

# **Peers and Parental Attachment And Emotional Intelligence Among Delinquents In Rehabilitation Centres In Malaysia**

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## **Introduction**

Emotional Intelligence, at the most general level, refers to the ‘abilities to recognize and regulate emotions in own selves as well as in others’ (Bar-On, 2000). According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in our own selves and in others for motivating oneself and for managing a relationship. Good level of emotional intelligence is very important for growing adolescents in order to avoid them from involving in behavioural problems.

Many previous studies agreed that emotional intelligence was negatively correlated to delinquency and problem behaviour. Siu (2009) found that individuals with low emotional intelligence level tend to involve more in behavioural problems, both internalizing (depression, anxiety, and stress) and externalizing (aggression, delinquency). Similar pattern can be observed in Malaysia. Liau, Liau, Teoh & Liau (2010) also found that emotional intelligence is negatively related to depression, stress, and aggression delinquency.

Past studies also showed that one of the factors that can influence the level of emotional intelligence among adolescents is the attachment bonding between them, parents and peers. Attachment always been discussed based on attachment theory developed by Bowlby (1969). Within this theory attachment refers to the affectionate bond or tie between an individual with an attachment figure regardless of time and distance constraints. Attachment bonds to parents are treated by many adolescents more like ties that restrain rather than ties that anchor and secure, and an important task of them is to develop autonomy power, so they no longer need to rely on the support of parents when they make

their own way through to the outside world (Allen & Land, 1999). Moretti & Obsuth (2009) also suggested that insensitive and negative parenting in childhood contributed to insecure attachment and child behavioural problems.

For the past years, many researchers have concentrate on the relationship of emotional intelligence and delinquency or social problems among adolescents (Austin, Saklofske & Egan, 2005; Siu, 2009; Bonab & Koohsarb, 2011). But, most studies did not focus on the adolescents in rehabilitation centres, as this present study.

## **Method**

There were 203 delinquents aged between 11 to 19 years old from six rehabilitation centres managed by Department of Social Welfare in Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Malacca involved as respondents for this study. Stratified random sampling method was employed to choose sample. Among 203 respondents, 52.9% were males and 47.1 % were females aged between 11 to 19 years old.

The Assessing Emotional Scale (AES; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, 1998) or also known as the Emotional Intelligence Scale was used to measure emotional intelligence among respondents. Many past studies have used the AES and reported high values of alpha Cronbach (Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009) while the value of reliability for this present study is 0.89. The second scale used in this study was the revised version of Instrument of Parents and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1989). This scale was used to measure the attachments between parents-adolescents and peers-adolescents. The internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for this present study were 0.88 (mother), 0.88 (father) and 0.78 (peer).

## **Results and Discussion**

Analysis of Pearson Correlation showed that there were significant relationship between mother attachment ( $r=0.167^*$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), father attachment ( $r=0.196^{**}$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and peer attachment ( $r=0.328^{**}$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with emotional intelligence among delinquents. These findings showed that delinquents who have close attachment with mother, father and peers

were more emotionally intelligent compared to those with lack of attachment with parents or peers. Finding on the relationship between parents' attachment and emotional intelligence was in line with the findings from previous researches which suggested that parents' attachment is positively related to emotional intelligence among adolescents (Kafetsios, 2004). However, in contrast, Rossen & Kranzler (2009) in their study on 150 undergraduates in North Central Florida found that peer attachment did not directly explain the emotional intelligence trait of an individual.

Result of t-test revealed that there was a significant difference in father attachment ( $t=2.414^*$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) between male and female delinquents but not in mother's attachment ( $t=1.581$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and peers' attachment ( $t=-1.409$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). These findings revealed that compared to male delinquents (mean=12.96), female delinquents (mean=21.31) were more attached to their fathers but the level of mother and peer attachment for both male and female delinquents were almost similar. However, Song, Thompson & Ferrer (2009) found that females have stronger attachment ties with both fathers and mothers compared to males. Koen (2009) in a study regarding to parent-adolescent relationship and emotional wellbeing also revealed that females experience more secure attachment and closer relationship with family than males.

Findings also showed that there was no difference of emotional intelligence level between male and female delinquents ( $t=-0.019$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This present finding is in line with a study by Davis (2012), which reported that, no significant difference in emotional intelligence between male and female adolescents. However, most past studies on emotional intelligence reported inconsistent findings with this present research. Naghavi, Redzuan, Asgari & Mirza (2012) found that emotional intelligence between male and female are significantly different. They revealed that male have significantly higher interpersonal skills and can control emotions better than female. Koen (2009) also suggested a similar finding, but this study found that females are more emotionally intelligent compared to males. These findings may be explained by the facts that females are born to be more aware of their own emotions, more sensitive to others' emotion, always demonstrate empathy to others and have more interpersonal skill than males (Watson, 2002) but male and female

delinquents in this present study were going through a similar program and environment (rehabilitation institutions under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development) for some period of times. These reasons may cause them to be almost similar in many aspects, including the way they use, control and regulate or react with emotions or the way they attach to people in their surroundings.

## **Conclusion**

As a conclusion, based on the research objectives mention earlier, results of this study revealed that delinquents with good attachment with their mother, father and peers were more emotionally intelligent compared to those who were not. However, t-test analysis showed that there were no differences in mothers' attachment, peers' attachment and emotional intelligence between male and female delinquents. Only fathers' attachment was found to be different between male and female respondents. Researchers believed that the unique findings in this present study compared to past studies were contributed by the occurred because of the different nature and environment of sample studied. However, because of limited past literature reviews delinquents in the rehabilitation centres, comprehensive comparisons with the present findings were inadequate and incomplete. Thus, researchers hope these findings may contribute to additional information on available research.

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