

EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT AND CRIMINALITY: MODERATION BY PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT

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Abstract

The study investigated the predictive relationships between emotional adjustment, perceived social support and criminality. It also examined if perceived social support moderated this relationship. One hundred and sixty-seven (167) male prisoners with mean age of 29.54 years completed a questionnaire pack which included the Emotional Adjustment Bank (EAB, Rubio, Aguado, Hontangas & Hernandez, 2007) used to assess tendency towards emotional equilibrium and volatility, the Crime and Violence Scale (CVS, Conrad, Conrad, Dennis, Riley, Chan & Funk, 2009) used to measure tendency towards crime and violence, and the Social Provisions Scale (SPS, Russell & Cutrona, 1984) used to assess perceived social support. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between emotional adjustment and criminality ($\beta = .43, t = 6.07, p = .000$) and a significant negative relationship between perceived social support and criminality ($\beta = -.48, t = -7.12, p = .000$). Interestingly, perceived social support produced a significant negative moderation effect ($\beta = -.20, t = -3.03, p = .003$) on the relationship between emotional adjustment and criminality. Thus, these findings imply that in as much as poor emotional adjustment is a significant predictor of criminal behaviour, penchant for criminality would be minimized when crime-prone individuals perceive that adequate social support is available to them. Findings were discussed and recommendations were made for further studies.

Introduction

Crime and violence is increasing day by day in Nigeria and the world over. In turn, the number of prisoners is increasing at the same rate. These prisoners remain imprisoned for a long duration and in some cases for life. Life in prison is difficult for all inmates and as a result, they often face adjustment problems. Therefore, imprisonment is perceived as a stressor which tasks one's ability to emotionally adjust and could alter an individual's ability to function normally.

Emotional adjustment refers to one's ability to maintain emotional equilibrium and stability in the face of both internal and external stressors. This is facilitated by the cognitive processes of acceptance and adaptation. It is a process in which the personality is continuously striving for greater sense of emotional health both intra-psychically and intra-personality (Vig & Jaswal, 2010), and it is preceded by the ability to accept or avoid one's emotions. It relates to whether someone has the tendency to feel negative emotions, have irrational thoughts as well as

control these impulses when facing stressful situations, and the characteristics of this dimension are moody, touchy, irritable, anxious, unstable, pessimistic, and complaining versus controlled, secure, calm, self-satisfied and cool (Rubio, Aguado, Hontangas & Hernandez, 2007). Emotional adjustment is the ability to successfully regulate one's emotions in a bid to adjust to situations and events.

The ability to deal effectively with negative emotions is widely thought to be integral to mental health (Gross & Munoz, 1995; Kring & Werner, 2004), with the emotionally mature having the ability to withstand delay in satisfaction of needs, tolerate a reasonable amount of frustration, believe in long-term planning and capable of delaying or revising his/her expectations in terms of demands of the situations (Vig & Jaswal, 2010). They can cope with marriage, illness, divorce, parenthood, careers and unemployment, and emotional maturity is a prerequisite for long-term happiness, with the keys to maturity being relationship clarity, a stable sense of integrity and self-acceptance (Vig & Jaswal, 2010).

Emotional difficulties have been associated with criminal behaviour, and criminals indicate histories of serious and repetitive antisocial acts. According to Aichorn (1935) criminality results from inadequate childhood socialization and manifests itself in the need for immediate gratification (impulsivity), a lack of empathy for others and the inability to feel guilt. In addition, offender population differ from general population on personal/emotional needs factors (Robinson, Porporino & Beal, 1998), and psychological testing suggests that crime-prone youths are impulsive, paranoid, aggressive, hostile and quick to take action against perceived threats (Avshalom, Caspi, Moffitt, Silva, Stouthamer-Loeber, Krueger & Schmutte, 1994). They are perceived as id-dominated individuals who are unable to control their impulsive pleasure-seeking drives (Toch, 1979), and have been found to lack ambition and perseverance, have difficulty controlling their tempers and other impulses and more likely than conventional people to hold unconventional beliefs (Atkins, 2007; Caprara, Paciello, Gerbino & Cugini, 2007).

Deficits in emotion-regulation skills have widely been shown to be associated with poor emotional adjustment (Berking, Orth, Wupperman, Meier & Casper, 2008), and individuals regulate their emotions through reappraisal (the regulation of emotional experience by changing the contents of one's thoughts after an emotion has been elicited or by re-evaluating the emotion-eliciting stimuli) and suppression (the regulation of emotional expression by inhibiting or neutralizing emotional behaviour) (Matsumoto, Yoo, Nakagawa & 37 Members of the Multinational Study of Cultural Display Rules, 2008).

Richards and Gross (2000) demonstrated the intrapersonal effects of emotion regulation on affect and cognition in relation to healthy adaptation and adjustment. They reported that individuals high in reappraisal and low in suppression experienced more positive and less negative emotions, shared emotions more with others, were more well-liked, had better social support, had lower scores on depression and higher scores on happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, optimism and well-being. Essentially, reappraisal has been associated with positive outcomes, whereas suppression has been associated with negative outcomes (John & Gross, 2004), and criminal behaviour could be one of these negative outcomes.

On the other hand, the ability to manage and modify one's emotional reactions in order to achieve goal-directed outcomes has been found to be associated with sympathy and prosocial behaviours (Eisenberg, 2000) and with morally-relevant behaviour and general social

competence (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, Murphy & Maszk, 1996). Specifically, suppression has been associated with less social closeness and support, disrupted communication, reduced rapport, inhibited relationship formation and avoidant attachments, while reappraisal has been associated with greater sharing of emotions, closer relationships and greater social support (Butler, Egloff, Wilhelm, Smith, Erickson & Gross, 2003; John & Gross, 2004). The ability to regulate emotion is learned within a developmental context such as family situations and relationships (Bell & Calkins, 2000; Miller, McDonough, Rosenblum & Sameroff, 2002), and the emotionally well-adjusted are quick to establish affectionate relations with others (Vig & Jaswal, 2010). The presence and quality of social relationships is essential to physical and psychological well-being (Berkman, Glass, Brissette & Seeman, 2000) and there is ample evidence that people with larger social networks and those who perceive that support is available to them show less reactivity to stressors (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996).

On the other hand, adaptation to imprisonment is almost always difficult and sometimes creates habits of thinking, feeling and acting that could be dysfunctional. Notwithstanding, a primary predictor of the emotional adjustment of criminals could be the quality of their interpersonal relationships particularly the availability of social support from close family and friends. Social support refers to help available in times of need which only others can provide. It can manifest in many forms, such as providing information, companionship, financial assistance and emotional support (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Disclosing stressful experiences in a negative social context or network where members are not perceived to be fully supportive can result in increased psychological distress (Major, Cozzarelli, Sciacchitano, Cooper, Testa & Mueller, 1990; Major, Zubeck, Cooper, Cozzarelli & Richards, 1997). Also, the quality of interpersonal relationships appears to influence an individual's cognitive-emotional processes of adaptation to life stressors and availability of social support from close family and friends is associated with better adjustment (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996) whereas, strained relationships are associated with poorer adjustment (Manne & Glassman, 2000).

Prisoners experience interpersonal trauma at higher frequencies than individuals in non-incarcerated populations (Bosgelmez, Aker, Kokluk & Ford, 2010) and although the importance of social support for prisoners is well-recognized, inmates often receive inadequate social support (Asberg & Renk, 2014). Social support is a concept recognizing that people exist to varying degrees in networks through which they can receive and give aid, and in which they engage in interactions (Patel, Petersen & Kimmel, 2005). It includes both tangible components, such as, financial assistance and physical aid, and intangible components, such as, encouragement and guidance (Heitzmann & Kaplan, 1988), and could be informational, instrumental, and emotional (Simoni, Huang, Goodry & Montoya, 2005). Social support can be obtained from family, friends, coworkers, spiritual advisors, health care personnel, or members of one's community or neighbourhood.

Studies have demonstrated that social support is associated with improved outcomes (Patel, Petersen, & Kimmel, 2005) and has been implicated in the mediation of stressful life events, recovery from illness, and increased program adherence (Heitzmann & Kaplan, 1988). Social support facilitates both coping with specific stressors and contributes to a sustained well-being throughout the life span (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000). Low perceived social support is associated with more suicide attempts in prison (Meltzer, Jenkins, Singleton, Charlton & Yar,

2003). Among both incarcerated and non-incarcerated individuals, perceived social support has been found to be protective against various health outcomes such as hopelessness, depression and anxiety (Johnson, Esposito-Smythers, Miranda, Rizzo, Justus & Clum, 2011). Heller, Swindle and Dusenbury (1986) described a model explaining the positive effect of social support which includes two key components - esteem-enhancing appraisals and stress related interpersonal transactions. The esteem-enhancing facet of social support refers to a generalized appraisal, which makes individuals believe that they are cared for and valued and that others are available to them in times of need, while the stress-related interpersonal component is a more practical aspect of social support. Perceived social support has received much attention recently (Bisschop, Kriegsman, Beekman & Deeg, 2004; Burgoyne & Renwick, 2004), and studies have found that perceived social support is associated with adjustment to life stressors (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996).

However, it is unclear whether a relationship between emotional adjustment and social support exists within incarcerated populations. If it did, it would be of concern because social support (perceived or actual) supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners (Lin, 1986) serves as an important protective factor for prisoners during incarceration. In addition, there is a paucity of research linking emotional adjustment to criminality while assessing the moderating role of perceived social support. Therefore, the study focuses on whether emotional adjustment and perceived social support would significantly predict criminality and if perceived social support is a moderator of this relationship. Thus, it was hypothesized that – there would be a significant positive relationship between emotional adjustment and criminality; there would be a significant negative relationship between perceived social support and criminality; and perceived social support would moderate the relationship between emotional adjustment and criminality.

Participants

The study involved one hundred and sixty-seven (167) male prisoners selected from Nsukka Prisons using purposive sampling technique. Their ages ranged from 18 to 48 years ($M = 29.54$; $SD = 5.97$), and there were 57 (34.1%) married men and 110 (65.9%) single men. Their educational qualifications ranged from primary school ($n = 20$, 12%), through secondary ($n = 80$, 47.9%), to tertiary institution ($n = 67$, 40.1%). Eighty-seven (52.1%) of the participants have been imprisoned once, while 54 (32.3%) have been imprisoned twice, with twenty-one (12.6%) being imprisoned for the third time and five (3%) imprisoned four times.

Instruments

The Emotional Adjustment Bank (EAB)

The EAB is a uni-dimensional scale developed by Rubio, Aguado, Hontangas and Hernandez (2007) which purports to measure the tendency to exercise emotional equilibrium, regulation and stability as opposed to emotional instability. It is a 28-item inventory with response format ranging from 1 (totally agree) to 6 (totally disagree).

The N scale of the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPQ, Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) and the EA scale of the Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ, Caprara, Barbaranelli & Borgogni, 1993) were used to establish the convergent validity of the EAB. Rubio, Aguado, Hontangas and

Hernandez (2007) reported the correlations between the EAB scores and the EPQ-A N scale and the BFQ EA scale as $r = .86$ and $r = .77$ respectively, while the correlation between both criteria were $r = .81$. One hundred and ten (110) participants drawn from Enugu Prisons were involved in the determination of the reliability of the scale in a Nigerian sample. Their responses to the EAB were subjected to item analysis and internal consistency using Cronbach's coefficient alpha .87 was obtained.

In terms of scoring, three items were reverse-scored (21, 25 and 28) and a sum of the direct and reverse-scored items gives the participant's overall score, with higher scores indicating lower degree of emotional adjustment.

The Crime and Violence Scale (CVS)

The CVS is a psychological assessment instrument developed by Conrad, Conrad, Dennis, Riley, Chan and Funk (2009). It is a 31-item inventory that assesses increasingly violent strategies used for resolving interpersonal conflict in the past year and the types of drug-related, property and interpersonal crimes the respondent has committed. It has four subscales – the General Conflict Tactic Scale (GCTS; 12 items), the Property Crime Scale (PCS; 7 items), the Interpersonal Crime Scale (ICS; 7 items), and the Drug Crime Scale (DCS; 5 items).

It is a dichotomous scale with a Yes/No response format. However, for the purpose of the present study, it was made a polytomous scale in order to control for social desirability bias, with the item stem reading: "During the past 12 months, have you had a disagreement in which you did the following things? Conrad, Conrad, Dennis, Riley, Chan and Funk (2009) reported internal reliability consistency .82, with Cronbach's alpha .90 and a good item reliability index of 1.00. There were two items of misfit both psychometrically and logically having seemingly little to do with the construct of crime and violence (item 1 – *Discussed it calmly and settled the disagreement* and item 2 – *Left the room or area rather than argue*) (Conrad, Conrad, Dennis, Riley, Chan & Funk, 2009) and these items also had item-total correlation of less than .30 with the total scale in the present study. As a result, they were removed. One hundred and ten (110) participants drawn from Enugu Prisons were involved in the determination of the reliability of the scale in a Nigerian sample. Their responses to the CVS were subjected to item analysis and internal consistency estimation. Cronbach's coefficient alpha .93 was obtained.

A summation of the respondent's ratings on all the items gives a composite score of criminality tendencies with higher scores indicating greater disposition towards crime and violence.

The Social Provisions Scale (SPS)

The SPS is a standardized psychological assessment instrument developed by Russell and Cutrona (1984) and validated for use with Nigerian sample by Kpenu (2009). It is a 24-item inventory that assesses the degree to which respondent's social relationships provide various dimensions of social support, which has six (6) subscales and they include: attachment, social integration, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance, guidance and opportunity for nurturance, with each subscale having four items for which a composite score could be obtained. Responses

are scored on a 4-point Likert scale as follows: 4 (strongly agree), 3 (agree), 2 (disagree), 1 (strongly disagree).

Russell and Cutrona (1984) reported test-retest reliability co-efficient $r = .93$, with alpha co-efficient for the total sample ranging from .59 (opportunity nurturance) to .78 (guidance) on individual scales, while Kpenu (2009) reported internal consistency (co-efficient alpha) ranging from .65 to .76 for the subscales; .92 for the total scale; construct validity coefficient ranging from .38 to .79; and Cronbach alpha .82, showing a good internal consistency. The researchers obtained test-retest validity co-efficient $r = .43$ in a 2-week interval. In terms of scoring, half of the items are reverse-scored (2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, and 24) and a sum of the direct and reverse-scored items gives the participant's overall score: the higher the score, the higher the degree of perceived support.

Results

Table 1: Summary of Regression Coefficients for Emotional Adjustment and Criminality: Moderation by Perceived Social Support

	R ² change	F change	B	β	t
Emotional adjustment	.18	36.79	.43	.43	6.07***
Social support	.19	50.66	-.48	-.48	-7.12***
Emotional adjustment x Social support	.03	9.18	-.17	-.20	-3.03**

Key: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$.

The Table shows that emotional adjustment had a significant positive relationship with criminality ($\beta = .43$, $p = .000$), while perceived social support had a significant negative relationship with criminality ($\beta = -.48$, $p = .000$). In addition, the table shows that social support had a significant negative moderation effect on the relationship between emotional adjustment and criminality ($\beta = -.20$, $p = .003$).

Discussion

The hypothesis that there would be a significant positive relationship between emotional adjustment and criminality was confirmed. Thus, as emotional adjustment declines, tendency towards crime heightens. This is in line with the assertion that crime-prone individuals have difficulty controlling their tempers and other impulses (Atkins, 2007; Caprara et al., 2007). Individuals who cannot control their emotions have greater tendency to become involved in crime than those who are emotionally sound (Hampson, 2012). They are more predisposed to feel negative emotions and have irrational thoughts when facing stressful situations. This also buttresses the notion that emotional difficulties are associated with criminal behaviour.

On the other hand, the hypothesis that there would be a significant negative relationship between perceived social support and criminality was also confirmed. An increased perceived social support leads to a decline in predisposition towards criminal behaviour. This is in line with the finding of Patel, Petersen and Kimmel (2005) who demonstrated that social support is

associated with improved outcome and is implicated in adjustment to stressful life events (Uchino, et al., 1996). In other words, perceived social support serves as a protective factor for prisoners during incarceration. When individuals perceive adequate social support network, psychological distress is reduced and criminal activities are discouraged.

Furthermore, the hypothesis that perceived social support would significantly moderate the relationship between emotional adjustment and criminality was also confirmed. Perceived social support negatively moderated the relationship between emotional adjustment and criminality by changing the direction and strength of the relationship. Thus, despite the positive relationship between poor emotional adjustment and criminality, an individual who has a high perceived support from family, community, social networks and confiding partners during incarceration would be less likely to engage in criminal behaviours.

When people get incarcerated for one reason or the other, their friends, family members and loved ones tend to feel disappointed and as a result unwilling to freely associate and identify with them, thereby denying them of the social support which they are in desperate need of. Nobody wants to be linked with an ex-convict. Offender population is not easily assimilated into general population even after serving their term, and this could result in their engaging in repetitive antisocial acts. This is evident in many in-mates reporting being imprisoned more than once and this defeats the sole aim of correctional facilities which is to modify deviant behaviours and promote assimilation of offender population into the general population.

This implies that among incarcerated population, poor emotional adjustment predisposes one to increased criminal tendencies but the availability of support from family, friends and close associates would drastically reduce criminal tendencies. Thus, inability to adjust is a predisposing factor to crime, which consequently results in imprisonment when caught. However, the correctional facilities would not be effective in executing their remedial, rehabilitative, curative, and counteractive functions if the social support system is not actively in place.

One limitation of this study is in the attribution of relationship to the variables studied. There are other variables such as religiosity, resilience, distress tolerance, religiosity, self-esteem, culture, gender, self-efficacy, exposure and other demographic variables that may bring about this relationship. These factors could be confounding variables to the study.

It is recommended that in subsequent research, it will be necessary to carry out further studies on the moderating and mediating effects of other individual differences variables not used in this study as well as other demographic, social and personality variables. It is also suggested that there is a need for the provision of adequate social support to prisoners due to the undeniable relevance of perceived social support in adjustment to imprisonment. Available support would not only foster adjustment and adaptation to imprisonment but would also promote the attainment of the sole objective of correctional facilities which is to reduce criminal tendencies and curb crime.

Summarily, in as much as poor emotional adjustment is implicated in criminality perceived social support would reduce the perpetuation of crime that stems from an inability to regulate one's emotions.

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