping. The aggression phenomenon represents a concrete social existence, determined by the objective and subjective interactions,

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respectively by the way of reflecting the environment, through cognitions as well as by the way of elaborating the response relationship by the individual.

The trend of primary control refers to the attempts of individuals to change the external world so as to suit their personal needs and desires. Typical examples of primary control efforts are persistence in objectification efforts or investment of time and effort if obstacles arise. The tendency for secondary control, in contrast, is directed toward the inner world and involves the efforts of individuals to influence their own motivation, emotion, and mental representation (Rothbaum et al., 1982). Exemplary secondary control processes include positive reassessment, bottom-up comparison, award bias, or disengagement of objectives.

Heckhausen and Schulz (Wrosch, Heckhausen, & Lachman, 2000) developed a theory of lifelong control that proposes age-specific trajectories for primary control potential, primary control effort, and secondary control effort. The ability to achieve results, ie the potential for primary control, is expected to increase during childhood and early adolescence, to remain stable in adulthood and to decrease in old age.

Instead, individuals' efforts for primary control should remain stable throughout their lives, so that individuals are motivated to produce behavior-event contingencies throughout life. Compensatory secondary control efforts are expected to develop in middle childhood and then increase throughout life. Extensive use of compensatory secondary control as we age should help the individual compensate for developmental failure and loss that is more commonly experienced at older ages.

In most etiological models of delinquency there is at least one emphasis on stressors. How stressors contribute to delinquency. According to the general theory of social pressure (Merton, Ogien, 2002, Agnew, 2001), a pressure is a "situation in which the individual is not treated in the way he would like to be treated" (p.48). Objective pressures are events or conditions considered antagonistic by almost all members of a group. Subjective pressures are events or conditions that displease the individual experiencing them. The pressure of both types increases the possibility of negative emotional outcomes. Pressure theory suggests that delinquent activity reduces the pressure caused by exposure to negative stimuli. Because the coping literature uses both the terms "pressure" and "stress" for consistency, the term stress will be used for the cumulative experience caused by exposure to stressors.

We support the views that promote the idea that young people who are subjected to a range of stressors in the environment must develop coping skills. The importance of coping skills when faced with stressors is highlighted by the fact that most young people who grow up in high-risk environments overcome difficulties, lead a productive and crime-free life and are neither criminals nor pathologists.

Coping as a moderator and mediator. Exposure to environmental stressors such as poverty, the violent environment, poor parents and parental abuse and trauma do not directly create negative psychological and behavioral outcomes such as psychopathology and delinquency, but rather the assessed outcomes are associated with stressors and stress through mediation and moderation. Coping has been

conceptualized as a possible link in the relationship between stressors, psychopathology and delinquency. Coping can directly protect individuals from the negative influences of stressors, by eliminating or changing the source of stress, or indirectly by changing the way individuals respond to stressors that cannot be eliminated (Zeidner and Sakalofske, 1996).

Coping as a moderator. As a moderator, coping is seen as pre-existing, so the association between stress and psychopathology depends on what type of coping the individual tends to adopt. Sandler, Tein, and West (1994) suggested a model of stress relief moderation, according to which the relationship between stressors and negative outcomes is attenuated when an individual uses effective coping strategies. In contrast, moderating stress amplification suggests that the influence of stressors would increase when an inefficient coping strategy increase. Their findings indicated the active approach (namely, decision-making through cognitive strategies, direct problem solving, seeking support, and cognitive restructuring) as a moderator of the relationship between parental divorce and behavioral problems.

A model of mediating coping assumes that this is a flexible intervention process, which is directly influenced by the stress factor and which subsequently leads to the psychological outcome. Thus, the specific coping behavior generates the result and is not only associated with it. Complete mediation is a strong assumption, namely that once coping has been controlled, the relationship between stressors and the psychological outcome disappears completely. Partial mediation would suggest that a control of coping behavior would significantly reduce the relationship between the stressor and the outcome.

2. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research focuses on identifying the peculiarities of personality and delinquent behavior in adolescents, studying the level of their manifestations at the time (current area).

2.2 HYPOTHESES

- In this research we stated the following general hypothesis: we assume that the psycho-social and clinical profile of the delinquent adolescent is different from that of the non-delinquent adolescent, and the manifestations, levels and dynamics of delinquent behavior in adolescents are determined by a complex of intrinsic factors. , related to their personality data (personality traits, clinical profile and determining the degree to which a particular person fits or not the prototype personality with delinquent pattern), as well as extrinsic factors

(demographic data, family and social environment, level economic, level of education).

- The operational hypothesis is defined by the fact that delinquent adolescents use different coping strategies than non-delinquent ones.

3. METHOD

Sample description: The research sample consisted of 210 adolescents aged 14 to 17 years at the start of the research. The socio-demographic aspects of the structure are: sex, age, environment of origin, type of family, presence of delinquency in the family, material situation, school situation, number of classes graduated. The 210 teenagers were divided into two sub-groups: 102 delinquent teenagers, investigated by the police for criminal offenses and sent to the Ilfov Psychiatric Forensic Expert Commission to establish discernment about the deed and 108 teenage students at high schools in Ilfov County.

The place of examination of the sub-group of delinquent adolescents was the Ilfov Forensic Medicine Service, the Ilfov County Police Inspectorate and the Ilfov County Emergency Clinical Hospital.

The data from the criminal investigation files, the social investigations, the transcripts, the observations regarding the environment (family, relatives, school, local administration), the interview, the data from the files of the psychiatric forensic expertise commissions from Ilfov county, the psychological examinations were used. carried out by the expert commissions.

The interpreted data were structured according to the following investigated dimensions:

1. biographical data (age, gender, environment of origin, level of education);
2. judicial status (type of crime, age of first offense, recidivism);
3. family structure (type, material level, presence of delinquency)
4. psychological and psychopathological peculiarities that resulted from the examinations and applied psychological tests.

3.1 PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS

The tool used to evaluate the coping mechanisms in the two subgroups of adolescents was the CERQ test. The cognitive-emotional coping assessment questionnaire is a multidimensional questionnaire, built to identify cognitive-emotional coping strategies, which a person uses after experiencing certain events or negative situations. A high score may indicate frequent use of that item as a cognitive coping strategy. A low score indicates less use of this strategy. The CERQ questionnaire measures the frequency of use of certain strategies, through 9 evaluation scales:

1. Self-blame - refers to the thoughts by which we blame ourselves for what happened.

2. Acceptance - refers to the thoughts by which we resign ourselves to what happened
3. Ruminating - we constantly think about the feelings and ideas associated with the negative event.
4. Positive refocusing - we think about pleasant things and not about the event itself
5. Refocusing on planning - we think about the steps we will follow to deal with the event;
6. Positive re-evaluation - through which we think to assign a positive meaning to the event, in terms of a personal development;
7. Putting in perspective - thoughts that minimize the severity of the event, when compared to other events;
8. Catastrophes - we explicitly emphasize the terror caused by the event
9. Guilt - we think of blaming others for what happened.

3.2 PROCEDURE

Description of the procedure. Following the training of the research participants, the evaluation questionnaires of the studied construct (coping mechanism) were applied. Participants were instructed to read the sentences given and to indicate how often they had certain thoughts, circling the most appropriate answer for each item of the scales. They were told that all options were correct. The way to complete the scales was pencil-paper. The completion of the scales was done without time limit.

Description of variables. The cognitive dimension of coping is not the only one that exists. Coping is a process that can take the form of behaviors, emotions, cognitions, physiological reactions. It is a mixture of emotions, behaviors, cognitions, and to intervene effectively we need all the pieces of the puzzle (cognitions, emotions, behaviors, physiological reactions of the body). It is not enough to know the cognitive dimension of coping and to ignore the behavioral or emotional one. It is less common for a person to use exclusively cognitive or exclusively behavioral coping. The coping strategies used by a person in a situation are rather complementary. It interferes in that person's attempt to deal with the problems they face, and in order for the intervention to be as effective as possible, the other dimensions of coping must be investigated, taking into account especially the relationship between cognitions, behaviors and emotions.

4. RESULTS

Description of results. Following the application of the CERQ test on coping strategies, it was found that the coping style of type Self-blame, the average response of delinquent adolescents was $MD = 4.51$ and a standard deviation of 2,119, which

indicates a low level score and shows that in the face of negative events, such as exposure to the police investigation is not responsible for the situation experienced, the blame is attributed to those around him and there are no concerns about thoughts that relate to the mistakes he may have made. Non-delinquent adolescents indicated responses with a mean MnD = 8.35 to a standard deviation of 1.75 (Table 1). These scores for non-offenders indicate an average level. Between the averages obtained by the two subgroups there are statistically significant differences, according to Table no.2 in which $t = -14,480$ and $p = 0.0001$.

In the Coping style Acceptance, scores were obtained for the group of delinquent adolescents with an average of MD = 8.31 and a standard deviation of 1.67 which determines an average level, in which these adolescents adopt, but not frequently, this style of coping. which consists in thoughts due to which we resign ourselves to what happened and accept the situation, thinking that it can no longer be changed and that life goes on. And the group of non-delinquent teenagers get here also an average level score MnD = 8.94 at a standard deviation of 2,029. There is no statistically significant difference between the results of the two groups, obtaining a score $t = -2,415$ and a $p = 0.17$.

The Ruminating coping style records as scores in delinquent adolescents an average MD = 2.99 at a standard deviation of 1,039 which falls to a very low level and shows us that these adolescents never use preoccupied with the feelings and thoughts they associate with an event negative, not taking responsibility. The group of non-delinquents obtain scores with an average of MnD = 7.43 and a standard deviation of 2,383, being also at a level below average that indicates the frequent non-adoption of this style of coping. But between the two groups there are statistically significant differences with a score $t = -17.303$ and $p = 0.0001$.

Regarding the coping style Positive refocusing, the group of delinquent adolescents obtain low level scores, the average being MD = 5.14 at a standard deviation of 2,044. These scores show that delinquents have a low level of emotional well-being, compared to non-delinquent adolescents whose scores reach an average of MnD = 8.99 and a standard deviation of 2,934. Between the two coping styles there are statistically significant differences between groups with $t = -10,977$ and $p = 0.0001$.

The refocusing on planning coping registers in the group of delinquents an average level with an average MD = 9.03 and a standard deviation of 3.222, close to the scores obtained by the group of non-delinquents, which fall in the same level MnD = 9.13, between the two groups, there being no statistical differences $t = -.222$ and $p = .824$. Not all of these young people often choose to think about the steps they need to take to deal with a negative event or when they think of a plan to change a situation.

The coping style Positive Reassess records as scores in delinquent adolescents an average MD = 5.18 to a standard deviation of 2,203 which falls to a low level and shows us that these adolescents are never concerned with this style of coping, not

assuming and responsibility. The group of non-delinquents obtain scores with an average of $MnD = 9.24$ and a standard deviation of 4,207, being also at an average level that indicates the adoption of this style of coping. But between the two groups there are statistically significant differences with a score $t = -17,303$ and $p = 0.0001$.

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In the coping style, the average perspective of delinquent adolescents was $MD = 2.17$, at a standard deviation of 1,014, a very low level score. Perspective refers to those thoughts that reduce the severity of the event, by comparison with other events and emphasizes that there are more serious things in the world. A low score indicates the use of this strategy to a lesser extent in delinquent adolescents. The non-delinquent group obtains an average of $MnD = 10.21$ with a standard deviation of 4,277 and an above average level, indicating that they frequently use this style of coping. We found significant differences between the two groups of adolescents at this factor $MD = 2.17$, $MnD = 10.21$ with $t = -18.502$ and $p = 0.0001$.

Analyzing the Catastrophic type coping we identify in the group of delinquents an average $MD = 1.81$ with a standard deviation of only 0.87 which indicates as an extremely low level and shows that these young people do not use in the face of a negative event, almost not in the recurrent type of thinking how terrible the event was and the fact that it is the most cruel / terrible thing that could happen, that it is much worse than what happened to others. But non-delinquent adolescents identify with this style of thinking by obtaining an average of $MnD = 7.09$ and a standard deviation of 2.74. Between the two coping styles there are statistically significant differences between groups with $t = -18.584$ and $p = 0.0001$.

Adolescent delinquents most often adopt as a coping style the responsibility of others for what happened. Blaming others occurs when we blame others for what happened to us, when we hold others responsible for what happened, and / or when we think about the mistakes others have made in this regard. The average obtained by them is 9.61 with a standard deviation of 4.46 compared to non-delinquents who obtain an average of 6.36 with a standard deviation of 2.12. We found significant

differences between the two groups of adolescents at this factor MD = 9.61, MnD = 6.36, t = 6.79, p = 0.0001.

Table 1. Descriptive data for coping strategies according to delinquent status

Delinquent status		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Self-blame scor	Delincent	102	4.51	2.119	.210
	non-delincent	108	8.35	1.715	.165
Acceptance scor	Delincent	102	8.31	1.671	.165
	non-delincent	108	8.94	2.029	.195
Rumination scor	delincent	102	2.99	1.039	.103
	non-delincent	108	7.43	2.383	.229
Positive refocusing scor	Delincent	102	5.14	2.044	.202
	non-delincent	108	8.99	2.934	.282
Refocus on planning scor	Delincent	102	9.03	3.222	.319
	non-delincent	108	9.13	3.093	.298
Positive reassessment scor	delincent	102	5.18	2.283	.226
	non-delincent	108	9.24	4.207	.405
Putting into perspective scor	delincent	102	2.17	1.014	.100
	non-delincent	108	10.21	4.277	.412
Catastrophization scor	delincent	102	1.81	.870	.086
	non-delincent	108	7.09	2.744	.264
Blame scor	delincent	102	9.61	4.469	.442
	non-delincent	108	6.36	2.129	.205

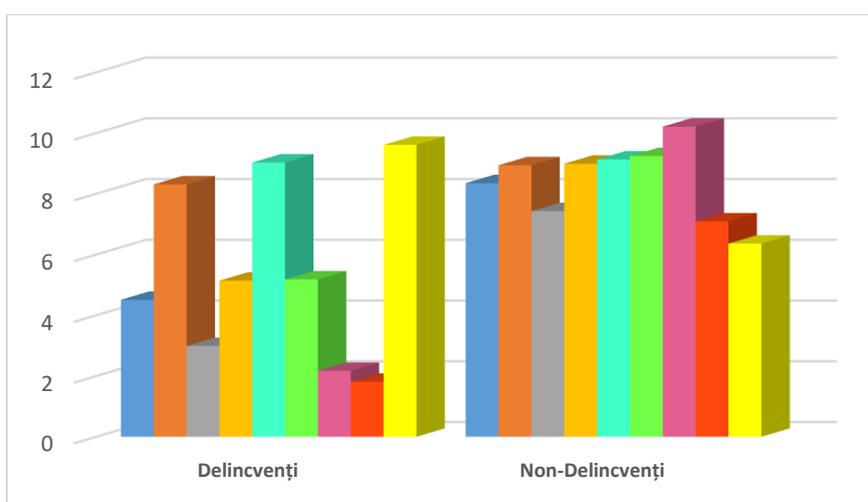


Fig. 1. Arranging coping styles on groups of delinquents and non-delinquents

Table 2 Significance test for CERQ coping strategies

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Self-blame scor	Equal variances assumed	3.683	.056	-14.480	208	.000	-3.842	.265	-4.365	-3.319
	Equal variances not assumed			-14.394	194.384	.000	-3.842	.267	-4.368	-3.316
Acceptance scor	Equal variances assumed	5.239	.023	-2.415	208	.017	-.621	.257	-1.129	-.114
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.428	204.255	.016	-.621	.256	-1.126	-.117
Rumination scor	Equal variances assumed	63.936	.000	-17.303	208	.000	-4.435	.256	-4.940	-3.930
	Equal variances not assumed			-17.644	148.028	.000	-4.435	.251	-4.932	-3.938
Positive refocusing scor	Equal variances assumed	9.184	.003	-10.977	208	.000	-3.852	.351	-4.544	-3.160
	Equal variances not assumed			-11.087	191.616	.000	-3.852	.347	-4.537	-3.167
Refocus on planning scor	Equal variances assumed	.136	.712	-.222	208	.824	-.097	.436	-.956	.762
	Equal variances not assumed			-.222	206.001	.824	-.097	.436	-.957	.763
Positive reassessment scor	Equal variances assumed	40.169	.000	-8.606	208	.000	-4.054	.471	-4.982	-3.125
	Equal variances not assumed			-8.742	166.929	.000	-4.054	.464	-4.969	-3.138
Putting into perspective scor	Equal variances assumed	124.112	.000	-18.502	208	.000	-8.041	.435	-8.898	-7.185
	Equal variances not assumed			-18.983	119.668	.000	-8.041	.424	-8.880	-7.203
Catastrophization scor	Equal variances assumed	71.215	.000	-18.584	208	.000	-5.284	.284	-5.845	-4.724
	Equal variances not assumed			-19.025	129.425	.000	-5.284	.278	-5.834	-4.735

Blame scor	Equal variances assumed	50.470	.000	6.791	208	.000	3.252	.479	2.308	4.196
	Equal variances not assumed			6.670	142.750	.000	3.252	.488	2.288	4.216

5. CONCLUSIONS

Statistical results confirmed the hypothesis and demonstrated the existence of statistical differences in certain coping mechanisms between the group of delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents, reinforcing the idea that the majority of juvenile delinquents do not assume the facts, diminishing their importance and showing serenity on social injustice. This is explained by the fact that in families with a high position, education centered on moral beliefs and the avoidance of risks by family members predominate; as a result, intolerance towards breaking the law is strongly asserted and therefore children are less likely to commit delinquency than those from poor families with low social status, where there are many shortcomings that generate a sharp sense of social injustice, which leads to tolerance visible against the violation of the law and therefore, the chances of becoming a criminal may become more frequent.

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