



The Ways Psychological Trauma Affect Juvenile Delinquency

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Abstract. There have been numerous pieces of research on trauma and juvenile delinquency. Experiencing trauma at an early age poses various negative effects on individuals, making them gradually slide into deviant behavior and finally to delinquency in adolescence. However, few research has explored how exactly specific types of trauma affect juveniles to delinquency. The purpose of this paper is to find out how different kinds of traumas affect juvenile delinquency. In particular, this paper reviewed 19 previous studies and summarized the types of psychological trauma and found that how different kinds of traumas affect juveniles differently. This paper helps us establish a more comprehensive understanding of how trauma relates to delinquency.

Keywords: Psychological trauma · juvenile · delinquency

1 Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is a common social problem. Juvenile delinquency, also known as “juvenile offending, is the act of participating in unlawful behavior as an individual younger than the statutory age of majority [1]. This phenomenon not only makes the society unstable, but also leaves criminal record to juveniles themselves, which has negative effect to their future life and career. Thus, investigating what factors influence juvenile delinquency help parents and schools take actions to reduce juvenile delinquency and improve their well-being. Of all the factors that lead to juvenile delinquency, psychological trauma plays a significant role. Psychological trauma is a damage to a person’s mind as a result of one or more distressing events causing overwhelming amounts of stress that exceed the person’s ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved, eventually leading to serious long-term negative consequences [2]. Many studies have investigated the correlation between psychological trauma and juvenile delinquency. However, few examined how exactly trauma affect juvenile delinquency. Therefore, the current study aims to fill in this research gap by conducting a literature review and reorganizing the previous evidence.

2 Literature Review

In this paper, research on the relationship between psychological trauma and juvenile delinquency has four aspects. First of all, Doctor Kerig, P. K et al. hold the view that traumatic experiences are associated with PTSD and other mental problems bear by detained juveniles. Secondly, Julian. D et al. find that childhood traumatic victimization of juveniles increases the possibility of their delinquent behavior, no matter what forms it takes. Thirdly, Patricia K. Kerig and Stephen P. Becker believe that it is negative emotions that implicate juveniles to delinquency, such as shame, painful feelings and anger. Heather Y. et al. stress that a certain distrusted feeling caused by trauma leads to juvenile delinquency. What is more, Judge Michael L. Howard and Robin R. Tener find that the symptoms of PTSD unconsciously drive juveniles to delinquency. Fourthly, Tina Maschi finds that different kinds of trauma could lead to different kinds of delinquency. Jane A, Siegel Linda M. and Williams find that in the way of escaping the source of trauma, many are forced to delinquency in order to survive. In my part, I focus my research on the links between different kinds of trauma and juvenile delinquency.

3 Psychological Trauma

The factors that contribute to trauma are manifold. Natural disasters are a primary factor that can cause psychological trauma. As well, both physical and mental abuses can lead to trauma. For instance, being bullied, parental substance abuse, witnessing quarrels or violence between parents and parental incarceration can be regarded as antecedents of psychological trauma. As for the types of trauma, researchers have classified it into three types situational trauma stress disorders, and vicarious trauma [2]. Firstly, situational trauma, which causes by not only man-made adverse situations but also to natural disasters. Stress disorders is caused by unpleasant stimuli. Vicarious trauma refers to workers witnessing their client's trauma. Trauma affects people in many ways and this paper summarizes its negative effects from the following aspects. Trauma induces individuals to generate more negative emotions and causes people suffer from PTSD. As well, it makes people lose trust and feel shameful and creates a bad self-image. Moreover, individuals with psychological traumas are more likely to get stuck in "violent copying", sex delinquency, substance abuse and property delinquency.

4 Psychological Trauma and Violent Delinquency

Violent crime, or violent delinquency, is that the offender or perpetrator uses or threatens to use force on victims. Studies have shown that many juveniles who conduct violent delinquency bear severe mental problems, which are caused by psychological trauma [3]. Trauma leads juveniles experience overwhelming negative emotions, and delinquency can be seen as response to these emotions. In other words, according to [4], the act of offending itself is a means of emotional adaption. Many juveniles have experienced violence, and they are deeply traumatized because of this. Juveniles who experience violence at an early age generate many negative emotions, which in turn to lead to delinquency to prevent themselves from being overwhelmed. Being treated violently in

the long term will cause deep trauma to juveniles. And trauma in early childhood leads to poor self-regulation and identification with social norms [5]. It can also lead to poor management of emotions and behavior. So they are more likely to take hyperactive or behavior. These factors increase the risk of violent delinquency.

Another reason for juveniles to perform violent delinquency is that they suffer from PTSD, a mental disease that may be caused by trauma. The traumatized juveniles with PTSD still have the feelings when the traumatic event happens. Many of them are still tortured by nightmares, flashbacks and so on. They are hypervigilant so they often misunderstand some social situations. The common situations for ordinary people may be seen as dangerous by them. The illusion that they are once in danger makes them take assaultive behavior as a means to defend themselves [6]. That probably constitutes delinquency or crime. Losing trust is also a factor for causing violent delinquency. This usually comes from being abused as a child. Abuse from parents traumatizes the kids, making them develop a feeling that parents and rules are untrustworthy, or even harmful, because they are abused by their loved ones, who should have protected them [7]. This distrusted feeling is very likely to transfer to anger, hostility, neglect, and indifference towards others [8]. Thus, they become more aggressive. Some of them defy the laws, some hurt or injure other people, still some conduct deeds that infringe on others' rights.

5 Psychological Trauma and Sex Delinquency

Sex crime refers to the behavior that knowingly make others to engage in unwanted sexual act by force or threat [9]. Actually, some conduct sex delinquency as a way to survive. This is caused by the fact that traumatized juveniles tried their best to escape from the source of trauma. Many children and teenagers are abused at home and thus, they attempt to run away in order to avoid being abused. Without income, however, some turn to the victims of sexual delinquency [10]. Another reason for sexual delinquency is the feeling of shame. When juveniles experience sex abuse, such as rape, they are traumatized by producing a strong sense of shame, or stigmatization. Stigmatization plays an important role in delinquency especially among adolescent girls. The ones being abused usually develop a negative self-view, regarding themselves as bad and blameworthy, which may lead to deviant sexual behaviors by reinforcing these views. This phenomenon can also be considered as the actions that traumatized individuals perform to hide the damaged self from others. [11]. Some victims who have these feelings think they do not deserve or have the right to have advocacy and protected sex [11]. A study conducted showed that trauma related to delinquent sex, including having a higher number of sexual partners, casual sexual behaviour, and having sex at a young age. The trauma caused by physical abuse or witnessing parental violence is associated with inconsistent condom use, which leads to pregnancy prematurely and even criminal abortion [12].

The experience of "victim copying" can also account for why some individuals become sex offenders [4]. Studies have shown that many molesters have experienced forced sex, as well as the rapists. Some witnessed forced sex in their family [12]. The traumatized juveniles unconsciously repeat the circumstance over and over again and thus it is likely that the victims of sexual abuse imitate the behavior of the perpetrators. What is more, sexual trauma leads to abnormal sexual arousal of the victims [13]. When

their abnormal lust is aroused, they are likely to conduct sexual offences. For example, a male victim who was raped by an adult man in his childhood may become pedophiles themselves. When they see an innocent little boy, their lust is aroused and he conducts rape. Some may experience sexual trauma which is related to sex and a certain object. Their lust is aroused when seeing the special object and this is likely to develop fetishism.

6 Psychological Trauma and Substance Abuse

Substance abuse refers to inappropriate, or illegal use of a substance, such as drug, alcohol, or another chemical such as an inhalant, especially when resulting in addiction. It is also called chemical abuse [14]. On the one hand, many traumatized adolescents get addicted to substances to get away from agony brought by trauma [15]. Many substances, like drugs, paralyze people's nerves and create an intoxicated feeling. This feeling relieves painful feelings for a little while. However, it's not enough for the traumatized adolescents. Their endless requirement for the abused substance makes them become an addict, a substance abuser. On the other hand, being exposed to poor living conditions at an early age also increases the risk of drug abuse. Living conditions usually include family, school, peers, and community, which provide both physical and psychological supports for adolescents [13]. Poor living conditions usually mean less supports, and even violence, prejudice, and instability. Under these living conditions juveniles are more likely to victimize and get traumatized. These traumatized juveniles are poorer at emotional control as well as dealing with stress. In this regard, some of juveniles are more likely to get out of control and resort to drugs as a relief when they are under pressure. But when enough support is given, juveniles are better at going through hardships. As a result, they typically do not need to seek external assistance to deal with stress, such as substance abuse.

Neglect is also a factor that leads to substance abuse. It causes intangible, but terrible trauma to children. Children being neglected are more likely to suffer from mental disorders during adolescence that makes them easily feel break down [13]. Parental substance abuse also increases the risk of substance abuse of juveniles, as these parents are less likely to establish stable and close relationships with their children. In other words, juveniles with this kind of parents are subject to neglect. When these juveniles break down, some become deviant and even become addicted to substance. Neglect can also cause egocentrism, impulsivity, antisocial personality. And dysregulation, which are factors that contribute to substance abuse.

7 Psychological Trauma and Property Crime

Property crime refers to the crime to obtaining money, property, or some other benefits illegally. This may involve force, or the threat of force [16]. One of the main reasons for property crime is that some juveniles live in a high-crime neighborhoods, which triggers their senses of helplessness and negative self-images and thus, causing trauma onto them. Moreover, living in such neighborhoods increases the risk of experiencing violence and theft. All these factors rise the risk of property crime [17]. As well, these traumatized juveniles may have an impulse to revenge as a rebellion against their bad

living environments. Juveniles holding this idea assume that they do not have to be a disciplined person and turn to property delinquency.

Another reason for property crime is the feeling of isolation. To be specific, juveniles with low socioeconomic status are more likely to experience the feeling of isolation. This feeling, in turn, causes trauma to juveniles. Juveniles with poor family or inequality of their parents' income are also likely to have a low self-esteem and feel alienated from the society [18]. These juveniles feel lonely and out of place, and some of them are sensitive to money and want to become equal to the ones with higher economic status. As a result, they turn to property delinquency.

There is still a special reason for juvenile property crime. That is, being wronged with conducting property crime. This causes trauma to the wronged juveniles. The trauma, in turn, produce motivations for juveniles to conduct property crime. A boy was wronged for being a theft of books in a bookstore in his childhood. Years later, he found himself couldn't resist stealing. His psychological therapist found that he stole for revenge. He felt a tinge of pleasure at the thought of the storekeeper found books were gone and at rage. A great number of Juvenile property criminals like this boy are victims of trauma relating to property delinquency. Being tortured by trauma, they obsessed by sporadic repulsion of conducting property crime.

8 Conclusion

This paper finds that trauma affects delinquency in many ways. Psychological trauma has a negative effect on juvenile's mental health, which in turn lead to various delinquencies. For instance, traumas may make juveniles feel overwhelmed by agony, feel distrust in others, generate a sense of shame and inferiority, experience "victim copy", and construct negative self-image. This paper contributes to exploring how trauma affects juvenile delinquency, especially how exactly different kinds of trauma put juveniles into delinquency. But it is not enough. Future studies should aim to find the correlation between trauma and juvenile delinquency, especially how exactly different kinds of trauma put juveniles into delinquency. Moreover, how to build a trauma-informed system in justice system and how to deal with the trauma of delinquent adolescents should also be studied.

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