THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RISKY AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR, SELF-ESTEEM AND DEPRESSION IN ADOLESCENTS[1]

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Abstract

Adolescence is a sensitive developmental period in the life of every individual in which significant biological, physical and psychological changes occur. Also, it is a period of establishing various new forms of behavior in interactions with significant others. Some of them may have characteristics of risky and delinquent behavior. The aim of this paper was to examine whether the self-esteem and depression of adolescents can be important in predicting risky and delinquent behavior. Also, the goal was to examine the relationship between self-esteem, depression, and the tendency toward risky and delinquent behavior, as well as to examine the mutual relationships between the tendency toward risky and delinquent behavior and sociodemographic variables (gender, school performance, parents' education). The research sample is convenient and consists of 200 participants (102 female; 98 male), aged 18 to 19. The following instruments were used: Beck Depression Inventory, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, and Self-description of risky and delinquent behavior of young people. A significant negative correlation was obtained between depression and self-esteem ($r = -.45$, $p < .001$), as well as between self-esteem and the tendency towards risky and delinquent behavior ($r = -.49$, $p < .001$). Also, a statistically significant positive correlation was obtained between depression and a tendency towards risky and delinquent behavior ($r = .17$, $p < .005$). The results showed that the regression model with self-esteem and depression as predictors explained 23% of the variance in the tendency towards risky and delinquent behavior, but self-esteem is the only significant predictor ($\beta = -.515$, $p = .000$). When it comes to the relationship between the tendency towards risky and delinquent behavior and socio-demographic variables, the results show that the tendency towards risky and delinquent behavior will be manifested more often in boys ($t = 6.88$, $p = .000$), adolescents with lower school performance ($r = -.52$, $p < 0.01$) and an adolescent whose parents have a lower education ($r_{(father)} = -.25$, $p < 0.01$, $r_{(mother)} = -.38$, $p < 0.01$). The results of this research indicate the importance of self-esteem, and individual and family factors for the development of desirable forms of behavior and have implications for counseling work with adolescents.

Keywords: Depression, self-esteem, risky behavior, delinquent behavior, adolescents.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period of development from the age of ten to the early twenties (Smetana, 2006), which has its own psychological characteristics that distinguish it from other periods of life (Lacković-Grgin, 2006) and implies the realization of numerous developmental tasks, such as sexual maturation, development personal and social interests, reaching the level of hypothetical and deductive reasoning, building identity and self-concept (Christie & Viner, 2005).

Baron (Baron, 1974) believes that self-esteem plays a key role in the development process of adolescents. According to Rosenberg (Rosenberg, 1979), self-esteem is a set of thoughts and feelings about one's own value and importance, that is, a global attitude that a person has towards himself as a whole personality. He advocates the point of view that self-esteem is one-dimensional in nature and is formed based on feedback from reference persons such as parents, teachers, peers, and therapists, and is reflected as a positive or negative attitude towards oneself. Coopersmith (1967) defines self-esteem as the degree of an individual's belief in his own abilities, importance, success, or value and treats it as a multidimensional construct. This understanding of self-esteem best corresponds to self-esteem as seen by Maslow, who emphasizes personal competence, success, freedom, and independence from others as its basis and who

saw self-esteem as one of the basic developmental motives of an individual (Fulgosi, 1990). In adolescence, self-concepts and the development of feelings of self-intensify, and this is not necessarily accompanied by satisfaction, and contradictory self-concepts cause confusion because they cannot be integrated immediately. Cognitive development enables comparison with others, which can be a source of "internal" injuries because that comparison can harm one's own self-esteem (Ruble, 1976; Maccoby, 1983; Damon and Hart, 1982 as cited in Todorović, 2005).

Adolescence is a period when many changes take place extremely dynamically and intensively, and in many studies, depressive symptomatology has been identified as a key obstacle to the normal functioning of adolescents (Greenberg, 2004). Depressive symptoms appear in the life of almost every individual and represent a mostly normal reaction to some unpleasant and stressful situations (especially in cases of the loss of a loved one, home, or pet). For these reasons, researchers define depression as a continuum from normal, intermittent, and transient sadness to a deep depression that persists or reoccurs (Vulić-Prtorić, 2004). Unlike the period of childhood when it is difficult to recognize a depressive clinical picture, in the period of adolescence there are fewer dilemmas and difficulties in recognition, but the main problem becomes distinguishing a truly depressed adolescent from a moody adolescent or one prone to behavioral changes. Cognitive development in adolescence contributes to the possibility of the appearance of depressive symptoms, as well as thinking about the world and the future, the meaning of life, about one's own value and identity (Turner and Cole, 1994, Nolen- Hoeksema et al., 1992 as cited in Vulić-Prtorić, 2004). In adolescents, depression is characterized by experiencing loneliness, helplessness, anger, and disappointment. However, it should be kept in mind that the image of adolescence as a period of intense stress is actually applicable to a smaller number of adolescents and that most children pass this period without significant emotional changes (Vulić-Prtorić, 2004).

Adolescence is also a period of life characterized by the testing of social constraints, often involving engaging in risky behaviors or committing minor crimes (Magoon and sar., 2005). In their desire to prove their independence and freedom of decision, young people tend to do exactly what their parents forbid them to do (Kapor-Stanulović, 2007). Risky behavior can be defined as any behavior that can threaten the physical and psychosocial health and development of adolescents, such as consumption of harmful substances, risky sexual behavior, antisocial behavior, etc. (Jessor, 1991). Stevens and Griffin (2001, as cited in Ferić et al., 2008) indicate that young people exhibit mostly multiple risky behaviors rather than one isolated risky behavior. In addition to risky behavior, adolescents can also exhibit delinquent behavior. Delinquents are an adolescent population whose specificity is that they drastically reject the values and norms of the ruling culture and who, through inappropriate behavior, express their rebellion against some form of abuse or fears they experienced in relationships with adults (Todorović, 2005). Delinquency includes various forms of behavior that violate the law - from minor offenses such as petty theft, through the destruction of private or social property to robbery, serious physical attacks, rape and murder. Delinquent behaviors can arise as a result of the interaction of various factors: personal (social skills, academic achievement), family (educational procedures, punishment, marital conflicts), and sociocultural factors (school experience, peer interactions) (Lacković- Grgin, 2006).

Researchers find that high self-esteem is associated with a lower frequency of risky behaviors (McKay et al., 2012). Jelić (Jelić, 2012) cites the results of research that showed that low self-esteem leads to some negative phenomena such as delinquent behavior, depression, bulimia, and a tendency to mental illnesses. Classic psychiatric classifications contributed to the prejudice that depression and delinquent behavior are incompatible. On the one hand, the key symptoms in the clinical picture of depression are low energy and withdrawal from the world (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). On the other hand, delinquent behavior does not represent a withdrawal from the world, but an action "against the world", which even implies increased energy. However, research shows that about 35 to 45% of adolescents who show symptoms of depression often show symptoms of anxiety, substance abuse, and risky behavior (Wesselhoeft et al., 2013).

2. Objectives

The subject of this research is to investigate the relationship between risky and delinquent behavior, self-esteem, and depression in adolescents. The specific goals were:

- Examine the expression of self-esteem and depression of adolescents and their experience of risky and delinquent behavior

- Examine the correlations between self-esteem, depression, and the experience of risky and delinquent behavior in adolescents

- Examine whether risky and delinquent behavior of adolescents can be predicted based on their self-esteem and depression

- Examine relationship between risky and delinquent behavior of adolescents and sociodemographic variables (gender, school success, parents' education).

3. Design and sample

The research was conducted in 2020 in two secondary schools in Serbia. Before filling out the questionnaire, participants were informed about the method of data collection and processing, the purpose of the research, as well as about the anonymity of the obtained data. For each questionnaire, participants received a short description of what the questionnaire refers to, as well as instructions on how to fill it out. The questionnaires were without a time limit. The sample consisted of 200 students, aged 18-19 ($M = 18.51$, $SD = 0.50$), 98 male (49%), and 102 female participants (51%).

4. Instruments

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale consisted of 10 items. Participants were requested to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each of these 10 statements using a 5-point scale from 1-strongly disagrees to 5-strongly agree. Example items: "Generally speaking, I'm satisfied with myself". Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .74

Beck Depression Inventory (BDI, Beck et al., 1961). It is a self-report rating inventory that measures characteristic attitudes and symptoms of depression The scale consisted of 21 items that are evaluated on a four-point scale (0–3), so higher values indicate greater symptom intensity. The assessment is made in relation to the last two weeks. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.78

Self-description of risky and delinquent behavior of young people (SRDP; Ručević et al., 2009). It consists of 42 items that make up seven factors (misdemeanor and minor delinquent behaviors, undesirable normative behaviors, risky sexual behaviors, use or abuse of psychoactive substances, violent behavior in close relationships, aggravated theft, burglary and robbery, and suicidal and auto aggressive behaviors). Each statement also has a certain index of severity that shows the seriousness of the behavior. The participants are asked to answer each statement about how many times they behaved in a certain way. The answers offered are: never, 1-2 times, 3-5 times, and more than 5 times. In this research, the total score on risky delinquent behavior was used, where a higher score indicates more pronounced risky and delinquent behavior. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.90.

5. Results

The following tables show obtained the results.

Table 1. Descriptive statistic.

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Self-esteem	200	18	50	33.66	7.81
Depression	200	0.00	39	13.89	7.93
Risky and delinquent behavior	200	6.00	275	101.65	62.24

The obtained data show that the mean value for self-esteem is shifted to higher values ($M = 33.66$) on range from 10 to 50. The mean value for depression is grouped around lower values, ($M = 13.89$) on a range from 0 to 63. The mean values for risky and delinquent behavior are 101.65 on range from 0 to 663.

Table 2. Correlations between self-esteem, conformism, and risky and delinquent behavior.

	1	2	3
1 Self-esteem	1	-.45**	-.49**
2 Depression		1	.17*
3 Risky and delinquent behavior			1

Note: **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

All examined correlations show statistical significance. A negative correlation between self-esteem and depression and between self-esteem and risky and delinquent behavior was identified. These correlations are moderate Positive correlation exists between depression and risky and delinquent behavior and this correlation is relatively low.

Table 3. Self-esteem and depression as predictors of risky and delinquent behavior.

Predictors	B	*p*	Model Summary
Self-esteem	-.515	.000	$R = .49$, $R^2 = .24$, $R^2_{adj} = .23$,
Depression	-.060	.393	$F(2,197) = 31.25$, $p = .000$

The results of linear regression analysis show that self-esteem is the only significant predictor of risky and delinquent behavior in adolescents. The direction of the Beta coefficient indicates that lower self-esteem increases the probability of risky and delinquent behavior in adolescents. Examined predictors could explain a 23% variance in risky and delinquent behavior in adolescents.

When it comes to the relationship between the tendency towards risky and delinquent behavior and socio-demographic variables, the results show that the tendency towards risky and delinquent behavior will be manifested more often by boys ($t = 6.88$, $p = .000$), adolescents with lower school performance ($r = -.52$, $p < 0.01$) and an adolescent whose parents have a lower education ($r_{(father)} = -.25$, $p < 0.01$, $r_{(mother)} = -.38$, $p < 0.01$).

6. Discussion and conclusion

The main goal of this paper was to investigate the relationship between self-esteem, depression, and experience of risky and delinquent behavior in adolescents. The main goal was broken down into several specific and narrower goals: first to determine the correlations of variables, and then to investigate whether risky and delinquent behavior in adolescents can be predicted based on their self-esteem and depression. Also, we wanted to investigate the relationship between risky and delinquent behavior in adolescents and sociodemographic variables.

After examining the correlations between self-esteem and depression, we noticed a significant negative correlation. In other words, adolescents with lower self-esteem experience more depressive symptoms, which is a result confirmed by numerous studies (Mruk, 2006; Baumeister et al., 2003). Also, a correlation between self-esteem and risky and delinquent behavior is statistically significant and negative. Similarly, other research also confirms that high self-esteem is associated with a lower frequency of risky behavior (McKay et al., 2012) and a lower frequency of delinquent behavior (Jelić, 2012). When it comes to the correlation between depression and risky and delinquent behavior, the results show that adolescents with depressive symptomatology are more prone to risky and delinquent behavior. And the results of other research confirm that in adolescents the symptoms of depression are often associated with the abuse of psychoactive substances and risky behavior (Wesselhoeft et al., 2013).

After reviewing the results of the linear regression analysis, it was determined that only self-esteem is a statistically significant predictor of risky and delinquent behavior. The obtained results showed that a positive self-image is a protective factor against the emergence of risky and delinquent behavior in the adolescent period. Kalajdžić and Perućica (2018) conclude that adolescents with a higher level of self-esteem use positive strategies for coping and solving problems and are therefore less likely to develop disorders such as anxiety, depression, and delinquency, than adolescents with lower self-esteem. In this research, it was not confirmed that depression is a significant predictor of risky and delinquent behavior, but a positive correlation of low intensity was found between these variables. Similarly, Hrnčić (2003) concludes that the high comorbidity of depression and antisocial behavior is the rule rather than the exception. A significant positive relationship between depression and antisocial behavior is found in young people with behavioral disorders, delinquent youth, and depressive youth. The results of this research show that boys will be more prone to risky and delinquent behavior than girls, which is also confirmed in other studies (Fagan et al., 2007; Junger-Tas et al., 1994). Also, adolescents who achieve lower school performance and whose parents have lower education will be more prone to risky and delinquent behavior.

Based on the results of this research, it could be concluded that in order to reduce risky and delinquent behavior in adolescents, the programs for prevention that are aimed at working with adolescents should contribute to strengthening their self-esteem and motivate them to achieve better school performance. Also, in the prevention of risky and delinquent behavior, it is important to pay attention to the prevention of mental health, due to the established connection between depression and risky and delinquent behavior.

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