

Unravelling Youth Aggression: Genetic Predispositions and Environmental Influences in Maladaptive Behaviours

Swathi Kannan, Satheesh Varma

Department of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Heritage, Chinmaya Vishwa

Vidyapeeth (deemed-to-be University), Kochi

E-mail: swathikannan52@gmail.com, satheesh.varma@cvv.ac.in

Abstract

The present research focuses on the causes of aggression and violence amongst the youth and more specifically the children in conflict with the law. The results of the study are gathered from the practitioners and other stakeholders of the Kerala Juvenile Justice System by conducting semi structured interviews and employing Thematic Analysis. It focuses on inherited factors including Genetic Predispositions such as heritable temperament and mental disorder as well as environmental factors including violence exposure and socioeconomic disadvantage resulting in maladaptive behaviour. The results show that although personalities may be inherited, the environment paves the way for aggressive behaviour. The study underscores the complexity of attributing youth aggression solely to either nature or nurture, emphasizing the necessity for holistic interventions.

Keywords- Genetic Predispositions, Environmental factors, Youth Aggression, Maladaptive Behaviours.

Introduction

The increased cases of expression of anger and violence among youths particularly the children in conflict with law has become a very sensitive issue of public concern in today's society. These behaviours do not only impact the youths in the manner in which they go on living their young lives but also impact their families, the entire society and the justice system in its entirety. The nature of explaining youth aggression involves understanding several causes: heredity and environment are precursors to aggression but are fundamental natures of aggression as well. This study aims to explore fundamental causes by incorporating data from semi-structured interviews with professionals working in the Kerala Juvenile Justice System, offering a close observation of participants' experiences and consolidating their views.

Objectives

1. Identify How do genetic predispositions and environmental influences interact to contribute to the development of aggressive and maladaptive behaviours among youth in conflict with the law in Kerala.
2. Identify what holistic intervention strategies can effectively mitigate these behaviours?

Research Question:

The present study tries to delve deep into the area of research to find answers to the following question

How do genetic predispositions and environmental influences interact to contribute to the development of aggressive and maladaptive behaviours among youth in conflict with the law in Kerala, and what holistic intervention strategies can effectively mitigate these behaviours?

Methodology

This qualitative study employs thematic analysis to evaluate How do genetic predispositions and environmental influences interact to contribute to the development of aggressive and maladaptive behaviours among youth in conflict with the law in Kerala, and what holistic intervention strategies can effectively mitigate these behaviours. It includes semi-structured interviews with 11 key informants, such as juvenile justice board members, caretakers, superintendents, project coordinators, psychologists, and counselors each with 1-15 years of experience. Document analysis of relevant programs supplements the interviews, focusing on observation homes, rehabilitation centers etc. Data reliability was ensured through triangulation, intercoder checks, and psychologist validation. The study adhered to ethical standards, obtaining consent and maintaining participant confidentiality. Data were recorded using voice recorders and detailed notes, with rigorous systematic analysis emphasizing transparency and reflexivity.

Results and Discussion

The study found that youth aggression stems from both genetic predispositions and environmental influences. Genetic factors, including hereditary mental disorders and temperament, contribute significantly to aggressive behaviour. Environmental factors, such as exposure to violence, socioeconomic disadvantages, and peer pressure, also play crucial roles

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in shaping maladaptive behaviours in youth. The following themes are identified from the thematic analysis of the transcripts of the interviews-

The Complexity of Youth Aggression

There are tendencies in young children that are genetically influenced as well as aspects of the environment that provoke aggression in youth. The controversy on the roles that heredity or environment has been argued to have a more significant role in youths' aggression. Thus, there are genetically influenced factors such as genetic constitution, predisposition to aggression, and hereditary mental illness that make individuals engage in such behaviours. Violent media and observed aggression can affect aggression while socioeconomic status and the degree of environmental restriction can also predict aggression.

Genetic Predispositions (Nature)

Hereditary factors remain absolutely important for children's behaviour as they define the ability to become a delinquent. Notably, as one participant noted, "Genetic predispositions might contribute to their behaviour," various youths possess predetermined behavioural features such as aggressiveness and impulsiveness, owing to their genes. These predispositions manifest in conduct problems and include such traits as manipulation and defiance, traced more in children from families with criminal or behavioural disorder histories. It is for this reason that knowledge on the genetic factors that predispose youth to poor outcomes is essential in informing interventions for such youth.

Heritable Temperament

The inheritable temperament of children in conflict with the law varies widely, as noted in the statement: 'They display patterns of behaviour that appear to be genetically inherited' Impulsiveness, inadequate control of emotions, and lack of ability to establish meaningful bonding are aspects that are manifested. These traits put the young people on a pedestal to engage in impulsive and risky deeds hence become involved in delinquent activities. Thus, early identification and intervention aimed at the treatment of these inherited temperamental characteristics are critically important when it comes to accurate behavioural management planning in children in conflict with law, as well as promoting better emotional coping strategies.

Inherent Mental Disorders

Inherent mental disorders significantly impact children's behaviours and criminal trajectories, as observed by the participant "Majority children usually present themselves with pre existing psychological problems. Some of the disorders include conduct disorder, ADHD, substance use disorders among others as most of the kids in the children's home exhibit." These disorders are frequently comorbid with trauma and childhood maltreatment, which can worsen the effects on behaviour. Assuming these underlying mental illnesses, there has to be coordinated approaches which involve medical management, psychosocial interventions and rehabilitation based on each person's condition. This means that armed with proper treatment, these disorders will not determine one's propensity to engage in criminal activities, as well as other positive developmental changes.

Environmental Influences (Nurture)

Environmental factors play a crucial role in shaping youth aggression and delinquency, as highlighted, Speaking of environmental contexts, the respondents highlighted the importance of such factors as broken families. Many explained that growing up in a broken home or witnessing their parents' divorce had a negative influence on them. Such conditions promote stressors which cause youth to have emotional dysregulation, social adjustment and participation in anti-social behaviours. Working on the environment entails integration of support for families, communities and school based education programmes that seek to facilitate youthful development. Generally, preventing harm and enhancing protective conditions allows the necessary measures to counter adverse environments, and the latter promote successful reintegration.

Effect of exposure to violence and socioeconomic status.

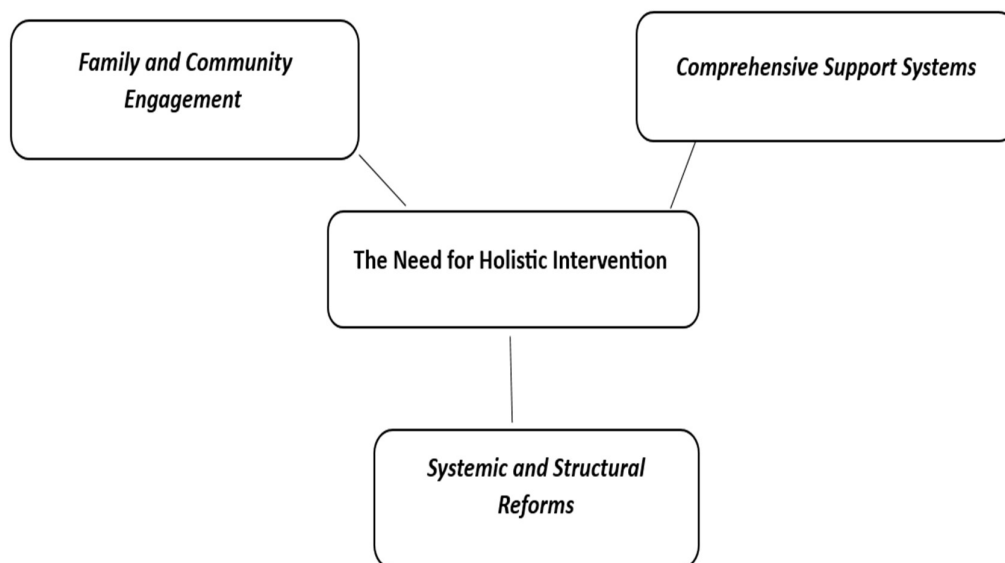
Exposure to violence and socioeconomic disparities significantly heighten the risk of juvenile delinquency, as noted: "Violence has a huge impact on their behaviour. " Poor environments, unemployment, and lack of educational services make youths more vulnerable. People described how these issues lead to hopelessness, exclusion, and reinforced propensity for delinquent activities for the sake of livelihood or conforming to certain groups' standards. Combating these issues entails using community-level prevention and economic and social justice strategies aimed at ensuring safety among the people.

The Role of Peer Pressure and Community Dynamics (Nurture)

Peer pressure and community dynamics exert profound influences on children's behaviours, as illustrated: 'They copy other people, their peers in most cases,' thus making peer pressure a common reason for their engagement in criminal activities. Peer pressure makes them engage in negative behaviours such as substance abuse, gang activities, and other delinquent conducts. They stressed on how such dynamics could be used in devising preventive measures/strategies and enhancing peer relations. They recommend that programs which involve youth in togetherness with other caregivers, volunteers and professionals who will relate with them in a positive manner, provide role models and engage them profitably can reduce influence which leads to negative decisions from such peers.

Figure 1

Themes on the need for holistic intervention.



The Need for Holistic Intervention

Due to the complex interplay of genetics and environment, addressing youth aggression requires a comprehensive intervention strategy. Psychosocial counselling, family engagement, and systemic reforms are crucial components. Kazdin (2003) emphasizes that timely counselling interventions can prevent youths from engaging in aggression and promote

healthier coping mechanisms. Observation homes and long-term treatment programs, highlighted by Lipsey (2009), effectively reduce recidivism rates by creating correctional environments conducive to rehabilitation. These structured interventions, including cognitive behavioural therapy and multisystemic therapy, have shown significant success in managing aggression and improving functioning (Catterson et al., 2009; Lipsey, 2009).

Comprehensive Support Systems

The appropriate strategy that must be employed when dealing with children who are wayward and engage in criminal acts is a multidimensional treatment model that incorporates psychological, educational, and sociological measures that are rehabilitative in nature. As mentioned in the transcripts: “We should provide comprehensive support systems including counselling.” This shows the distinct requirements that the children have to be met through a number of ways. While encompassing principles of rehabilitation and corrections, concurrent supportive systems also avoid reoffending since most of these people suffer from psychological problems, educational deficiencies, and lack of social readjustment. It is in this respect that these systems avail a number of services that are personalized to meet the youths’ needs or requirements in specifics such as counselling, educational sessions as well as vocational training in order to observe desirable changes in behaviour among these youths and enable them to make positive choices in life.

Family and Community Engagement

Active engagement with families and communities is crucial in the rehabilitation of children in conflict with law, as emphasized in the transcripts: A very critical area of intervention is the family and community participation in the rehabilitation process. They need to be involved in coming up with the treatment plan for the patient and they too ought to be assisted as they try to foster new improved relationships that shall help the patient to change for the better. Awareness programmes and support networks are other important ways that involve the community in the process of rehabilitation of children in conflict with law and the prevention of their reinvention into criminal activities. Given that families, communities, and juvenile justice systems can function as cooperative entities, interventions can target the system’s shortcomings to achieve comprehensive, lasting rehabilitation results.

Systemic and Structural Reforms

In the context of the study, both systemic and structural changes within the society and within the juvenile justice system could be implemented to explain the causes of delinquency and provide equal treatment to all children in Juvenile Justice System facilities. The transcripts highlight the need for such reforms: Systematic changes are required within the scope of the juvenile justice system. The objectives of these reforms are to increase the impact and efficacy of the treatment measures by synchronizing the services, equity in the alleviation of justice, and equality in punishment and its reception. This may involve policy revision to favor the restoration of children without focusing on the punitive aspect, they may include training of the persons who work with children, and lastly, adequate financial support for such services. These reforms aim at eliminating the barriers which have for years been contributing to the high youth recidivism rates through the provision of suitable environment and proper rehabilitation perfectible through evidence.

Conclusion

Hence, the present Study unequivocally emphasizes the paramount importance of multi-dimensional approaches rather than the mere practice of institutionalization for combating juvenile delinquency in Kerala. Thus, merging clinical, instructional, and community-psychological interventions with the policy changes within the Juvenile justice system's framework, one can counterbalance the effects of genetic susceptibility and unfavourable environment on children's behaviour. This approach does not only help for the best result but also helps for children in conflict with law' healthy development and reintegration into the mainstream society.

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