

EMPATHY AS A MEDIATOR OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND AGGRESSION AMONG JUVENILE DELINQUENTS AND NON-DELINQUENTS

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Abstract

The study explored the differences and inter-relationship of empathy, emotional intelligence and reactive proactive aggression among juvenile delinquents and non-delinquents. Juvenile delinquents ($n = 186$) from Borstal Jail, Faisalabad and Jaranwala and a matched control group ($n = 186$) was drawn from general population. Emotional Empathy Questionnaire (Ashraf, 2004), Reactive Proactive Aggression Questionnaire (Raine et al., 2006) and Emotional Intelligence Scale Youth version (Bar On, 2006) were used. As assumed, lower levels of empathy and poor emotional intelligence both significantly predicted higher levels of reactive and proactive aggression. Additionally, emotional intelligence proved to be a significant predictor of emotional empathy. Emotional empathy partially mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and aggression in the total sample. Results of *t*-test showed that delinquents had significantly poorer emotional intelligence, lower levels of empathy and higher levels of both reactive-proactive aggressions than non-delinquent group. The findings are discussed for the role of emotional competence in aggression and delinquency.

Key Words: Empathy, Emotional Intelligence, Reactive Aggression, Proactive Aggression, Juvenile Delinquents, Emotional Competence.

Introduction

Unfortunately, children and adolescents have been numerously found to be involved in criminal activities. Since an act cannot be considered as crime unless it is done on purpose, therefore motive is very important in condemning a juvenile. Juvenile Delinquency is an antisocial demonstration done by an individual or individuals

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underneath the age of 18 years (Berger, 2000). The lowest minimum age for juvenile court jurisdiction is 7 years in most of the US states and rest of the world except for North Carolina where this age is 6 years (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Juvenile delinquency is a complicated communal issue that notably impacts all members as well as processes of a social structure. Delinquency refers to the behavioral practices which are incongruent with the shared acts and/or moral principles of the central social group. These actions are fundamentally against the social norms and particularly they disrupt customary criminal codes and laws. Juvenile delinquency includes two types of behaviors, status and delinquent offenses. Status offenses are the activities that are considered inapt or harmful for both children and adolescents, thus inadmissible owing to the age of the delinquent. These kinds of activities, if performed by adults, are not considered illegitimate. This is thought to be the beginning of crime in a state. Juvenile delinquency consolidates not only broad-spectrum illegal actions but behavior that is prohibited for minors, such as running away from home and school (Bartollas & Schmalleger, 2014).

Delinquency displays an assortment of styles of behavior or types of conduct. A variety of types of juvenile delinquency are reported by researchers. Moffitt (1993) in his developmental taxonomy of juvenile offending has distinguished between life-course-persistent offenders and age specific offenders. The former involve in criminal activities and display antisocial/aggressive conduct in adolescence (or even childhood) and carried out this throughout life on into adulthood. Age specific offenders, start offending and end throughout their age of adolescence and denoted as the adolescence-limited offender. Moffitt and Caspi (2001) also described the differences between overt and covert delinquency.

Juvenile delinquency has become a tremendous burden on Pakistani society which has extremely serious dangers rendered for wellbeing, social and ethical development of youngsters and ultimately the society. What makes the condition more serious is that out of 165 million Pakistani population, nearly 49% are under the age of 18 years whereas 22 % are adolescent (10-18 years). According to the report of Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) 2012, there were 1500 to 2000 juveniles imprisoned in Pakistan excluding under trial minors (Rafique,

2017). Existing investigation of this challenging but vital concern presents a wide range of theories about delinquency and its prognosticators further focusing on a variety of plans and policies to deal with overall delinquency. The agreement among researchers, experts and practitioners keeps up that juvenile delinquency is a multidimensional problem with various contributory dynamics (Jones, 2014).

Scot and Steinberg (2010) have discussed the role of psychological knowledge in juvenile justice in order to understand the complex and distinctive state of cognitive and emotional development during adolescence. In their book, *Rethinking Juvenile Justice*, authors have emphasized the interrelationship between law and developmental sciences. One of the significant outcomes from extensive criminological research is that behavior problems, especially stable aggressive behavior in early childhood predict criminal offense in adolescence (Lober & Hay, 1997). From psychological perspective of behavioral problems in youngsters, both aggression and delinquency are regarded as externalizing behaviors (Achenbach, 1991).

Aggression, a common component of delinquent behavior, is considered to be an intentional act to harm others and is straightforwardly connected with the feelings (Baron & Richardson, 1993). Delinquency as a legal term may or may not include aggressive behavior. Since motivational aspect is an integral part of aggression and delinquency, the present study includes two subtypes of aggression based on the underlying motivation i: reactive aggression and proactive aggression (Dodge & Coie, 1987). Reactive aggressive practices are spontaneous and hasty, and are normally a reaction to sentiments of displeasure, apprehension, or a need to strike back against somebody (Connor, 2002). Proactive aggression contrasts from reactive aggression in its expectation of solitary practices. For young men, proactive aggression amid pre-puberty predicts delinquency and brutality amid mid-immaturity, and criminal conduct in adulthood (Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2002). Proactive aggression practices are arranged activities that have some rationale other than hurting somebody. Studies have also found that nature and types of aggression could be influenced by social and emotional competence.

Youngsters involved in conduct problems in early childhood may have a disposition of less fear that might make them more likely to participate in risky behaviors or could also disturb the development of guilt and empathy (Frick & Morris, 2004). Both reactive and proactive aggressor may have different types of emotional incompetence. Reactive forms of aggression have been most linked with emotion deregulation (Hubbard et al., 2002) whereas proactive aggression has been primarily linked with lack of empathy (Kimonis, Frick, Fazekas, Loney, 2006). Some other researches however could not demonstrate a particular relationship between empathy and nature of aggression (Mayberry & Espelage, 2007). It has been rather difficult to draw conclusions about the involvement of empathy dysfunction in pathologic aggressive individuals.

The term empathy refers to the sensitivity towards others feelings and also the understanding of others' mental state (Bellet, Michael & Maloney 1991). Empathy has been linked to several aspects of criminology for example the enactment of strict penalties for repeat delinquents, antisocial conduct, feelings of legitimacy toward the law, and approach toward the death penalty (Posick, Rocque & Rafter, 2014). Gumora, and Arsenio (2007) demonstrated that youngsters who are inadequate in social and emotional capability may not able to empathize with others. Juvenile exploration has concentrated more on behavioral direction instead of feeling control particularly, and understanding the part of emotional change and direction are basic for advancing avoidance action programs went for lessening juvenile aggression and offending (Frick & Morris, 2004). Discrepancies in empathy are required to be linked with competitive and criminal acts, as an instance, delinquency, closer to others (Robinson, Roberts, Strayer, & Koopman, 2007). The examination to date has demonstrated that youths with more elevated amounts of attribute compassion behave all the more prosaically and show unselfish conduct while teenagers with lower levels of empathy have been appeared to be more aggressive (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). Affective empathy has been discovered to be negatively correlated with delinquency by Pakistani researchers as well (Ashraf, Khalid & Ahmed, 2014).

Empathy is just one aspect of affective competence. A more broader concept is Emotional intelligence (EI), being involved in

perception, practice, comprehension, controlling and regulating of emotions, could be related to aggressive behavior and can thus be a valuable tool in predicting deviant behavior (Petrides, Fredrickson & Furnham, 2004). Empirical research has established a significant association of EI with social function and an inverse one with conflicts in social relationships. It has also been suggested that people with high EI levels are more likely to regulate their emotions and thus become less impetuous. Conversely, people with low EI levels tend to be involved in risky behaviors. A systematic review by Garcia-Sencho, Salguero and Fernández-Berrocal (2014) found that individuals with greater EI were less aggressive. They also find it difficult to understand the situation from other's perspective and therefore, found to be less empathetic (Henley & Long, 1999).

Adolescents with delinquent conduct regularly battle with troublesome individual and emotional issues. Johnston (2003) studied the association between juvenile emotional intelligence and aggression. The youngsters who scored low on the variable of EI were liable to include in socially unsuitable ways like unlawful drug use (Trinidad & Johnson, 2002), at a more serious danger for psychiatric issues (Zeman, Shipman & Suveg, 2002) and involved in violent activities (Winter, Clift & Dutton, 2004). Several studies have documented the relationship between poor emotional intelligence and juvenile delinquency (Silsby 2012).

Lacking affective competence may predispose an individual to aggressive behavior finally leading to the delinquency. It is likely that adolescents with inadequate trait EI display more proactive aggression owing to their failure of behavioral inhibition and deficiencies of empathy. Understanding the association among these variables would provide better framework for the therapists dealing with juvenile delinquents. Improving interpersonal compassion and understanding would minimize the chances to act or react aggressively in a provoking situation. Thus the outcomes of the current study would offer inferences for psychological intervention, where emotional empathy could both be a tool and a goal. That is why the study would also identify the mediating role of empathy in association between emotional intelligence and aggression.

Although many researchers have investigated the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency in Pakistan (Ali & Malik, 2014; Ashraf, Khalid & Ahmed, 2014; Rafail & Haque, 1999; Rizvi & Najam, 2015;

Saleem, Ahmed, Hanan & Haroon, 2013), yet none of them have extensively examined the interplay of affective competencies among both offenders and non-offenders. Moreover, aggressive mechanism in terms of motivational aspects of aggression (such as reactive/proactive) have never been addressed as most of researchers had been focusing on general aggression and its subtypes like, physical, verbal etc. Keeping the dearth of Pakistani studies in view, the present study was designed not only to discover the connection between poor emotional competence (empathy and emotional intelligence) and aggressive behavior but also compare these variables across offenders and matched control group of non-offenders.

Method

Participants

A sample of 372 individuals participated in the study having an age range of 8 to 18 years ($M=15.63$, $SD=1.53$). Juvenile Delinquents ($n = 186$) from Borstal Jail, Faisalabad and Jaranwala and a control group of 186 individuals ($M=15.63$, $SD=1.53$) ($n=186$) matched for age, gender, education and socioeconomic status were drawn from general population of children and adolescents. The Superintendent jail provided the list of all available prisoners in Borstal jail. Of these 16.4 % were convicted while 33.5% were under trial.

Instruments

Demographic Data Sheet

Demographic data sheet was used to obtain subjective facts from the participant, such as, name, education, residency, number of siblings, family system, family size, mother education, father education, their occupation, monthly income, nature of crime, account of crime etc.

Emotional Empathy Scale (Ashraf, 2004)

Emotional Empathy Questionnaire was developed by (Ashraf, 2004). It consists of 26-items and measures the propensity to feel the (positive and negative) emotive experiences of others. It assesses individual variances in the trait of emotional empathy. The reliability coefficient for the scale is 0.85.

Reactive Proactive Aggression Questionnaire (Raine, et al., 2006)

Reactive Proactive Aggression Questionnaire was developed by Raine, et al., (2006) which is translated into Urdu by Khawar et al, (2015). The questionnaire has 23 items, with two subscales: reactive aggression and proactive aggression. Each item is rated on 3 point scale i.e. 0 (never), 1 (sometimes), or 2 (often) for frequency of occurrence. The reliability of the Urdu version was also greater than .80 for both the subscales and the RPAQ total.

Emotional Intelligence Scale Youth Version (Baron & Parker, 2000)

Emotional Intelligence Scale Youth version was translated into Urdu by Malik and Shujja (2013). It has 60 items and used a 4 point likert scale. It has 6 subscales namely positive impression, intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood. Positive Impression and general mood subscales are excluded from the composite score on EI. Original version had α coefficient of .82 (Bar-On, 2006). The translated version has been recently used in a study by Iftikhar and Malik (2016). Reliability coefficient of the Urdu version was 0.97. The paper includes overall emotional intelligence in terms of total score on the measure.

Procedure

Permission was sought from the Superintendent of Borstal Jail Faisalabad and Jaranwala, who provided the list of all convicted and under trial delinquents in the jail. After that, an informed consent was obtained from the participants to fulfill the ethical requirements of the scientific research. Emotional Empathy Questionnaire, Reactive Proactive Aggression Questionnaire, Emotional Intelligence Scale Youth version were administered to the participants in two sessions. Non delinquents were selected from general population. From urban and rural areas data were collected from shopkeepers, workers, laborers and factory workers. All the measures were administered to them in the same manner. Only those non-delinquents were included who provided the consent for the study. Almost twenty percent of them discontinued during the study and thus it proved to be time consuming. No compensation was offered to the participants. All of them were assured of the confidentiality of the data. They were thanked after data collection.

Results

The relationship of empathy, emotional intelligence and both kinds of aggression (reactive and proactive) was computed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Later, regression analysis identified the potential predictors of both reactive and proactive aggression. Based on these results, mediation analysis was carried out. Mean differences between delinquent and non-delinquent groups were observed using *t*-test for independent samples.

Table 1
Inter-Correlations among Study Variables (N=372)

| | Reactive Aggression | Emotional Empathy | Emotional Intelligence |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Proactive Aggression | .85** | -.34** | -.49** |
| Reactive Aggression | - | -.35** | -.47** |
| Emotional Empathy | | - | .31** |

Table 1 showed that Proactive Aggression was positively associated with Reactive Aggression ($r = .85, p < .001$). There was a significant inverse relationship between Proactive Aggression and Emotional Empathy ($r = -.34, p < .001$). There was a significant inverse relationship between Proactive Aggression and Emotional Intelligence ($r = -.49, p < .001$). There was also a significant negative relationship between Reactive Aggression and Emotional Empathy ($r = -.35, p < .001$). Reactive Aggression was negatively linked to Emotional Intelligence ($r = -.47, p < .001$). Emotional Empathy was positively correlated with Emotional Intelligence ($r = .31, p < .001$).

Table 2
Regression Analysis showing Emotional Empathy as a Predictor of Reactive/Proactive Aggression (N=372)

| Predicted | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | β | <i>T</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| 1. Reactive Aggression | -.07 | .01 | -.35 | -7.22 | .001 |
| 2. Proactive Aggression | -.08 | .01 | -.34 | -6.96 | .001 |

1. $R^2 = .123; \Delta R^2 = .121. (F = 52.11, p < .001).$
2. $R^2 = .116; \Delta R^2 = .113. (F = 48.47, p < .001)$

Table 2 showed that lower levels of Emotional Empathy significantly predicted higher score on Reactive Aggression accounting for 12% variance. Moreover, poorer Emotional Empathy also significantly predicted greater levels of Proactive Aggression accounting for 11% variance.

Table 3

Regression Analysis for Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Reactive/Proactive Aggression (N= 372)

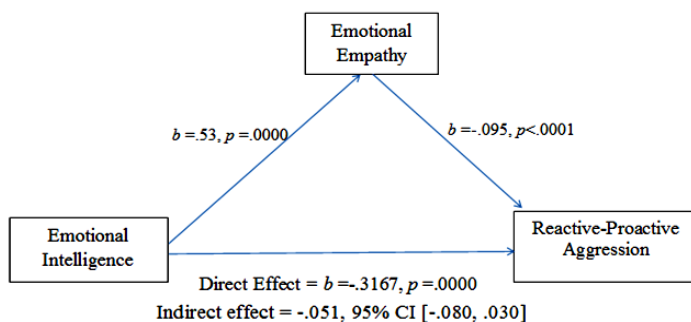
| Predicted | β | SE | β | t | p |
|-------------------------|---------|------|---------|--------|------|
| 1. Reactive Aggression | -.171 | .016 | -.474 | -10.36 | .001 |
| 2. Proactive Aggression | -.197 | .018 | -.491 | -10.85 | .001 |

1. $R^2 = .223$; $\Delta R^2 = .225$. ($F = 107.28$, $p < .001$)

2. $R^2 = .241$; $\Delta R^2 = .239$. ($F = 117.71$, $p < .001$)

Table 3 showed that poor Emotional Intelligence significantly predicted experience of Reactive and Proactive Aggression accounting for 22and 23% of variance respectively. Considering the above mentioned relationships and predictors of both reactive and proactive aggression, possible mediating role of empathy in association between emotional intelligence and overall aggression was evaluated using mediation analysis through process in SPSS.

Figure 1
Mediating Role of Empathy in Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Aggression



Mediation analysis was conducted with process in SPSS. There was a significant indirect effect of emotional intelligence on reactive proactive aggression through empathy $\beta = .51$, $BC_a \text{ CI } [-.080, -.030]$. Indirect effect being about 7.7% of the maximum value that it could have been, $k^2 = .077$, $BC_a \text{ 95\% CI } [.047, .115]$ which reflected fairly small but meaningful mediation effect. When emotional empathy is not in the model, emotional intelligence significantly predicted aggression, $\beta = .32$, $t = 6.15$, $p < .001$. R^2 value tells that the model explained 30% variance in reactive and proactive aggression in the presence of emotional empathy which was 25% in its absence. The

effect of IV i.e. the overall significance of the model, although did not drastically changed which reflected partial mediation.

Table 4
Comparison of Emotional Empathy and Aggression among Juvenile Delinquents and Non-Delinquents (N=372)

| Variables | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | 95% CI | | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------------|
| | | | | <i>LL</i> | <i>UL</i> | |
| Proactive Aggression | 23.09 | 370 | .001 | 9.01 | 10.67 | 2.39 |
| Reactive Aggression | 24.39 | 370 | .001 | 8.31 | 9.77 | 2.53 |
| Emotional Empathy | -6.76 | 370 | .001 | -23.83 | -13.09 | 0.70 |
| Emotional Intelligence | -7.23 | 370 | .001 | -14.31 | -8.18 | 0.74 |

Juvenile Delinquents showed significantly higher level of Proactive, $t(370) = 23.09, p < .001$ and Reactive, $t(370) = 24.39, p < .001$ Aggression in Juvenile Delinquents as compare to Non-delinquents. Delinquents also had lower scores on Emotional Empathy, $t(370) = -6.76, p < .001$ as compared to Non-Delinquents. Non Delinquents showed significantly better Emotional Intelligence as compared to Delinquents, $t(370) = -7.227, p < .001$. These differences are evident in figure 2.

Figure 2
Mean Score of Reactive/Proactive Aggression, Emotional Empathy and Emotional Intelligence across Juvenile Delinquents and Non-Delinquents (n = 186).

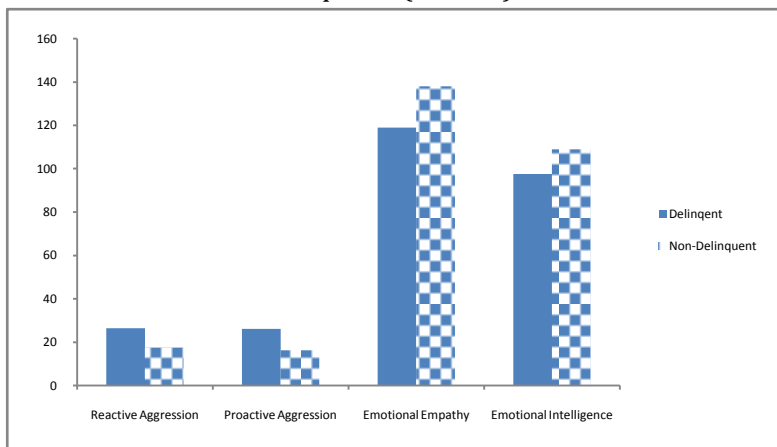
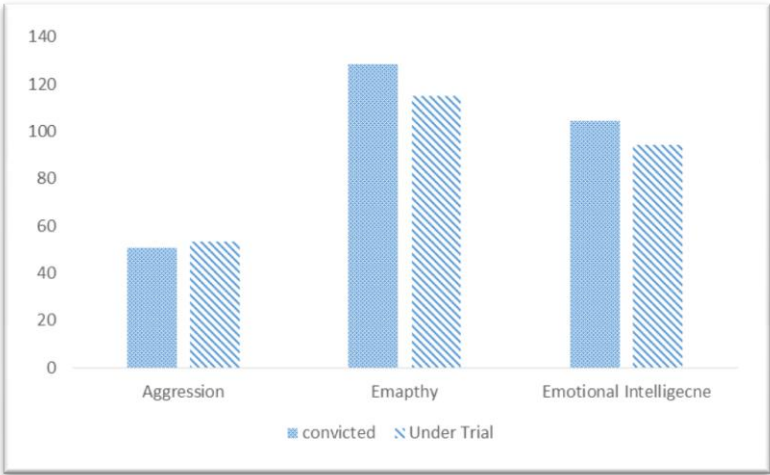


Table 5
Comparison of Empathy, Aggression and Emotional Intelligence
among Convicted and Under Trial Delinquents (n = 186)

| Variables | <i>t</i> | <i>Df</i> | <i>P</i> | 95% CI | | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------------|
| | | | | <i>LL</i> | <i>UL</i> | |
| Aggression | -2.285 | 184 | .023 | -5.08080 | -.37258 | 0.36 |
| Emotional Empathy | 3.392 | 184 | .001 | 5.67723 | 21.45825 | 0.53 |
| Emotional Intelligence | 4.449 | 184 | .001 | 5.62913 | 14.59933 | 0.67 |

Convicted and under trail delinquents showed significant differences in Aggression, $t(184) = 23.09$, $p < .05$, Emotional Empathy, $t(184) = 3.392$, $p < .001$, and Emotional Intelligence, $t(184) = 4.449$, $p < .001$. Nature of these differences is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 2
Convicted and Under Trial Delinquents Mean Score on Aggression, Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Empathy (n = 186).



Discussion

The study explored the nature of relationship between emotional empathy, emotional intelligence and reactive/ proactive aggression. Both types of aggression were inversely correlated with empathy. Regression results demonstrated that lower levels of

empathy significantly contributed to both reactive and proactive aggression in the total sample. Overall aggression has been negatively correlated with empathy in many studies (Burke, 2001); yet assessment of aggression varied to considerable extent in researches and therefore requires detailed account of the nature of aggression in relation to empathy. Studying reactive and proactive dimensions provide insight to the callous /unemotional form and the temperamental aspect of aggression. Some studies have found significant association between dispositional empathy and proactive aggression but again this link could be discussed in term of the nature of empathy itself e.g. cognitive/affective (Euler, Steinlin & Stadler, 2017; Hoffman, 2000).

Poor levels of emotional intelligence accounted for higher levels of both reactive and proactive aggression as assumed in the present study. Research on social information processing approach of aggression (Dodge, Lochman, Harmish, Bates, Pettit, 1997) also evaluates emotional aspects of proactive and reactive aggression as they tend to differ with respect to emotion regulation (Lober & Stouthamer-Lober, 1998). Some studies have found that emotional incompetence is associated more with reactive aggression, however, both kinds of aggression may co-occur (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay & Lavoie, 2003), therefore poor emotional intelligence as a predictor of both types of aggression is not unlikely.

Additionally, as expected, emotional empathy was significantly associated with emotional intelligence. Empathy is embedded in almost all models of EI (Goleman, 2002; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000) thus is an important component of emotional intelligence. The mediating role of empathy in relationship between emotional intelligence and aggression was evaluated. The results supported the partial mediation. Other researchers have studied empathy as moderated between EI and direct/indirect aggression (Ivanovic, 2008).

As hypothesized, significant differences were found between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquents in both reactive and proactive aggression. Juvenile delinquents were more aggressive both reactively and proactively. Existing studies also support the present finding as particular type of aggression have been linked to development of delinquency (Moffit, 1993; Vitaro, Bendgen & Baker, 2006). Although previous studies have reported more differences

on proactive aggression (Raine et al, 2006), however, both kind of aggression was greater in delinquent sample in the present study.

Delinquents and non-delinquents also significantly differed in their level of emotional empathy. Consistent with the previous findings (Kaplan & Arbuthnot, 1985; Ashraf, Khalid & Ahmad, 2014) delinquent sample reported lesser empathy than non-delinquent sample. Emotional empathy typically relates with socially adaptive conduct (Eisenberg, Egsum & Giunta, 2010), hence it is not unlikely to observe poorer empathy among adolescents; however, now it further contributes to aggressive behavior is an important question addressed.

Third hypothesis represents better Emotional Intelligence in non-delinquents as compared to delinquents. Analysis of *t*-test reveals that there is a significant difference in delinquents and non-delinquents on Emotional Intelligence. Delinquents lose their emotional decision power due to their directly reaction on the response of others behavior. Non Delinquents kept the ability to take action at the response of others behavior. On the other hand, Non Delinquents kept ability to problem solving, understand the others behavior etc. Results support the study through findings as non-delinquents are more intelligent as compare to delinquents. Delinquents also showed lesser adaptability, poorer stress management and more negative mood as compared to non-delinquents. However, both groups exhibited similar levels of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Criminal behavior has been linked with lower levels of emotional intelligence by several researches (Sharma, Prakash, Sengar, Chandh & Singh, 2015). This happens due to inability to moderate and negative emotions and thus beings impulsive in reactions.

Mean differences on emotional intelligence, empathy and aggression were also found across convicted and under trail juvenile delinquents. Results of *t*-test indicated that delinquents under trail were more aggressive than convicted delinquents. They were also less empathic and showed poorer emotional intelligence as compare to convicted juveniles. Research has also demonstrated that findings on nature and level of aggressive behaviors and evidence for empathetic concerns among incarcerated youth in somewhat inconsistency (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004). Further

research with larger sample sizes and other correlates may explain these differences.

Approaches toward juvenile offending have transformed a great deal since the '90s. The notion of punishing young delinquents essentially replaced efforts to reform them. Laws and strategies based on developmental and psychological spectrum would make it likely for juvenile offenders to nurture as responsible adults, rather than professional criminals, and would reduce the existent burden on the legal and penal systems.

Limitations and Suggestions

Although study has provided the significant contribution to the field of forensic psychology, but limitations were also found.

The following are some limitations of the current study.

1. The present study was designed as a correlational research; however we used matched control group. Many intervening variables still could have affected the results.
2. The sample size was limited due to short time period. The nature of sample was difficult to find and matching process of age, education and socio-economic status was also very demanding. The sample was selected from Faisalabad and Jaranwala only.
3. Only male delinquents were included in the study.

Following are some suggestions.

1. Sample size should be increased in future study by including juvenile jails from other districts of Punjab.
2. Comparison should be done between male and female delinquents.
3. Separate analysis of individual personality variables with reference to different psychological conditions can be done.
4. Due to the prospective role of empathy in delinquency, forthcoming inquiries could aim on designing intervention strategies for employing in general system of education, so as to encourage emotional empathy in youth.

Conclusions

Our ability to understand others feelings, moral management of emotions are crucial for avoiding conflicts in social relationships. Being a key feature of emotional intelligence, empathy can play an important in preventing or developing violent behaviors.

Intervention with delinquent groups should focus on strategies like perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions for better psychological adjustment after getting released from the prison.

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