

Study of the Effect of Individualistic Tendencies on Juvenile Delinquency Case Study: Male and Female Students of Shiraz

Bijan Khajehnoori¹, Saeed Keshavarzi²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Social Science, Shiraz University

²MA student in Sociology, Department of Sociology, Shiraz University

ABSTRACT

The present study deals with the effect of individualistic tendencies on juvenile delinquency. The required data was collected through survey and self-reported questionnaire. The sample case study was 381 male and female students of Shiraz in 2011, which were chosen by means of multi-stage random sampling based on Cochran formula. To set the theoretical framework, Durkheim's theory and Hirschi's social control theory were used. The results of the research showed that there is a significant positive correlation between individualistic tendencies and juvenile delinquency. In addition, multiple regression showed that %11 of juvenile delinquency variance is justified by the variable of individualistic tendencies.

KEYWORDS: Delinquency, Juvenile, Individualism, Globalization, Modernism

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays juvenile delinquency is a phenomenon, which most countries are dealing with and have taken various measures for the prevention and treatment of this problem. In recent years public opinion as well, has paid more attention to the issue of juvenile delinquency. Now media focuses regularly on issues such as delinquent youth groups, violence in schools and juvenile addiction. The heavy expenses of dealing with juvenile delinquency and the damages caused by it and its aftermaths in the future, oblige the society to explore the causes and howness of such a phenomenon through research, and by identifying the causes, to control and prevent it. The publication of the first report concerning a court for juvenile in 1899, led many scholars to study delinquency and to identify its effective factors, and to review it from different perspectives, however, no single theory has explained the effect of individual and social independent variables on the delinquent (Shoemaker, 2009).

Juvenile delinquency is a dynamic and scientific field, which is constantly changing; therefore the theories and concepts of this field of study are always changing. Along this, entering the modern world, novel concepts and variables can crop up and can be identified in the field of delinquency. New processes, including cultural globalization, have intensified the process of individualism among human beings. Scientists such as Durkheim (1933), Weber (1930) and Habermas (1970) have been interested in the concept of individualism. These theoreticians believe that the process of modernization has resulted in the loss of normative consensuses. Durkheim believes that the social process of modernization has resulted in the emergence of individualism (Durkheim, 1933). Habermas argues that modernization breaks the normative consensuses in a society, which in turn would lead to the freedom of the individual (Habermas, 1970).

In history, individualist behavior has been considered deviant and stupid which should have been avoided (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 77). Alexis de Tocqueville first used the word "individualism" in the 19th century to denote a feeling of social isolation in the American society. Then to measure individualism this hypothesis was proposed that people leave others with their problems and just live according to their own conditions (Elliott and Lemert, 2006: 3).

Certainly, the most important aspect of modernity is individualism as the main figure of the modern world. In other words, one can think of modernity as a system of ideas and values, which have resulted in individualism in the modern world. For the reason the modern civilization is fundamentally different from other civilizations and cultures; this civilization is the first and the only one who values the individual as an ethical creature, an autonomous and independent one (Jahanbagloo, 1997).

The concept of individualism considers individuals as more real and fundamental, and prioritizes them over human society and its structures and institutions. In addition, it considers a higher ethics for the individual in comparison to the society. In this way of thinking, the individual is prior to society in every respect (Arblaster, 1998).

***Corresponding Author:** Bijan Khajehnoori, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Science, Shiraz University,
Tel: +989173034810, Email: bkhaje@rose.shirazu.ac.ir

Nowadays individualism is comprehensible in the light of new information and communication technologies, the globalization of economy, politics, culture and changes in lifestyles. In under-developed countries the three substrata of urbanization, population and education are known as the main substrata for change and development, and urbanization is a process which can be looked on from the viewpoint of change in lifestyle and the normative society, on this ground urbanization can accompany the widespread of individualism (Azkia, 2008:12-13). Moreover in the late 1970s a new wave of economic globalization was formed, which at the first place was affected by the communication area (Golmohammadi, 2001). The studies done by Khajehnoori, Ruhani and Hashemi (2010) as well as those done by Maleki and Abbaspour (2008) have shown that in the youth the correlation between the national identity (as a form of collective identity) and using new information and communication technologies (such as the Internet and satellite) which is an index of globalization, is significantly reverse.

Individualism stands against the collectivism of traditional society. The collective society emphasizes the conformity of the individual with the group, and considers the expected behavior from the individual as the reflection of the norms of the group. Against this, the individualist society values non-conformity and emphasizes personal development and rethinking about the social norms and traditions. People from individualistic cultures mostly prefer their own goals, even though they are in contrast to the important goals of the group, family, tribe or colleagues. Nevertheless, in collectivist cultures people prefer the goals within the group (Ahmadi, 2010).

On the other hand, Ngo and Le's researches show that individualism has a direct correlation with delinquent behaviors (Ngo and Le, 2007). Delinquent behavior is a behavior, which does not conform with the values and norms and in general those social expectations, which are defined by the dominant culture in which the individual lives (Ahmadi, 1995). Durkheim's functional concept of crime and delinquency and Anomie theory has been a starting point for developing sociological theories of deviance. He refers to the process of industrialization and economic development, and individualism and the breakdown of social ties caused by economic developments, and consider them as underlying social deviances such as suicide (Ahmadi, 2010: 48).

Khajehnoori's researches show that Shiraz is heavily affected by globalization (Khajehnoori, 2006). Among the most important effects of globalization (especially in social dimension) is the change of individualistic-collectivistic viewpoints, a process which in the long term overthrows and abolishes the value systems and the individual's beliefs which are defined by the traditional identity (such as national identity, ethnic identity,...). This process leaves people and societies alone with meaning structures and ineffectual linking mechanisms (Cote; 2006; Abela, 2005-6).

Based on this it can be concluded that the young in Shiraz are exposed to individualistic behavior. On the other hand as it was said, studies show that individualism is in direct correlation with delinquent behaviors. (Ngo and Le, 2007; Sweeney, 2011; Rothwell and Hawdon, 2008; Thao and Stockdale, 2005). In the past concepts such as acculturation, collectivism and individualism were broached specifically in the field of psychology; however, it is time to use these concepts in a plan for developing healthy attitudes (Lopez et al, 2012). Accordingly identifying the degree of individualism of the young and its correlation with the rate of juvenile delinquency in our young society is of vital importance for the researchers in the field of social sciences as well as the policy-makers. This research is to study the effect of individualistic attitudes of the young people in Shiraz on the rate of committing crime and deviant behavior.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In reviewing, the theories related to individualism and globalization it is seen that the majority of current ideas about individualism have been proposed in the fields of sociology, politics and economic sciences. This research with a sociological approach studies the individualistic attitudes of the young and their effects on the delinquent behavior of the young.

At the beginning of the 20th century, scholars divided individualism into the two aspects of social individualism and individualistic feeling. Social individualism was more proposed in the ideas of economists and political scholars, who in their theories tended toward the priority of individualism and regionalism. However, individualistic feeling is a sign of the individual's social isolation. To Palante individualistic feeling is a tendency toward being different and distinct (George Palante, 1908).

Based on the works of some scholars, individualism can be divided into the two branches of methodological and ontological (Laurent, 1994, Palante, 1908). To Popper methodological individualism is a theory based on which collective phenomena should be pared down to the actions, goals, moods, the individual's thoughts and the traditions created by the individual. Also Boudon considers methodological individualism as thinking of collective phenomena as the product of individual action and the interpretation of individual action as reasonable action (Laurent; 1994:23-24) in this sense individualism stands against universalism. Ontological individualism, however, is focused on the

study of the individual behavior orientation, which is used in psychology and sociology, and is studied against universalism.

What is important in psychology is the Attribution Theory, that is to individuals what the causes of their behaviors and their outcomes are. Also studying personal behavior in relation to individualistic-collective attributions is of particular importance in psychology (Hilgard et al, 2006:607-611). Even though in sociology, like psychology, individualism is observed as against collectivism, however, what is important here is the individualistic tendency among the people in society, which is in fact part of the culture of the society. Culture can be defined as the total of acquired behaviors and the beliefs of the members of a definite society. (Cohen, 2008:56). Therefore, culture can be considered as a fluid entity, an entity which changes gradually through the relations of the members of the society with other societies and cultures. So it can be said that in contrast to psychology, sociology studies individualism in the framework of values reproduction, lifestyles, ethics and in general recreating personal identities which all have a social aspect (Giddens, 2007: 91).

To Durkheim in an anomic economy and in periods of economic crisis, egoistic behaviors increase in the society; because in such conditions individuals are exempt from balanced behavior and observing ethical order, and are in an intensive rivalry with others. To Durkheim anomie and deficiency economy are among the features of industrial societies, because industrial economy paves the way for a situation in which individualistic attitudes in society increase and people resort to everything in order to achieve their aims, in other words in the process of industrialization unanimity, norms and values are broken down, because egoistic and individualistic behaviors develop. Then Durkheim in explaining suicide concludes that if those factors which have consolidated the ties between the individual and society fade away, the possibility of suicide, as a form of delinquency, increases on the part of the individuals (Ahmadi, 2010).

Hirschi believes that those social ties, which individuals form, act as a pre-emptive of delinquency and deviance. He thinks that deviance is the result of the weakness or the disintegration of the individual's feeling of belonging to society. Hirschi reasons that there is no necessity to account for the motivation for delinquency, "because we are all creatures who are naturally able to commit criminal acts". Individuals who have a strong and established relationship with groups, such as family, school and peers, are more unlikely to commit crimes. He proposed four social rings, which include: A- Attachment. B-Commitment. C- Involvement. D- Belief (Hirschi, 1969). Individualism in the young includes the development of an identity, which is independent of the family, and this leads to some changes in the relationship between the young and their families (Noack and Puschner, 1999).

It can be said that individualistic juveniles, in comparison to collective juveniles, take delinquent behavior less seriously, so they involve more in delinquent behaviors. Since collectivist juveniles consider the outcomes of their delinquent behaviors in relation to their families and the others with whom they associate and according to the improvement which such relationships have for them, they are less inclined toward deviant behavior. In fact, collectivist juveniles, in comparison to the individualistic juveniles, act more according to the conventional norms and socially accepted behaviors.

Dangerous and deviant behaviors would lead the juvenile to identify his identity more deeply and feel themselves independent of their families. In fact these juveniles, by their delinquent behavior, test the social boundaries (Thao and Stockdale, 2005). Studies have shown that collectivist tendencies outweigh the individualistic ones, in fact the Asian parents tend to breed collectivist tendencies in their children rather than individualistic ones.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite many studies done on the recognition of individuals, friends, family, deviant behaviors, social dangers and pre-emptive factors, few experimental studies have dealt with the effect of attitudes on the rate of delinquent behaviors. Now the most important studies on this ground are mentioned.

Thao and Stockdale in a sample of 329 people, including young men out of China, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, studied the effect of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies on the rate of delinquent behaviors. The results showed that individualism positively and collectivism negatively had a correlation with the self-reported delinquency. This correlation is controlled slightly through double criminality (Thao and Stockdale, 2005)

In another research, Browne, studied the correlation of individualism with four forms of sex, including sex in juveniles, sex before marriage, illicit sex and homosexuality. In this research which was done during five periods, analyses supported none of the presuppositions, and the afore-mentioned correlation was not confirmed (Browne, 2010).

Rothwell's hypothesis is that secular worldview and individualism would lead to the increase of delinquent behaviors. The results of the research done, supports this hypothesis. The conclusion remained the same when factors as given factors related to delinquency like dogmatism, were controlled (Rothwell, 2009).

In another research, Rothwell and Hawdon studied the correlation between individualism and delinquency among 202 students in the south of Virginia. The results showed that individualism could not be considered as a significant predictor of deviant tendencies. Rothwell proposes that future studies, in the time of implementation, should concentrate more on the concept of individualism and its bearing for predicting delinquency (Rothwell and Hawdon, 2008).

Sweeney in a research studied the effect of individualistic and collectivistic attitudes on shoplifting. The results showed that the attitudes of those who shoplifted were more individualistic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study has been done through survey method. The tools for data collection were self-reported questionnaires. As Zhang et al explain, in self-reported method, respondents have personal place and space to remember their past events (Zhang et al, 2000). In this study the delinquent behavior of the female and male students of the four high schools in Shiraz were considered as dependent variable, and the individualistic attitudes of the students as independent variable.

I the academic year of 2007-2008 the total of female and male students of Shiraz was 52828 (The Organization of Education of Fars. Department of Research and Human Resources Planning, Department of Planning, 2008). Based on Cochran formula the sample was 381. The method was multi-stage random sampling. According to the population of each area, a part of the sample was devoted to it. Then in each area, several schools were chosen randomly and in proportion to the population of each school, the questionnaires were distributed. In order to determine the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, the two kinds of content validity and face validity were used. For content validity, the questionnaire was given to some experts and for face validity; it was given to some female and male high school students as well as freshmen and sophomores. To measure the reliability of the questionnaire items, Cronbach’s alpha technique was used. In addition, the collected data showed that the low, middle and high classes form 20, 63 and 17 percent of the sample respectively.

Definition of Concepts:

Delinquent behavior: Deviant behavior is behavior, which is in contrast to the values and norms, and general the social expectations, which are defined by the culture of the dominant group. (Ahmadi, 1995). Deviant behavior can be seen continuously on one side of which lie the more moderate forms of deviance, which can be considered venial by society.

Aliverdinia et al according to the past studies have studied delinquency in the four dimensions of vandalism, violence and aggression, theft and fraud and finally cultural deviations (Aliverdinia, 1999). In this study based on Ahmadi’s definition and the provided dimensions, Aliverdinia has considered some indexes for each of the dimensions.

In the present study by means of 18 items, the dimensions of vandalism, theft and fraud, cultural deviations and violence and aggression were measured (SD= 14.06, m=31.04, α =0.93). In addition, individualism has been measured by means of some items. These items measured tendencies such as: individual decision-making, isolation, seeking one’s own welfare, lack of dedication, and the priority of individual benefit. The students out of the four school districts were required to express their agreement or disagreement with the items (SD=8.11, m=15.00, α =0.70)

RESULTS

Table one 1. The Correlation between Individualistic Tendencies with juvenile Delinquency

Predicting Variable	The Rate of Juvenile Delinquency
Individualism	0.34**

** p≤ 0.01

As table 1 shows statistically between there is a significant positive correlation individualistic tendencies and the rate of juvenile delinquency, that is the more the individualistic tendencies in juveniles, the more the possibility of committing deviant behaviors on their part (sig=0.000, r=0.34). Therefore, the null hypothesis is refuted, and the hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

Table 2. The Rate of Juvenile Delinquency Explanation by the Variable of Individualistic Tendencies

The Explanatory Variable	R	R ²	F Value	F Level of Significance	Beta	T Value	T Level of Significance
Individualistic Tendencies	0.34	0.11	22.84	0.000	0.34	4.78	0.000

As table 2 shows, the variable of individualistic tendencies explains 11 percent of the juvenile delinquency changes, and the rest of the changes are explained by other variables. In fact individualistic tendencies up to %11 are capable to predict the rate of juvenile delinquency.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was done to explore the correlation between individualistic tendencies and the rate of delinquency among the female and male students of four high schools in Shiraz. The data for this research was collected by survey method and the questionnaire designed by the researcher. The results show that there is a significant positive correlation between individualistic tendencies and juvenile delinquency; that is the higher the level of individualistic values and attitudes in the juvenile, the more he is likely to commit deviant behaviors. One of the primary and negative aspects of individualism is the exclusive concentration of the individual on personal needs and feeling no attachment towards others. This leads to a kind of selfishness, which can instigate deviant behaviors in the juveniles (Sweeney, 2011). Other studies are in line with these results (Ngo and Lee, 2007; Sweeny 2011, Rothwell and Hawdon, 2008, Thao and Stockdale, 2005). In addition, the regression shows that %11 of the changes of juvenile delinquency are explained by the variable of individualistic tendencies. Since few studies have been done in relation to the subject of individualistic attitudes and its effect on social deviances, it is hoped that this research and its result can help researchers in leading more studies on this ground.

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