

Personality Traits, Social Intelligence, Social Support and Juvenile Delinquency

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Abstract—In present research the author examined the relationship between personality dimensions, social intelligence, level of social support, and juvenile delinquency. She used personality questionnaire *BFI*, scale of social intelligence *TSIS*, scale of social support *CASSS*, and self-report delinquency scale *SLP* on a sample of 264 adolescents aged 14 to 20 years. The author found out that extraversion and neuroticism do not connect importantly with the juvenile delinquency; pleasantness and conscientiousness significantly negatively predict the level of juvenile delinquency, processing of social information as one of the dimensions of social intelligence positively predicts juvenile delinquency, on the other hand, social awareness is negatively associated with delinquent behavior. Social support from significant people, especially parents and good friends, negatively predicts juvenile delinquency.

Keywords—juvenile delinquency, personality traits, social intelligence, social support

I. Introduction

Today is juvenile delinquency a frequent phenomenon. Adolescents behave inappropriately in different ways, because of their actions they are very often stigmatized and marginalized. In a broader sense, juvenile delinquency means any act of persons, defined as adolescents, who violates the norms and standards of appropriate behavior, if we compare this behavior with the behavior of the control group (Kratcoski and Dunn Kratcoski, 1995), or an act which has the characteristics of a criminal offense or other forms of deviant behavior (Meško, 1997). In a narrower sense, juvenile delinquency is defined as any act of adolescents (i.e. “non-adult”; persons under the age of 18 years), which may cause that the performer of that offense is dealt with in court (Kratcoski and Dunn Kratcoski, 1995; Meško, 1997). Even here, difficulties according the definition may arise, namely because many people who have committed such an act have never been dealt with in court. Formally, an adolescent is not treated as a delinquent, until convicted as such in court (Kratcoski and Dunn Kratcoski, 1995). However, delinquency is not an isolated problem and it cannot be understood if we are not aware of the background of social problems in a given period of time. Basic conditions of delinquent behavior are an integral part of building the entire social order and include a large number of social changes that have occurred throughout history (Neumeyer, 1955).

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A. Predictors of Juvenile Delinquency

Farrington (2007) defines risk factors for delinquency as variables that predict a high likelihood of such behavior. In various literature we can trace a bunch of variables that are associated with juvenile delinquency. For the purpose of this research, we focused on the individuals’ personal traits, their social intelligence and social support that they receive from important others.

1) Personality Traits

The concept of personality represents the overall pattern of relatively permanent mental, behavioral and physical characteristics by which individuals differ from each other (Musek, 2000). It is, therefore, all that illustrates a person’s identity and characteristics by which he can be differentiated from others. The essential features of the personality are its relative permanence and individuality (Musek, 2005a). In recent decades the popularity of the theory of the five-dimension personality structure has increased, which is at least from Goldberg (1981, by Musek, 2005b) described as “Big Five”: extraversion, pleasantness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. Researchers who believe in the general applicability of lexical encoded folk wisdom believe that Big Five can be interpreted as real basic dimensions of personality. Caspi et al. (1994, by Donnellan, Ge and Wenk, 2002) used the Big Five model to determine the link between personal traits and delinquency and found that delinquents, compared to non-delinquents, achieve significantly lower results in dimensions of acceptability and conscientiousness. When examining Big Five in relation to the delinquency, Heaven (1996) also found that acceptability is strongly negatively related with delinquency, there are also slightly lower negative relations with the conscientiousness, while the correlation between neuroticism and delinquency is weak but positive. John, Caspi, Robins, Moffit and Stouthamer-Loeber (1994) have studied delinquency in 12 and 13-year-old boys and found that are high rates of delinquency connected with low levels of acceptability and conscientiousness. Ter Laak et al. (2003) have not found connections between delinquency and acceptability in their study in girls, but found negative correlations between conscientiousness and delinquent behavior. In their study, also openness was positively correlated with delinquency. Van Aken, Van Lieshout and Scholte (1998) found that juvenile delinquents achieve extremely low levels of acceptability and conscientiousness, while their levels of extraversion, openness and neuroticism are of average level.

2) Social Intelligence

Social intelligence is already an older term, which recently again comes to the fore. First who has developed the concept of social intelligence, was Thorndike (1920, by Kihlstrom and

Cantor, 2000) who has defined social intelligence as an individual's ability to understand and deal with other people and their ability to engage in appropriate social interaction. N. Cantor and Kihlstrom (1987) define social intelligence as declarative and procedural knowledge, which helps us to act in social world where primarily social objectives are highlighted. Goleman (2010) divides components of social intelligence into two segments: social awareness and social competence. Social awareness covers a range of characteristics, from feeling the internal state of another person to understanding their feelings, thoughts and perceptions of the complex social situations; social competence, with the help of social awareness, allows smooth and efficient interactions with others. Social competence in adolescence is associated with lower levels of delinquent behavior (Stepp, Pardini, Loeber and Morris, 2011). Social competence may explain reduced frequency of crime and increased education among young people with a high risk of delinquency. The growth of social competence can be connected with a reduction in the frequency of delinquent behavior as adolescents acquire the skills needed for entry into adulthood (Stepp et al., 2011). C. F. Garandeau and Cillessen (2006) conducted a study in which they examined characteristics of school bullies and they found that there are important connections between indirect aggression and social intelligence. In contrast, M. Vidmar and A. Avsec (2011) found that processing of social information as an aspect of social intelligence is a significant positive predictor of hostile humor, excitation of guilt and physical aggression, while social awareness proved to be a significant negative predictor of indirect forms of aggression.

3) Social Support

The concept of social support first appeared more than 35 years ago, when Cassel (1976, by Sarason and Sarason, 2006) and Cobb (1976, by Sarason and Sarason, 2006) conducted their research and noted that health is strongly influenced by social aspects of the environment. Recent definitions emphasize that social support is a complex interaction and communication process among members of a social group. Social support is also the sum of all positive influences on well-being and health of human beings, regardless of whether a person is under stress or not. Mainly, social support is a factor of protection against stressful situations in life but it also includes assistance with specific tasks and social contacts (Rogelj, Ule and Hlebec, 2004). Tardy (1985, by Kerres Malecki, Kilpatrick Demaray and Elliott, 2000) has developed a model of social support in which is social support divided into five dimensions: direction, disposition, description/evaluation, content and network. Direction indicates whether social support is given or received, while disposition refers to its availability. Description of social support includes researching what type of social support an individual receives and from which people it is received, while the evaluation of social support refers to the measurement of individual's satisfaction with the received support. Depending on the content of social support, there are four types: emotional, instrumental, informational and evaluating. Last dimension, identified by Tardy (1985, by Kerres Malecki, Kilpatrick Demaray and Elliott, 2000), is network of social support, which consists of various people who offer support. Network of an individual may include family, friends,

neighbors, colleagues and other important people. Many studies have confirmed the connection between social support, received by parents, friends and other important people, and the emergence of delinquent behavior in children and adolescents – adolescents who receive more care and support much rarely develop delinquent behavior (e.g. Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Loeber and Henry, 1998; Simons, Johnson and Conger, 1994; Steinberg, 2001; Taylor, Casten and Flickinger, 1993; Wright and Cullen, 2001). Level of social support is also evident in ways of parenting; children with more caring parents are later in adolescence more rarely involved in delinquent behavior (Werner and Smith, 1982).

B. Problem and hypotheses

Based on previous research, we concluded that the personality dimensions, social intelligence and level of social support will significantly predict juvenile delinquency; especially the following relations were assumed:

- positive relationship between neuroticism, extraversion and juvenile delinquency,
- negative relationship between pleasantness, conscientiousness and juvenile delinquency,
- negative relationship between the dimensions of social intelligence and juvenile delinquency and
- negative relationship between social support by various persons and juvenile delinquency.

II. Methods

A. Participants

The study involved 264 people aged 14 to 20 years. The average age of participants was 17.23 years with a standard deviation of 1.42 years. There were 109 boys and 155 girls. Participants attended secondary schools and the initial years of the faculties of various programs in Slovenia.

B. Instruments

- Big Five Inventory (John, Benet-Martinez and Benet-Martinez, 1998). The inventory includes 44 items which are combined into five dimensions: extraversion, pleasantness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness.
- Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (Silvera, Martinussen and Dahl, 2001). The scale consists of 21 items which are combined into following dimensions: social information processing, social skills and social awareness.
- Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (Kerres Malecki, Kilpatrick Demaray and Elliott, 2000). The scale includes 60 items; social support from parents, teachers, classmates, good friends and people at school are assessed with 12 items each.

- Self-report Delinquency Scale (SLP; Jug, 2014). The scale consists of 27 items which are combined into three dimensions: crimes against person, crimes against property and public disorder. In addition, the scale includes the following question: “Have you ever been convicted because of your behavior?” the participants answer this question with YES or NO.

C. Procedure

The participants were answering the questionnaires individually or in groups. At the beginning we ensured to the participants that all of their answers are anonymous and that there are no right or wrong answers. The participants also signed the Informed consent to participate in the study, for minors, the Consent read and signed also their parents or guardians. Participants were asked to answer the questionnaires honestly and in their entirety. The instructions were given for each questionnaire. The answering lasted about 20 minutes. After the answering, we reviewed the questionnaires and eliminated inadequate ones and those which were not fulfilled in accordance with the instructions. All data were then processed with various statistical programs.

III. Results

In this section, we show the results of tests and procedures, which we used to verify our hypotheses. At the beginning, the correlations between different predictors and the rate of delinquency in various fields are presented, and after that we present the results of the structural equation modeling.

In Table 1, it can be seen that several personality dimensions significantly correlate with the dimensions of delinquency, namely, pleasantness and conscientiousness show the highest negative correlations with delinquency. We also see that there are certain correlations between the dimensions of social intelligence and the rate of delinquency. Table 1 also shows a significant negative correlation between social support by important others and the level of delinquency in different areas. Social support from parents is, interestingly, least associated with delinquency; and there are no significant correlations between social support and public disorder.

Further, we present the results of the structural equation modeling, by which we wanted to find a suitable model, which includes a combination of different predictors of juvenile delinquency. On the basis of various factors, we wanted to predict the level of general delinquency. First, we wanted to know how well will work our set hypothetical structural model, which is shown in Fig. 1. The characteristics of this model were not fully optimal ($\chi^2 = 258,95$, $df = 71$, $RMSEA = 0,100$), therefore we tried to modify the model with changing the combination of the variables so that it would be more suitable. We calculated the characteristics of several different models, while we, in accordance with the results of previous studies, which confirmed the predictive values of the variables under consideration, want to keep the maximum number of predictors. In Fig. 2 we present the model that has proven to be the most suitable ($\chi^2 = 65,69$, $df = 29$, $RMSEA = 0,069$). In

this model, there are included all three latent variables: personality (it consists of pleasantness and conscientiousness), social intelligence (social information processing, social skills and social awareness) and social support by parents and good friends.

TABLE I. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT PREDICTORS AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

| | Crimes against person | Crimes against property | Public disorder | General delinquency |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| PERSONALITY | | | | |
| Extraversion | 0,01 | 0,02 | 0,13* | 0,05 |
| Pleasantness | -0,24** | -0,23** | -0,12 | -0,22** |
| Conscientiousness | -0,23** | -0,27** | -0,14* | -0,26** |
| Neuroticism | 0,12* | 0,01 | -0,03 | 0,04 |
| Openness | 0,03 | 0,03 | 0,01 | -0,01 |
| SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE | | | | |
| Social information processing | 0,09 | 0,10 | 0,16** | 0,12* |
| Social skills | 0,02 | 0,08 | 0,15* | 0,09 |
| Social awareness | -0,01 | -0,17** | -0,03 | -0,06 |
| SOCIAL SUPPORT | | | | |
| Parents | -0,10 | -0,14* | -0,10 | -0,11 |
| Teachers | -0,12* | -0,17** | -0,02 | -0,12* |
| Classmates | -0,16** | -0,19** | -0,03 | -0,15* |
| Good friends | -0,12 | -0,18** | -0,12 | -0,18** |

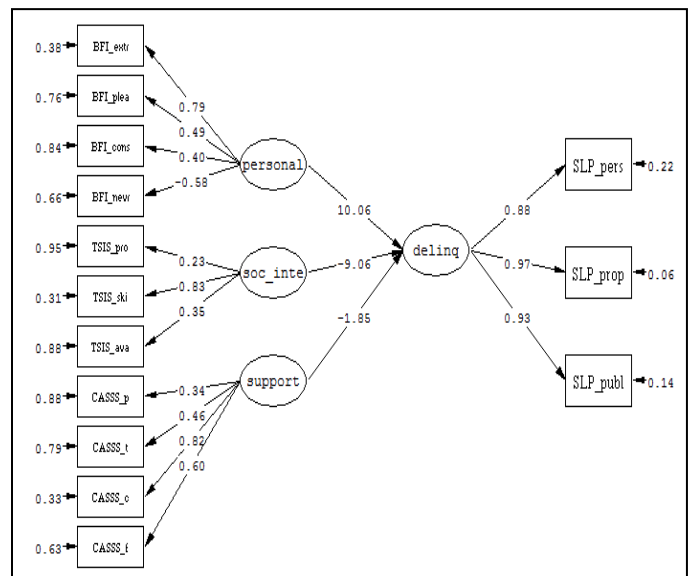


Figure 1. Verification of hypothetical structural model of delinquency.

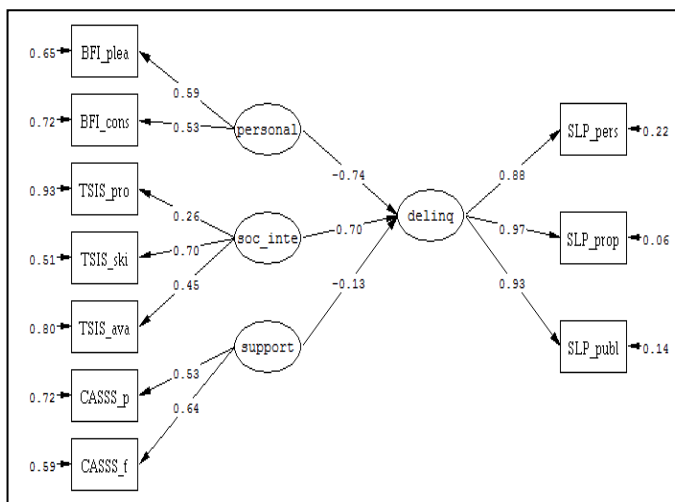


Figure 2. Most suitable structural model of delinquent behavior.

iv. Discussion

The main theme of the research was studying the relationship between personality dimensions, social intelligence, level of social support and juvenile delinquency.

In the first hypothesis, we assumed that level of delinquency positively correlates with the dimensions of extraversion and neuroticism, so that juvenile delinquents, in comparison with ordinary adolescents, show significantly higher values in these two dimensions. The results that we got are largely consistent with our predictions, there are only low connections between extraversion and the level of delinquency, the only statistically significant correlation is between extraversion and public disorder, but it is also below 0.15. Other connections are very low and do not exceed 0.05. Extraversion also does not appear among the significant predictors of delinquency. The obtained results are consistent with the results of previous research, e. g. Heaven (1996), Nederlof et al. (2010) and Van Aken et al. (1998), but they are not consistent with the results of Daderman et al. (2001). Based on our results, we have to reject the first part of the hypothesis.

Our results regarding the connection of neuroticism and delinquency are not consistent with our expectations and the results of Heaven's (1996) research, as is the dimension of neuroticism not significantly correlated with the level of delinquency; the connections are very low (between 0.00 and 0.05), the only exception is the connection between neuroticism and delinquent behavior against person which is statistically significant, but still low and does not exceed the value of 0.15. With these results, we also have to reject the second part of the first hypothesis.

In the second hypothesis, we assumed that the level of delinquent behavior is negatively connected with the dimensions of pleasantness and conscientiousness, so that juvenile delinquents are less pleasant and conscientious compared to ordinary adolescents. Results of the study are consistent with our expectations, there is a significant negative correlation between the dimensions of pleasantness and

conscientiousness on the one hand, and all measures of delinquent behavior on the other. The dimensions of pleasantness and conscientiousness also significantly negatively predict the level of delinquency. Identified negative correlations between pleasantness, conscientiousness and juvenile delinquency are consistent with results of previous studies (Caspi et al., 1994, by Donnellan, Ge and Wenk, 2002; Heaven, 1996; John et al., 1994; Ter Laak et al., 2003), all of which have shown that delinquents, compared to non-delinquents, express less pleasantness and conscientiousness. Based on the obtained results, we can confirm our second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis relates to the fact that we assumed a negative relationship between social intelligence and juvenile delinquency. The obtained results generally do not confirm our hypothesis, because we found that, in particular, level of social information processing, and partly also level of social skills, positively connects with juvenile delinquency, while the connection between social awareness and juvenile delinquency is, as expected, negative. The most significant correlations are between social information processing, public disorder and the total factor of delinquency (these connections are positive), further there is a statistically significant relation between social skills and public disorder (also positive), lastly, a statistically significant negative correlation can be seen between social awareness and delinquent behavior against property. In general, we can say that for juvenile delinquents good social intelligence is typical, as indicated by the results of the structural equation modeling. In majority, our results do not comply with the results of previous studies (Garandau and Cillessen, 2006; Sepp et al., 2011), where it was found that social competence in adolescence is connected with lower levels of delinquent behavior, but they do comply with the study of M. Vidmar and A. Avsec (2011), in which positive correlations between social information processing and aggression and negative connections between social awareness and aggression were found. Based on the results, we have to reject our hypothesis and conclude that juvenile delinquents, compared to ordinary adolescents, have fairly well-developed social skills, but they can quickly take advantage of them so that they get from people what they want.

In the last, fourth hypothesis, we predicted a negative relation between social support by various persons and juvenile delinquency. The obtained results confirm this hypothesis. Social support has proven to be an important predictor of delinquent behavior, where we can see the greatest negative relations between social support from parents, teachers, classmates and friends and crimes against property, while social support from significant people and public disorder connect in a lesser degree. The results are consistent with previous studies (e. g. Gorman-Smith et al., 1998; Simons et al., 1994; Steinberg, 2001; Taylor et al., 1993; Wright and Cullen, 2001), in which was found that adolescents who receive more assistance, support and care, much rarely develop delinquent behavior. Adolescents who have thus more social support from important others will be less likely to participate in the delinquent activities; this applies to crimes against person, crimes against property, public disorder and to the total factor of delinquency as well.

Based on the results, we can confirm the hypothesis and conclude that social support by adolescents' important others is a strong negative predictor of juvenile delinquency.

To sum up our results, we can conclude that there are more important predictors of delinquent behavior among adolescents. Based on the findings, we can create a model of risk factors for the emergence of delinquent behavior in which thus belong unpleasantness, unconscientiousness, good social intelligence and poor social support from important people. For risky adolescents is typical the following: they are hard, cruel, suspicious, robust, competitive, uncooperative, prone to extremes, dominating, unfriendly and rude. Compared to ordinary adolescents, they are also quite chaotic, unreliable, reckless and negligent. Many times they are hesitant; they postpone their duties and subside to the impulses. They are considered to be casual, lazy and have no self-confidence. They are able to predict the behavior of other people and they know how their behavior will affect the well-being of others. They are confident in the company of unknown people and have no problems in adapting to different social situations; they are relatively good in integrating into new situations and meeting new people. They have poor relationships with parents, teachers, classmates and friends, they do not get enough understanding and support in their environment.

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About Author:



[Model of risk factors of delinquent behavior includes low pleasantness, low conscientiousness, good social intelligence, especially social information processing, and poor social support from important others.]