

Emotional Competence of Children in Conflict with Law- A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Emotional competence is essential for shaping individual's ability to navigate interpersonal relationships, regulate emotions, and adapt to social environments. This study examines the emotional competence of children in conflict with the law (juvenile delinquents) in comparison to their counterparts with no legal conflicts. Using a comparative research design, 60 participants (30 in each group) were assessed using the Emotional Competence Scale by Bhardwaj and Sharma. The study explored dimensions such as emotional awareness, emotional expression, emotional regulation, and interpersonal sensitivity. The results revealed significant differences between the two groups, with children in conflict with the law exhibiting lower emotional awareness and regulation abilities. Contextual factors, including family environment and peer relationships, were found to significantly influence emotional competence in both groups. The findings highlight the importance of targeted interventions to enhance emotional skills in vulnerable populations, particularly children involved in the juvenile justice system. This study underscores the need for emotional competence training as part of rehabilitation programs for children in conflict with the law. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on juvenile delinquency and emotional development, offering implications for policy-making and intervention strategies.

Keywords: *Emotional Competence, Juvenile Delinquency, Emotional Awareness, Emotional Expression, Emotional Regulation*

Emotions are essential components of human psychology that impact an individual's worldview, social interactions, and decision-making abilities. They include a broad spectrum of emotional states acting as internal reactions to external stimuli, such as happiness, sorrow, anger, fear, and surprise. Comprising physiological, cognitive, and behavioral elements, emotions are intricate and influence how an individual responds to different circumstances. Humans experience emotions as natural responses to events and circumstances in their lives. The situations that elicit an emotion influences how an individual perceives and processes their feelings (Cherry, 2023). Emotional competence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, express, and regulate both one's own emotions and those of others. (Saarni, 1999). This idea includes a variety of abilities, such as emotional expressiveness, empathy, emotional management, and emotional awareness.

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While empathy is the ability to perceive and understand the feelings of others, emotional awareness is the recognition of one's own emotions and their influence on conduct. Being emotionally capable enables people to handle stress, settle disputes, and form enduring bonds with others, all of which are critical to psychological well-being.

Adolescence is characterized by increased emotional reactivity; they frequently exhibit more intense emotional reactions to ordinary occurrences. Adolescents must learn how to correctly express and control increasingly complicated emotions, such as empathy, remorse, and shame. Emotional control is necessary for both psychological well-being and positive social interactions. Since adolescent development is significantly impacted by emotions, it has an impact on behavior, relationships, and general well-being. Adolescents must learn to comprehend and control their emotions in the face of quickly evolving social, cognitive, and physical contexts as they traverse this difficult time. Adolescent delinquent conduct is often linked to emotional competency deficits. These deficiencies may be a result of several factors, including neurobiological variations, traumatic childhood events, inadequate parenting, peer pressure, and substance misuse. Emotional disorders can result in anger, impulsivity, trouble establishing relationships, and victimization, all of which raise the likelihood of criminality.

Five essential emotional competence categories have been identified by Saarni (1999), that influence how people manage their emotional experiences and interpersonal relationships (Goleman, 1995). Emotional awareness, the first domain, is the capacity to precisely recognize and understand one's feelings and those of others. Understanding one's own emotional states is essential for good emotional processing and socially acceptable responses, making it the cornerstone of emotional competence (Saarni, 1999). The second domain, emotional expression, is the skillful and socially acceptable communication of emotions. This involves expressing oneself both orally and nonverbally, which builds rapport and encourages empathy (Goleman, 1995).

The ability to recognize how emotions affect ideas and actions is the third domain or emotional understanding. To sustain successful social relationships and comprehend how emotions impact oneself and others, it is essential to identify the sources of emotions and forecast their consequences (Brasseur et al., 2013). The fourth area, emotional regulation, deals with the capacity to control and regulate emotional reactions, particularly under demanding or stressful circumstances. Maintaining emotional balance, lowering unpleasant feelings, and improving general mental health are all made possible by effective emotional regulation (Gross & John, 2003). Emotional utilization is the process of employing feelings in a productive way to support decision-making and problem-solving. People may use emotional energy to improve motivation, creativity, and productivity by learning to read emotional cues (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Studies show a negative correlation between delinquent conduct and emotional intelligence among juvenile home prisoners (Kaimal et al., 2021). It was also found that a large number of young offenders have both poor emotional management skills and increased emotional reactivity. Due to a lack of coping mechanisms for stress, frustration, or social difficulties, these people may respond impulsively to emotional cues, frequently displaying violence or disobedience (Cicchetti & Toth, 2009). A study highlighted the potential effects of opportunities and training for enhancing psychological skills such as emotional intelligence on managing and preventing delinquent behavior in children (Kaimal et al., 2021). This

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emphasizes how intervention programs that improve emotional competence can help lower juvenile delinquency.

Objectives of the Study

- The primary objective is to assess and compare the emotional competence of children in conflict with the law with their counterparts who are not involved in such legal issues. The study aims to:
- Explore differences in emotional awareness, expression, and regulation between the two groups.
- Examine the influence of contextual factors (e.g., family dynamic, socio-economic status, peer interaction) on emotional competence.
- Identify specific emotional competencies that may require targeted intervention among children in conflict with the law.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Children in conflict with the law exhibit significantly lower emotional awareness compared to their counterparts.
- **H2:** Children in conflict with the law have significantly lower emotional regulation abilities compared to their counterparts.
- **H3:** Children in conflict with the law display significantly lower interpersonal sensitivity and emotional expression compared to their counterparts.
- **H4:** Contextual factors such as family environment, peer relationships, and socio-economic status significantly influence the emotional competence of children in conflict with the law.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a comparative research design to assess differences in emotional competence between two groups: children in conflict with the law and their non-delinquent counterparts. The design facilitates a systematic examination of variations in emotional awareness, regulation, and expression across the groups.

Sample

The sample consisted of total of 60 adolescents, 30 in each group. One group had children not involved in legal conflicts, while the other group had adolescents in conflict with the law (juvenile delinquents).

Sampling Method

Purposive Sampling was done to ensures the inclusion of participants who meet the criteria for both groups.

Inclusion Criteria

- Aged 12–18 years.
- Group A: Currently residing in juvenile homes or identified by legal aid organizations.
- Group B: Matched by age, gender, and socio-economic status, with no recorded legal issues.

Exclusion Criteria

- Children with severe psychiatric disorders or cognitive impairments.

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Tools used

The Scale of Emotional Competencies developed by Dr. H. C. Sharma and Dr. R. L. Bharadwaj (2007) was used in the present study. The scale contains 30 items, and it measures five emotional competencies. These are adequate depth of feeling (ADF), adequate expression and control of emotions (AECE), ability to function with emotions (AFE), ability to cope with problem emotions (ACPE), and enhancement of positive emotions (EPE) separately as well as a whole. It is a five-point scale.

Procedure

Preparation

The investigators of the present study first need to obtain ethical clearance from the institutional authority. Seek permission from juvenile homes, legal aid organizations, and schools. After that, the scale of emotional competencies was administered to the selected sample. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Statistical Techniques Used

For this study, Mean, Standard deviation, and t-test was used to analyse the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to compare the emotional competence of children who are in conflict with the law with their counterparts who are not. An independent sample t-test was used for the comparative analysis and the following results were obtained.

Table 1: Mean, Standard deviation, t-value, and level of significance of children in conflict with the law with their counterparts who are not involved in such legal issues on emotional competence.

Descriptive statistics

Group	N	Mean	SD	t -value
Group A	30	43.8	2.97	2.023
Group B	30	59.97	7.06	

Note: N= sample size, SD= standard deviation

Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics of the study. Group A, consisting of children in conflict with the law (N=30), had a mean score of 43.8, while Group B, comprising children not involved in legal conflicts (N=30), had a mean score of 59.97. The results indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups at the 0.05 significance level. This suggests that children in conflict with the law have a lower mean score compared to those not involved in legal conflicts, with a notable difference in emotional competence. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Table No.2: Mean, Standard deviation, t-value, and level of significance of different emotional competencies for children in conflict with the law with their counterparts who are not involved in such legal issues.

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value
ADF	Group A	30	10.33	2.44	-5.27**
	Group B	30	14.86	4.03	
AECE	Group A	30	9.2	2.67	-2.67**
	Group B	30	11	2.52	

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Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value
AFE	Group A	30	8.9	1.2	-6.58**
	Group B	30	13.33	3.49	
ACPE	Group A	30	7.3	1.09	-3.76**
	Group B	30	8.73	1.78	
EPE	Group A	30	8.06	1.47	-7.06**
	Group B	30	12.03	2.7	

**significant at 0.01 level of significance

Table no. 2 On Affective Developmental Functioning (ADF) Group A (mean = 10.33) demonstrated lower scores compared to Group B (mean = 14.86). This significant difference, marked by a t-value of 5.27, suggests that children in Group B, who are not involved in legal conflicts, may have better emotional development and coping abilities than those in Group A. On the Affective Emotional Competence Evaluation (AECE) Group B (mean = 11.0) also scored significantly higher than Group A (mean = 9.2), with a t-value of -2.67. A particularly striking difference was found in the Affective Cognitive Functioning (AFE) measure, where Group A (mean = 8.9) scored significantly lower than Group B (mean = 13.33), with a t-value of -6.58. Group B (mean = 8.73) also outperformed Group A (mean = 7.3) on the Affective Cognitive and Physical Evaluation, with a significant t-value of -3.76. This finding suggests that Group B may possess a more integrated emotional and physical response system. The most pronounced difference was observed in the Emotional and Psychological Evaluation (EPE), where Group A (mean = 8.06) scored much lower than Group B (mean = 12.03), with a t-value of -7.06. This suggests that children in conflict with the law may experience greater emotional distress and psychological difficulties. These children are likely to face more challenges in terms of emotional regulation, mental well-being, and psychological resilience compared to children not involved in legal conflicts.

Research indicates that adolescents who run afoul of the law frequently have trouble identifying and controlling their emotions, which can lead to impulsivity, hostility, and antisocial conduct (Spruit et al., 2017). However, since they are more likely to have had supportive and constructive socialization that develops emotional competency and intelligence, adolescents who are not delinquent are usually better able to manage emotional difficulties (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001). Delinquents are emotionally retarded, according to research, which demonstrates notable disparities in emotional age and maturity (Durea, 1937). Their attitudes, social isolation, and lack of adherence to norms, especially in educational and peer environments, are indicative of their emotional immaturity (Miner & Munns, 2005). Delinquent conduct is caused by a variety of causes, including low tolerance, problems controlling one's anger, and a lack of empathy (Heynen et al., 2023; Patowary & Gopalan, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The results provide strong evidence that children in conflict with the law show significant deficits in various aspects of emotional and cognitive functioning compared to children who are not involved in legal issues. Lower levels of emotional awareness, regulation, and expression indicate that these children may struggle with managing emotions effectively, which could contribute to delinquent behaviour. The findings suggest the need for targeted interventions aimed at improving emotional and cognitive skills in children facing legal challenges, potentially including therapeutic interventions, educational support, and social

services to address the impact of legal conflicts on emotional and psychological development.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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