

Role of Education in Criminal Thinking among Convicts in Southern Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to explore factors effecting criminal thinking among convicts imprisoned in Central Jail Bahawalpur, Pakistan. The researcher collected from 181 male convicts by using the Indigenous Criminal Thinking Scale- ICTS (Sana & Batool, 2017). The findings of the study showed that lack of education appears to be a stronger predictor of criminal thinking than socio-economic status. The criminal thinking, being a dynamic factor, can be a direct therapeutic target for the control and prevention of crime or reoffending. The findings of the study enforce the dual role of education, either as a risk factor or can be used correctional tool in the reduction of recidivism.

Keywords. Criminal Thinking, Education, Convicts, Pakistan

Introduction

Cognitions behind the exhibition of any behaviors play a pivotal role in the explanation of that behavior. Literature has shown that offenders have a distinct yet maladaptive and erroneous thought pattern that not only justifies criminal behavior but also maintain its existence even after incarnation. Such thought patterns serve as the purpose of justifying criminal behavior (Tangney, Mashek, & Stuewig, 2007). Criminogenic designs of thoughts minimize the impact of crime and its consequences on the victim or society. The presence of antisocial or criminal thinking pattern is a strong indication or risk factor for not only recidivism but also for inmate misconduct during the period of their imprisonment

(Caudy et al., 2015; Tangney et al., 2012). Re-offending is an important phenomenon to study as it deals with the recommitting of crime by an already punished offender. Crime is always costly for society, individual and government in terms of money and resources. Literature has highlighted that criminal thinking is one of the influential factors which can explain the phenomenon of reoffending in detail (Mandracchia, Gonzalez, Patterson, & Smith, 2015; Wolff, Morgan, & Shi, 2013). Individuals might incline to crave excitement, to think their thrill-seeking actions are just a source of fun with no damaging consequences (Zeigler-Hill, Mandracchia, Dahlen, Shango, & Vrabel, 2017). For certain serious offenders, such

thought patterns become more automatic and persistent leading them to choices according to which the only way to handle the situation was to take law in hands. Thus, such distorted thought patterns do impact the overall life trajectory of an individual (Mitchell & Tafrate, 2012). Criminal thinking acts as a motivational construct that uses thoughts appropriately to pursue and internalize antisocial objectives, goals, and consequences (Tangney et al., 2007). These patterns are prevalent in almost all segments of society but in criminals, their prevalence is concentrated (Walters & Morgan, 2018). Such cognitive distortions is a dynamic and robust risk factor that can be handled through an appropriate treatment plan. Individuals have complex behavioral health problems. Criminal cognitions acts as a mean by which individuals justify, exhibit and neutralize their offending behavior and thus, neutralize any effort made to improve their behavior or thought pattern (Morgan, Fisher, Duan, Mandracchia, & Murray, 2010). In a criminal thinking style, individuals use several certain cognitive styles or processes to rationalize their behavior to the environment prevailing around them. Thus, they are not only engaged in faulty thought patterns but rather choose and actively develop them without being aware of their presence or maladaptive nature (Gavel & Mandracchia, 2016). It is thus, irresponsible thinking style criminal is unaware of its existence or impact. Criminogenic cognitions being dysfunctional thoughts act as a catalyst not only for maladaptive behavior but also for a psychological disturbance. So, it is vital to

explore and highlight the factors which influence criminal thinking.

Education and monthly income have reportedly linked with criminogenic thought patterns (Andrews & Bonta, 1998, 2010; Walters, 2014). Studies have shown that a lack of education has both short term and long term impacts on criminality and criminal thinking (Tagney et al., 2012; Walters, 2014). Poverty has also been a strong indicator and ground used to justify the criminal behavior of the individual by the society and the individual himself. Definition of crime or antisocial behavior is norm specific so, the Indigenous Criminal Thinking Scale (ICTS) was developed to measure the psychological expression of criminal thinking instead of clinical and to measure the phenomenon exclusively related to Pakistani culture (Sana & Batool, 2017). The purpose of the present study is to explore the role of education on criminal thinking and previous criminal record. Literature has shown that people with criminal thinking patterns do tend to offend again and stay in jail for a more extended period. Criminal thinking is a factor that interferes with responsiveness to forensic treatment programs (Mitchell, Tafrate, Hogan, & Olver, 2013).

Method

Sample

Data were collected from 181 male convicts incarcerated in Central Jail Bahawalpur, Pakistan, with age range 19 years to 65 years ($M = 34.84$, $SD = 11.14$), and monthly income ranged from 3000 PKRs to 2,00,000 PKRs ($M = 32,397$, $SD = 29,091$). 122 respondents (67.55%) were charged with one case filed against them as compared to 59 respondents

(32.5%), with more than one lawsuit filed against them. Duration of imprisonment ranged from 7 months to 17 years (M= 5.49, SD=3.80). Reported age at crime ranged from 14 years to 68 years (M=29.11, SD= 11.01). 145 respondents (80%) reported current conviction as their first crime as compared to 36 respondents (20%) who reported to be in jail for more than one time.

Instrument

Indigenous Criminal Thinking Scale

ICTS was developed by Sana and Batool (2017) and is a 24 item scale ranging from 1 = disagree strongly to 5 = agree strongly, where a score of “3” indicates the uncertain inclination of the respondent towards the statement. A high score on the scale represents a high inclination towards criminal thinking and vice versa. Alpha reliability of ICTS in the present study is .86.

Education, Monthly Income and Previous Criminal Record

Information about education and monthly income was asked through open-ended questions. Data obtained was retained in the continuous form to preserve the essence of information. Other closed-ended items were about the rearrests and reconviction, like have you ever been in jail or detention before? The response format was “Yes or No.”

Procedure

Permission was taken from the author to use the ICTS for research purposes. IG Jails Punjab permitted to collect data from Central Jail Bahawalpur. The introduction of the researcher, institution, and purpose of the study was explained to Superintendent Jail. The researcher met the team of 10 literacy

teachers from convicts in person to explain the purpose and process of the research. Informed consent was read out loud by the researcher, and instructions along with each item of the scale were then described to them in detail. They then fill out the questionnaire under the guidance of the researcher. The researcher rechecked each form, and then further forms were given to each literacy teacher so that they can collect data from other prisoners under the same protocol demonstrated by the researcher. This strategy was preferred due to a shortage of time and to utilize already built rapport for better data collection. Data collection from literate criminals was preferred. Data collected was then analyzed by using the SPSS 22 version.

Results

The relationship between Criminal Thinking and Demographic Variables (N=181)

Table 1

	Variables	1	2	3
1	Criminal Thinking	-	-.35**	-.19*
2	Education		-	.25**
3	Monthly Income			-

Note. **p<.01, *p<.05

Findings presented in Table 1 showed that criminal thinking is inversely associated with education and monthly income. Trends have shown that lack of education is related to criminal thinking. Multiple regression analysis was carried out to explore further whether it is the poverty or lack of education that is responsible for the development and persistence of criminal thinking.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Predicting Criminal Thinking from Education and Monthly Income among Convicts(N = 171)

Predictors	Criminal Thinking			95%CI	
	B	SEB	β	LL	UL
Constant	80.50	2.07		76.40	84.59
Education	-1.19	.24	-.36***	-1.66	-.72
Excluded variable					
Monthly Income	-.10				
R	.36				
R ²	.13				
F(df)	24.83(169)***				

Note. ***p<.001. CI= Confidence interval based on 1000 bootstrapped samples.

The findings of Table 2 showed that lack of education is a stronger predictor of criminal thinking than monthly income.

Table 3

Mean Difference in Education due to Previous Personal Criminal Record (N=181)

Variable	Previous Record		Personal Criminal Record		t (df)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	Yes (n=36)	No (n=145)	M	SD			LL	UL	
	Education	5.92	4.36	7.93			4.40	-2.46(179)	

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

Results in Table 3 showed that convicts with previous criminal records have a low education level as compared to first-time offenders. Fighting was reportedly the major crime committed, and clashes or disputes were considered as the main reason for crime in either previous arrest or conviction. Thus, education is essential shaping behavior and delinquent conduct of convicts.

Discussion

Crime has always been a costly affair starting from its commencement to detention. Crime effect society at the micro and macro levels on the party involved, which include offender, victim, families, government, and communities. So, crime control and prevention has been a primary concern for government, policymakers, researchers, and academicians. The present study was conducted on convicts imprisoned in the Central Jail of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. The sample was comprised of adult males only. The purpose of the study was to predict criminal thinking among convicts through education. A study (Tangney et al., 2012) showed that criminogenic cognitions have a moderate negative relationship with income and education, whereas findings of the current research in Table 2 showed that lack of education is a stronger predictor of criminal thinking than that of monthly income. Khan, Ahmed, Nawaz and Zaman (2015) reported the similar findings according to which crime rates have a strong negative relationship with higher education, more income, on the other hand, create significant benefits for thefts and robberies making affluent areas more attractive for those who want to earn more in less time and effort. Based on the cost-benefit analysis, to control criminal behavior benefits gained through crime should be more than the cost of committing a crime. Education induces high earning opportunities, the increased opportunity cost of crime or the cost of time wasted due to involvement in criminal activity (Iqbal & Jalil, 2010). Literature has shown that education fosters rationality and risk aversion among

individuals so, being in the academic institution itself reduces the inclination towards crime (Aslund, Gronqvist, Hall, & Vlachos, 2018).

Criminal thinking patterns in such scenarios act as a set of beliefs that shape the circumstances for making a choice and, thus, effect the individual actions (Mitchell & Tafrate, 2012). Zeigler-Hill and his colleagues (2017) highlighted the indirect relationship of criminal thinking and information processing of the environment and reported that criminal thinking could help explain the reason or the processes involved in the exhibition of criminal behavior. Walters and Morgan (2018) have taken criminal thinking as a motivational construct to advance antisocial goals or outcomes and is linked to recidivism. Criminal thinking served as patterns developed to reduce the discrepancies between moral standards and deviant behavior through rationalization or minimization. Gendreau, Little, and Goggin (1996) claimed that patterns of criminal thinking are dynamic risk factors that can be changed and are a moving target for treatment. The present study highlights the role of education which could be considered in two ways: inhibition of crime at first place by engaging adolescents in the educational activities act as a protective factor against involvement in crime or secondly education can act as a source of significant change through a correctional program designed for modifying criminal thinking, an approach advocated by Warner, Conley, and Murphy (2018). Use of education-related policies for controlling crime is being analyzed by researchers from

different fields and showed that enrollment, attendance in school and quality of education have played a significant role in the reduction of crime (Hjalmarsson, Holmlund, & Lindquist, 2015; Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Machin, Marie, & Vujic, 2011; Swisher & Dennison, 2016). The present study contributed by highlighting the role of education in controlling recidivism and criminal activities by modifying or altering criminal thinking. Aslund and colleagues (2018) highlighted the importance of curriculum changes along with prolonging education. Through incapacitation, education can reduce crime as per literature (Anderson, 2014; Berthelon & Kruger, 2011). Thus, education can help in both inhibiting and controlling crime, but the quality of education is itself important along with a quantity of education but even at the initial level, the presence of education is more precaution against crime.

Conclusion

Investment in education does bring benefits at a social level other than just personal level benefits. Education shape the thinking processes of an individual and to control or reduce reoffending, and it is essential to address criminal thinking of offenders at the jail, and quality education can serve as a base of improving their thinking patterns through customized correctional cognitive-based programs. The prevalence of criminal thinking is linked to severe issues like recidivism and increased intensity of crime committed. The present study is comprised of data from one central jail; it is recommended that central jails from other cities should also be included in further studies to ensure the generalizability of

findings. Model is proposed based on cross-sectional data, and longitudinal research is needed to further elaborate or confirm the results of the current study.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

National Ethics Committee for Psychological Research (NECPR) approved the ethical standards of the study.

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