

Assessment of Self Control by Measuring Risk Seeking Behavior Among Convicted Youth in Punjab (Pakistan)

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Abstract: In Punjab there are more than four thousands young prisoners who have been convicted in different offences. This statistic is quite alarming as showing an increasing trend of violence among youth. Therefore, an investigation is required to find out those factors that make significant contribution in committing such offenses. The ongoing scholarship asserts that low self control is one of the major predictor of youth violence. The following study was conducted to assess the level of self control among convicted youth of Punjab. From the nine central jails of Punjab, three central jails located at Faisalabad, Mianwali and Multan were randomly selected for this study. A sample of 400 convicted young prisoners was systematically selected from these three central jails. Five items self-control scale was used to assess the self control of convicted young prisoners. The results indicated that convicted youth had low level of self-control and still inclined towards the aggressive and risky behaviors. Therefore, the government should provide them counseling services and arrange convicted youth for their vocational training that could help them after completing their prison.

Key words: Self-Control • Youth Violence • Risk Seeking Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Youth violence is a serious problem of the modern civilization, because young people commit as many crimes as grow-ups. It is a threat to the health of other people, their property and security [1]. The increasing trend of youth involvement in violence poses a threat to human, social, ethical and economic sphere [2]. In adulthood or adolescence, a period of unpredictability, experimentation and adventure, there is greater probability of getting involved in violent activities [3] because of the socio-economic changes happening in many societies of the world during the last two decades [4]. Youth violence includes aggressive behaviors such as verbal abuse, bullying, hitting, or slapping. These behaviors have significant consequences but do not generally result in serious injury or death. It also includes serious violent and delinquent acts such as aggravated assault, robbery, rape and homicide, committed by and against youth [5, 6]. Most of the times, this phenomenon occurs due to the complex interplay of social institutions.

Youth violence is a fact that persistently seeks attentions of the sociologists [7] and remains an area of concern for criminologists [8]. In order to understand the

complex nature of youth violence, efforts have been made to explore those factors that motivate youth to become violent. The current scholarship identifies higher levels of youth violence in the following situations: (a) lower level of self control, (b) social exclusion [9], especially for youth springing from poverty and unemployment; (c) uncaring and inconsistent parental attitudes [10], violence or parental conflict exercised by dysfunctional families [11]; (d) the acceptance and promotion of the culture of violence by the society [12]; (e) gender or racial discrimination and exclusion due to unjust reasons [13]; (f) deterioration of urban environments and social bonds [14]; (g) improper surveillance of public places and property [15] and (h) easy access to drugs and weapons [16].

Self Control and Youth Violence: In explaining the criminal behavior, the work of Gottfredson and Hirschi's [17] is considered very significant. According to their general theory of crime, all sorts of criminal and deviant acts including violence are outcome of low self-control. Those persons who exhibit low self-control have a propensity to be impulsive. They prefer simple tasks, engage themselves in risky behaviors and show a volatile

temper. As Hirschi and Gottfredson [18] explain, "People who engage in crime are people who tend to neglect long-term consequences. They are, or tend to be, children of the moment. They have what we call low self-control". Empirical studies have been conducted and widely disseminated on the general theory [19]. These studies have confirmed that low self-control is one of the major predictors of crime and violence [20].

Youth Violence and Pakistan: Youth violence has now become a serious national concern and an overwhelming policy matter [21]. Pakistan denotes as the country of young generation [22] and is considered to be one of the most multi-cultural and polarized societies due to its geo-political position and participation in proxy wars. According to Govt. of Pakistan youth population was 55.66 million up to 2013. Furthermore, it is also assumed as a potentially fertile land for violent youth [23, 24]. Despite this fact, no national figures and statistics have been available about young people involvement in crime [25]. However, an alarming increase has been observed in youth violence cases during the last two decades in Pakistan. Legal studies indicate the plight of youth violence in Pakistan. For instance only in Peshawar, 62% of violent acts have been committed by young people between the ages of 20-39 years [24]. In addition, Chotani *et al.* [26] reported that 74% of disputes cases registered in selected hospitals of Karachi have occurred among young people between 20-40 years of age. Farooq *et al.* [27] portrays the situation even worst. According to him, 77% incidents reported in Rawalpindi hospitals have occurred between 16-45 years of age and 41% violent acts have committed by youth aged between 16-20 years. This increasing trend may become a significant cause of the creation of a socially toxic environment [28]. This gloomy picture demands a sociological investigation in order to explore those factors that are triggering the culture of violence among Pakistani youth.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Punjab shares majority of the population of Pakistan. In Punjab, there are total nine central jails located at Lahore, Gujranwala, Sahiwal, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Mianwali, Multan, Bahawalpur and D.G. Khan. According to the estimation of prison department of Punjab, there were more than 4000 convicted young prisoners in these central jails when this study was conducted. From these nine central jails, three central jails located at Faisalabad, Mianwali and Multan were randomly selected for this study. The total population of young convicted prisoners

in these three central jails was 1400. For this study, 400 convicted young prisoners were systematically selected from these three central jails. These convicted young prisoners were interviewed through interview schedule.

Measurement of Self Control: Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990, p. 89-90) described low self-control as (1) a tendency to choose actions that offer immediate gratification, (2) a preference for simple tasks, (3) a preference for thrilling or risk-seeking behaviors, (4) a preference for physical as opposed to mental acts, (5) a minimal tolerance for frustration (*i.e.*, quick temper) and (6) an insensitive or self-centered orientation. According to them, the people with low self-control will be impulsive, insensitive, physical, risk-seeking, short-sighted and nonverbal [17].

In order to measure self-control, Grasmick *et al.* [29] developed 23 items instrument. These items measured the above said attitudes and behaviors that reflect low self control. Through their study, they identified six components mutually representing a single personality trait - self control. By adopting the approach of Grasmick *et al.* [29] used this scale to see the effect low self control on three imprudent behaviors: smoking, drinking and gambling. Their study confirmed a positive and significant effect of self-control on the imprudent behavior index. However, their study found that the risk-seeking component of the self-control scale was the most significant component and stronger predictor of imprudent behavior as compared to the other components. Such type of results was also reported by also Wood *et al.* [30]. Thus, the researcher used risk-seeking as an indicator of self control in this study. For measuring risk-seeking, 3 items scale were adapted from Grasmick *et al.* [29] scale and further were developed after reviewing relevant literature.

These items were measured on five point Likert scale anchored from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. Higher value would be an indicator of low self control and lower value against each item would depict high level of self control of the respondent. The Cronbach's Alpha for this scale was 0.864 which indicated that the scale was highly reliable.

RESULTS

Previous studies indicated that people who had low self control were more interested in excitement and adventure rather than security. The first item evaluated their preference between adventure and security. The findings indicate that convicted young prisoners were

Table 1: Risking Seeking Behavior among Convicted Youth

Self control	Mean	S.D.
Excitement and adventure are more important to you than security	3.89	1.26
You often take risks without thinking about the consequences of your action	3.88	1.24
You test yourself every now and then for doing something a little risky	1.99	1.12
You might do something foolish simply for fun	3.93	1.11
You some time find it exciting to take actions for which you might be punished	3.91	1.25
You some time take unnecessary risks	4.01	1.16
At times you do something which may harm others	3.69	1.10

more interested in excitement and adventure rather than security. The mean average of this item was 3.89 that showed convicted youth preferred excitement and adventure in their lives and they did not think about security. Furthermore, research highlights that people who have low self-control are often involved in such type of actions that have been taking without considering the consequences. The results confirm such type of behavior among the convicted youth as well. The mean average of this item was 3.88 which indicated that convicted youth did not understand consequences of risky actions before committing such actions.

Young convicted prisoners who were involved in criminal activities having low self control as found by Gottfredson and Hirschi [29]. The results of the study show that young convicted prisoners were doing a little bit risky tasks in their lives for testing their selves. The average value of this statement was 1.99 its mean that more than half of the young prisoners who disagreed with the statement having moderate self control, while the other young convicted prisoners having low self control. Young people are more prone to commit crime as compared to adult because they were young, energetic and have more chances to do foolish things. When asked from the young prisoners about the foolish things they had done in their lives, the mean score of the item was 3.93 shows that the convicted prisoners had done something foolish in their lives simply for fun. Young people often do actions without the consequences of their results. Most of these actions bring pain for them but at the time they were doing those actions they did not care about the results. As found in the study that convicted young prisoners had done such types of actions which they had punished. The average value of the item was 3.91 which show the tendency of the convicted young prisoners toward the actions which might be brought punishment for them. Taking unnecessary risks is one of the most important factors in the lives of young people. They do risky things as fun and sometimes these risky activities bring pain for them. The result of the study shows that young convicted

prisoners took unnecessary risks in their lives. The mean value of the item was 4.01 and this value strongly support the belief that young people take unnecessary risks in their lives and in this way they were indulge in negative activities and with the passage of time these negative activities transforms into crime and violence. The last statement of the scale was “At times you do something which may harm others” study results shows that young convicted prisoners were doing such type of activities which harm others in their lives and the average value of this item 3.69 also support the notion. Longshore *et al.* [31] tested self control as a correlate of property, personal crimes by adult and adolescent offenders. They found that self control was significantly lower among offenders who reported a higher frequency on each crime measure. Dahlberg [32] also draw conclusion that aggression at earlier stages of life predicted later aggression or criminal activities.

Piquero *et al.* [33] conducted a study to test the relationship between self-control and violent offending and homicide victimization and found that low self control was related to both violent offending and homicide victimization.

CONCLUSION

The following study assessed the level of self-control among convicted youth. The results indicated that convicted youth had low level of self-control and still inclined towards the aggressive and risky behaviors. In the light of these findings, the researchers suggest that the government should take appropriate measures for improving positive behaviors among convicted youth. For instance, the government should provide them counseling services to improve their self confidence and self-control. Capacity building workshops should be conducted with convicted youth for their vocational training that could help them after completing their prison. Awareness workshops and informal learning programs should be organized to educate and make them good citizens of the society.

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