

Criminal Friends' Influence on Criminal Behavior of Adult Offenders Moderated by Psychopathic Traits

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Criminal friends' influence on offender's own criminal behaviour is well documented (Rokven, Boer, Tolsma & Ruiter, 2017). However, little is known about the moderator of criminal friends' influence (Kerr, Zalk, & Stattin, 2012). Aim of present study was to examine psychopathic traits of offenders as moderators of criminal friends' influence on criminal behaviour. Sequential moderated regression analysis was used to assess the data. Levenson's Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-Revised Urdu Version and Measure of Criminal Attitudes and Associates were administered to a sample of adult criminal offenders (N= 342). In the present study, three dimensions of psychopathic personality: egocentricity, callousness, and antisocial traits were examined as a moderator. In terms of moderating role of psychopathy, offenders who were high on antisocial traits were more strongly influenced by their criminal friends whereas high levels of egocentricity moderated the positive relationship between criminal friends' influences and criminal behaviour. Present study is the first study in Pakistan to look at this relationship by assessing three dimensions of psychopathy. Therefore, it advances the knowledge about the influence of criminal friends on offender's own criminal behaviour. Additionally, the study also contributed to the literature by looking at the moderating effects of three dimensions of psychopathy between criminal friends' influence and criminal behaviour of adult offenders.

Keywords: antisocial factor, callousness, criminal friends, egocentricity, psychopathic traits.

Psychopathy has been attributed towards an individual's harmful antisocial and rule-breaking behaviour. Psychopathy as a risk factor for deviant and criminal behaviour is well documented (Cook & Michie, 2001; Edens, Skeem, Cruise & Cauffman, 2001; Hart, 1998; Hart & Hare, 1996; Jones, Miller & Lynam, 2011; Lynam, Whiteside & Jones, 1999; Miller, Lyman, Widiger & Leukefeld, 2001). Psychopathy, personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and borderline personality disorder have been examined as combination of different behavioural and personality traits. Although, the term "psychopathy" has not been used both in DSM-V and ICD-11 diagnostic system but antisocial personality disorder and borderline personality disorder have been described in DSM-V and ICD-11 as a personality disorder (Soderstrom, 2003). DSM-V defines personality disorder as enduring and deviations of inner experience and behaviour that leads to clinical distress and can

cause social, occupational, and functioning impairments (Ullrich, Farrington, & Coid, 2007). DSM-V describes Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD) as a pattern of deviated behaviour manifested in childhood persisting into adulthood. ASPD has been linked to the risk-taking, impulsive, and egocentric behaviour. According to the DSM-V, people with Borderline Personality Disorder exhibit extreme emotions, frequent mood swings and are unable to regulate emotions (Darke, Williamson, Ross, Teesson, & Lynskey, 2004). As defined by DSM-V, characteristics of ASPD are behavioural, and traits of BPD are psychological, while psychopathy consists of interpersonal, affective, and behavioural features.

Cleckley (1976) defined psychopaths as asocial, impulsive, and aggressive persons with little or no feelings of guilt. He further suggested that adult psychopathy is related to both, crimes and disturbing relationships. It has also been evident by meta-analytic reviews that psychopathic traits are associated with socially undesirable outcomes e.g., violent, criminal and reoffending behaviour (Edens, Campbell, & Weir, 2007; Hemphill, Hare, & Wong, 1998; Salekin, Rogers, & Swell, 1996). Viljoen, McLachlan & Vincent, (2010) reported that 90% of the researchers have measured psychopathy as a risk factor for criminal behaviour among adults offenders. Recently, psychopathy has been assessed by using three dimensions: egocentricity, callousness, and antisocial acts (Brinkley, 2008; Sellbom, 2011; Shagufta, 2018).

Research related to correlations and consequences of psychopathy among youth has been dramatically increased in the last few years. Previous studies suggested that association with criminal friends increases an individual's own risk of offending (Rokven et al., 2017). Considerable attention has been paid to assess the influence process related to crime. Decades of research has showed that association with criminal friends enhance the individual's own criminal behaviour. Additionally, most studies have used samples of adolescents to assess the peer influence on criminal behaviour because friends exert more influence during adolescent period than at any other point in life. A few studies explained that having criminal friends increases the offender's own criminal behaviour, however, it remains to be seen whether psychopathic traits enhances the criminal friends' influence on offender's own criminal behaviour in early adult hood. Kerr and his colleagues (2012) investigated peer influence on delinquency moderated by psychopathic traits among adolescents; however, this link has been less likely examined among adult incarcerated offenders.

Differential Association Theory (Sutherland, 1947; Sutherland and Cressey, 1978) explained influence of criminal friends on individuals' own involvement in criminal activities. This theory suggests that friends influence each other's behaviour through transmission of values, attitude, and social contacts. Aker (1973) further elaborated Sutherland's theory and stated that observation and imitation play an important role to learn behaviour. People become criminal by interaction with those who are already involved in criminal acts. This theory is supported by previous researches conducted among adolescents exhibiting that criminal friends indeed increase the risk of an individual's involvement in criminal activities (Warr, 2002; Weerman, 2011; Rokven et al., 2017). The theory does not explain why some people, despite having criminal friends, do not get involved in criminal acts. Sutherland and Cressey (1978) further specified that early association, longer association, and frequent association can strengthen the influence of delinquent friends. Agnew (1993) further stated that those individuals who spend more time with criminal friends are more likely involved in criminal activities.

It is evident from previous study that psychopathic trait moderate friends' influence on delinquency (Kerr et al., 2012). It is suggested that those individuals who are high on antisocial and impulsive factors of psychopathy and make close association with criminal friends, are more likely influenced by their criminal friends and ultimately at high risk of committing criminal acts (Kimonis et al., 2004; Munoz et al., 2008; Kerr et al., 2012).

On the other hand, those youth who are high on callous traits are unresponsive to parental influence, and therefore, unreceptive to peers' influence as well (Oxford, Cavell, & Hughes, 2003). It is suggested that those who are high on callous traits exhibit low susceptibility to peer pressure and peer influence. Additionally, those who exhibit high callous traits are more likely to be low on both anxiety and social anxiety which subsequently reduce peer influences. Therefore, those individuals who have more callous traits of psychopathy might less likely be influenced by their criminal friends (Edens, Skopp, & Cahill, 2008).

To date, fewer studies (Kerr et al., 2012; Rokven et al., 2017) have been conducted to assess psychopathic traits as moderator of influence of criminal friends. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to find out moderating effect of three dimensions of psychopathy to assess the influence of criminal friends on their criminal behaviour.

In the present study, it was hypothesized that egocentricity and antisocial factors of psychopathy will moderate influence of criminal friends on criminal behaviour of adult offenders, while those offenders who will be high on callous trait, their criminal behaviour will be less likely influenced by their criminal friends.

Methods

Participants

The sample of the present study consisted of 342 adult male offenders incarcerated in the different prisons of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). The respondents were between 21 and 45 years of age ($M = 30.08$, $SD = 7.58$). Results showed that 53.2% of offenders committed serious crimes such as murder, robbery, rape, and drugs supplying. 65.5% were from lower economic status.

Procedure

The sample was recruited from the different prisons of KPK and the ethical approval for this study was granted by the provincial Minister to Prisons. Data was collected from the offenders who were able to read and write in Urdu. A booklet consisted of demographic variables and measures and consent form was provided to the participants and informed consent was obtained from them. They were assured that their participation would be anonymous and they can withdraw their participation at any point. Questionnaires were completed by participants in their living cells and returned to the superintendent. All the participants were briefed about the questionnaires.

Measures

Levenson's Self Report Psychopathy Scale- Revised Urdu Version (Shagufta; LSRPS-RUV, 2018)

Levenson's Self Report Psychopathy Scale- Revised Urdu Version (LSRPS-RUV) is a short and easily administered scale containing 19 items. It is a self-report assessment scale in which the respondents answered the statements on five points Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). High scores (58 or more) on LSRPS-RUV suggested the prevalence of traits of

psychopathy. The response sets was controlled by reverse scoring. Items 3, 6, 8, 10, 14, 19 of the current scale are reversely scored.

Measure of Criminal Attitudes and Associates (MCAA; Mills & Kroner, 1999)

The Measure consists of two-parts: self-report measure of criminal attitudes and associations with criminal friends. Part A is to measure the criminal association by requesting participants to recall (enlist) four adults with whom they spent most of their free time. The measure was 1 (0%-25%), 2 (25%-50%), 3 (50%-75%) and 4, (75%-100%). These four options (1-4) for each identified associate are named 'Criminal Friend Index' (scored from 1 to 4). On Part B, the respondents were requested to respond 'four questions' in relation to the degree of the criminal involvement of their associates: (a) "Has this person ever committed a crime?" (b) "Does this person have a criminal record?" (c) "Has this person ever been to jail?" and (d) "Has this person tried to involve you in a crime?" All these questions were assigned 0 for "No" and 1 for "Yes". This part was used to calculate two measures of criminal associates: (i) the total numbers of criminal friends and (ii) their involvement with their criminal friends. This meant that the respondent could indicate zero to all items if they didn't have criminal friends. Then total numbers of criminal friends which they mentioned were multiplied by the total number of responses. At the end total numbers on Part 1 were added to the total numbers on Part B. Overall scores were ranged from 0 to 64, with higher scores (32 and above) reflecting increased involvement with criminal friends.

Results

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliability

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, reliability, and correlations for all continuous scales. The correlations were examined among all predictor variables: egocentricity, callous antisocial factor, and association with criminal friends. All correlations were found to be moderate, ranging between $r = 0.44$, $P < 0.01$ and $r = 0.35$, $P < 0.01$. Examination through multiple linear regressions was reliably undertaken because four predictor variables were significantly related to criminal behaviour which indicated that the data were suitably correlated with the dependent variable. There were weak to moderate correlations between predictor variables and dependent variable (criminal behaviour), ranging from $r = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$ to $r = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliability for psychopathy (egocentricity, callous, and antisocial factor), and criminal friend

Variables	CB	EG	CA	AS	CF
Criminal Behaviour	1				
Egocentricity (EG)	0.22**	1			
Callous (CA)	0.11*	0.39	1		
Antisocial (AS)	0.26**	0.44**	0.35**	1	
Criminal Friends	0.13*	0.031**	0.05	0.21**	1
Mean	7.82	25.40	10.44	12.22	4.01
SD	3.72	11.32	4.80	6.36	3.13
Range	1-13	10-50	4-20	5-25	0-46
Cronbach's α	0.71	0.97	0.93	0.96	0.72

Note: Statistical significance at: $p < 0.05$ to $p < 0.01$

Moderated multiple regressions

In order to examine the relationship between criminal friends and criminal behaviour with the moderating role of psychopathic traits, a moderated multiple regression analysis was applied as recommended by Cohen and Cohen, (1983). According to the suggestions of the Aiken and West (1991), Mean value of all predictor variables was centred.

To assess the moderating role of three factors of psychopathy, four predictors were entered: criminal friends' influence (measured by MCCA Scale), egocentricity, callous and antisocial traits (measured by LSRPS-RUV). Table 2 shows that the model was statistically significant ($F(4, 337) = 69.92, p < 0.001$) and explained 44% of variance in criminal behaviour. The strongest predictor of criminal behaviour was the influence of criminal friends ($\beta = 0.40$), followed by antisocial traits of psychopathy ($\beta = 0.25$) and egocentricity ($\beta = 0.15$). At the final step, interaction has been made between the variable of influence of criminal friends and three factors of psychopathy. Interaction term explained additional 51% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.52$) in criminal behaviour ($F(7, 334) = 51.01; p < 0.001$). Results are showing that antisocial traits ($\beta = 0.24$), and egocentricity ($\beta = 0.12$) are significant predictors of criminal behaviour, amongst the sample of adult offenders. Results suggest that those offenders who were high on psychopathic traits such as antisocial traits ($\beta = 0.22$) and egocentricity ($\beta = 0.08$), their criminal behaviour was more strongly influenced by their criminal friends. Simple slopes for the relationship between influence of criminal friends and criminal behaviour were examined for low (-1 Standard Deviation below the mean), medium (mean), and high (+ 1 Standard Deviation above the mean) level of psychopathic traits. Results indicated a positive link between influence of criminal friends and criminal behaviour moderated by high level of antisocial trait of psychopathy (Figure 1). Additionally, results also suggest that high level of egocentricity moderated the positive relationship between association with criminal friends and criminal behaviour (Figure 2). However, role of callous trait as moderator between influence of criminal friends and criminal behaviour appears to be nonsignificant. Reasons may be attributed towards the less empathic nature of the individuals who are high on callous factors of psychopathy. Due to their callous nature, they are unable to make strong and long lasting relationships and untimely less likely influenced by their friends.

Table 2

Regression model of offenders association with criminal friends and their criminal behaviour moderated by psychopathic traits

	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Step 1	0.45	0.44					
Criminal Friends (CF)			0.13	0.02	0.40	9.18	0.00
Egocentricity (EC)			0.54	0.02	0.15	3.20	0.00
Callous (CA)			0.08	0.04	0.09	2.14	0.33
Antisocial (AS)			0.16	0.03	0.25	5.40	0.00
Step 2	0.52	0.51					
Criminal Friends (CF)			0.17	0.05	0.53	11.60	0.00
Egocentricity (EC)			0.04	0.02	0.12	2.65	0.04
Callous (CA)			0.06	0.04	0.07	1.65	0.10
Antisocial (AS)			0.15	0.03	0.24	5.19	0.00
Egocentricity × CF			0.02	0.01	0.08	1.72	0.05
Callous × CF			-0.01	0.03	-0.46	-1.11	0.26
Antisocial × CF			0.15	0.02	0.22	4.80	0.00

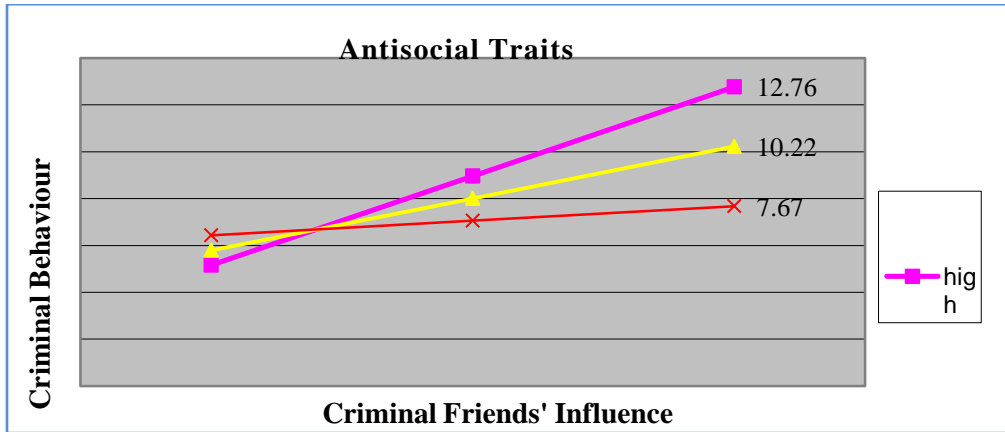


Figure 1: Relationship between criminal friends' influence and criminal behaviour moderated by antisocial trait of psychopathy

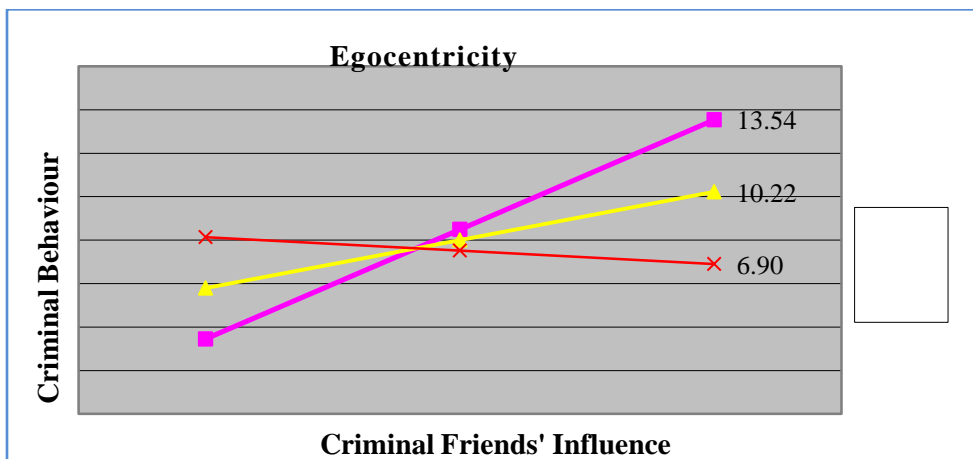


Figure 2: Relationship between association with criminal friends and criminal behaviour moderated by high level egocentricity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Among adult offenders, criminal friends' influence on their criminal behaviour is well examined, however, there has been insufficient focus on characteristics of offenders that enhance or diminish their criminal behaviour. The findings indicate that the degree of influence on adult offenders by their criminal friends depends on their own psychopathic traits. Deviant behaviour and long-standing maladaptive personality traits are manifested in psychopathic behaviour of adult offenders. Results provide empirical support that psychopathic traits moderate relationship between criminal friends' influence and individual's own criminal behaviour.

In order to assess the main effect and interaction effects of psychopathy, a model was specified and tested to examine the impact of influence of criminal friends on criminal behaviour moderated by three traits of psychopathy. The results indicated that those offenders who displayed high psychopathic traits of antisocial and egocentricity were more influenced by their criminal friends and were more likely involved in criminal behaviour. The present study's contributions are unique because it demonstrates the moderating effects of three dimensions of psychopathy (egocentricity, callous and antisocial traits) rather than two dimensions (Primary and secondary). Antisocial traits and egocentricity have been shown to moderate the link between influence of criminal friends and offenders own criminal behaviour. The study is consistent with previous studies that show that those offenders who are high on antisocial and impulsive factors are more influenced by their criminal friends and ultimately at high risk of committing criminal acts (Kimonis et al., 2004; Munoz et al., 2008; Kerr et al., 2012). Overall results indicate that adult offenders' involvements in criminal activities were due to their psychopathic characteristics which made them more vulnerable to be influenced by their criminal friends in the commitment of their criminal acts. Present study could not find any significant role of callous factor of psychopathy in the relationship between influence of criminal friends and offenders own criminal behaviour. Callous traits can be characterized by persistent pattern of behaviour that reflects lack of empathy and disregard for others. Therefore, these results are according to the theoretical views explained in the Introduction, that those offenders who are high on callous factor of psychopathy cannot make strong bonds with others (Cleckley, 1976) as they show shallow emotions and are less empathetic toward others.

Limitation and Suggestion

The most significant limitation of current study is the use of self-report measures among incarcerated offenders because it can over- or under-estimate the responses. Moreover, only those criminals were included who were able to read and write Urdu because in the present study self-report measures were used and most of the offenders were uneducated and were not able to read and write Urdu. Hence, a large number of data was excluded. To overcome this limitation, further studies should use interview method for data collection. Lastly, the sample included only male offenders; therefore, future studies should include females and young offenders to get more comprehensive results.

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