Socio-Cognitive Development, Peer Pressure and Ego Strength of Children in Conflict with the Law

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the socio-cognitive development, peer pressure, and ego strength of children who are in conflict with the law from three institutions in the Philippines. It also aimed to determine the relationship between the variables, and whether gender, age, family structure, and socio-economic status would predict any significant difference in the ego strength of the respondents. This study utilized 145 respondents from Quezon City (120 respondents), Mandaluyong City (four respondents) and Dasmariñas City (21 respondents). Among the respondents, 130 were male and 15 were female. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the desired sample. To determine the relationship between the variables, this study used the descriptive correlational method of research design. The results of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between socio-cognitive development and ego strength which implies that the higher the cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal skills, the higher the chance that a child will have high ego strength. Peer pressure was also found to have a significant relationship with ego strength implying that the higher peer pressure a child has, the higher the chance of having high ego strength and the lower the peer pressure the lower the ego strength. The findings also showed that the respondents’ gender and family structure had no significant difference in the level of ego strength except for socio-economic status which had a significant difference with the ego strength of fidelity. Lastly, the regression analysis presented interpersonal skills as predictors of hope, purpose, and fidelity; both cognitive and interpersonal skills predicts will while emotional skills predicts purpose.
I. INTRODUCTION

Childhood is a stage of self discovery when children learn different things from both parents and peers. The first few years from birth is when parents and other significant people play a big role in a child’s life, but later on as they start interacting with their peers from school and the playground they pick up a few things from them. If a child is not well trained in the early years, such neglect could pose as threat when children look for answers concerning life challenges from their peers. If they meet with the wrong kind of friends and do not have firm ego strength, such mistake and lack might lead to their problematic behaviors. Parents are usually the primary source of social and emotional support for children during their first years of life. However, peers begin to play a significant role in a child’s social-emotional development in later years (Welsh, Robert, Clancy, Bierman, & Keith, 2010). The strength of the ego though depends on a number of factors. Some people are born with a strong ego and some are born with a weak one. The developmental tasks also either add or lessen the strength of the ego (Varma & Gupta, 2008).

Erik Erikson described ego development as psychosocial and that at every stage of the human life cycle there should be mastery of the developmental tasks for each stage. However, each stage may bring with it a normal developmental crisis or disequilibrium that comes about when an individual tries to cope with the demands of a certain stage (Lesser & Pope, 2007).

According to Staiik (2012), people with little or weak ego strength have unrealistic expectations and their thinking patterns are out of balance and this blocks them from developing healthier ego strengths and instead makes them prone to problematic behavior patterns. Erikson believes that there is a disruption of identity during adolescence resulting from both physical and social factors that force the adolescent to consider alternatives. He continued to say that adolescents need to develop a vocational identity and philosophy. The lack of which will result in self doubt, role confusion and indulgence in self destruction activities (juvenile delinquents or personality aberration) (Ogena, 2011).

The 1980 crime report statistics from the United States showed that about one fifth of all persons arrested for crimes were under 18 years old. In the 1970s, juvenile arrests increased in almost every serious crime category and female juvenile crimes more than doubled. During the most recent five year period studied, juvenile arrests decreased slightly each year. Unofficial report, however, suggests that a higher percentage of juveniles are involved in minor criminal behavior; grossly underreported common offenses that include vandalism, shoplifting, underage drinking, and using marijuana (Roberts, Barry, Clancy, & Noam, 2005).

The Department of Social Welfare and Development, Philippines shows 5,825,425 children and youth who are at risk. Three million children are disabled, 246,011 are street children, 64,000 are victims of armed conflict, 2,400,000 are exposed to hazardous working conditions, 4,097 are sexually abused, 11,317 are in conflict with the law, 3,694 are abandoned and neglected and 100,000 are commercial sexually exploited (Celia & Leones, 2006).

More Filipino boys than girls come in conflict with the law. This is because they are given greater freedom to roam the
streets, where they are more likely to use violence, drugs and alcohol when joining gangs and succumbing to peer pressure. The usual age range of a young Filipino offender is 14-17 years old. One suggested reason for older teenagers committing the most crimes lies in the struggle of transitioning from childhood to adulthood, during which time issues concerning independence, intimacy, identity, intellect, and integrity surface (Don Bosco Forum, 2009).

According to an article by Grapikom (2012), under the Christian Convergence for Good Governance, the statistics presented by the Philippine National Police from 2011 show a decline in crime from 2009-2010. However, crimes involving minors is alarming. Children as young as eleven years old are involved, in not just petty crimes but serious offenses as well. Most children who normally stay in the streets are used by syndicates and are involved in gang movements like the “ba-tang hamog”, a group of 14-19 year old boys. They rob random vehicles in traffic places like Makati and EDSA. No studies have been made yet that discusses the ego strength of these children in conflict with the law.

Environmental factors such as poverty, inadequate education, high degree of unemployment, lack of positive role models, and absence of opportunity can place pressure on young people to escape these problems through mind altering substances. Peer pressure, a second major influence after environmental factors explains why young people get involved in problematic behaviors, and which is why peer pressure was included as one of the variables for this current. The personal characteristics of adolescents have been noted to increase the risk of alcohol and other substance abuse. These characteristics include poor coping skills as response to the powerful emotional pain often experienced in adolescence, relationship and achievement problems at school (Zastrow, Kirst, & Ashman, 2010). According to Monahan (2008), social functioning is associated with a number of positive outcomes such as good interpersonal relationships, adaptive coping mechanisms when under stress, better mental health, and a decrease in problem behaviors (Holsen, Smith, & Frey, 2008) and less substance use. The study of Shepherd and Edelman (2009) showed a correlation between low ego strength and high score on social anxiety, revealing ego strength underlying coping, and personal functions. Such study further shows that ego strength is indicative of psychosocial adjustment and maturity.

Studies have already been conducted on ego strength but none has been done yet relating ego strength with children who are in conflict with the law. Ego strength is important in one’s psycho-social-emotional and cultural development, and when dealing with the self and others around. This study relates the influence of the socio-cognitive development and peer pressure on the functions of the ego strength. It attempted to increase the awareness of the community, the institutions where the respondents are affiliated with, and the respondents themselves. A program to help young people is encouraged through this study.

II. METHODS

A descriptive-correlation research design was used to determine the relationship between socio-cognitive development, peer pressure, and ego strength.
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III. RESULTS

Socio-cognitive Development

The results suggests that the respondents have a high level of cognitive skills ($M=2.98; SD=35$). They are aware of their cognitive skills and put them to use. They get involved in activities that use their cognitive abilities and do not face any difficulties. In terms of emotional skills, the respondents have high level ($M=2.72; SD=0.44$) as well. This is manifested by being able to remain calm even under pressure. Moreover, the respondents interpersonal skills is high ($M=2.94; SD=0.38$). This could mean that they do not have difficulty relating with and helping other people. The results of this study showed that the respondents have a high level of interpersonal skills.

Peer pressure

Peer pressure is the group’s insistence and encouragement for an individual to be involved in a particular way. The result suggests that the respondents have a high level of peer pressure ($M=2.69; SD=0.35$). They are easily influenced by their peers on a lot of issues, both negative, such as “my friends encouraged me to have pre-marital sex”, and positive, such as “I get good grades because my friends encourage me to”.

Ego Strength

The respondents have shown to have high level of hope ($M=2.80; SD=0.34$) which means that they have the belief that their needs will be met and they have a high level of self confidence. Moreover, the respondents will is high
Peer pressure positively relates with ego strength \((r=0.272, p<0.001)\). This implies that the higher the peer pressure, the higher the level of ego strength.

Moreover, the results show there is a relationship between peer pressure and hope with a Pearson correlation of 0.228 and a significant value at 0.006. This implies that the higher the peer pressure, the higher the level of hope.

The results also show that there is a relationship between peer pressure and will with a Pearson correlation of 0.215 and a significant value at 0.006. This implies that the higher the peer pressure, the higher the level of will.

Furthermore, the results show that there is a relationship between peer pressure and purpose with a Pearson correlation of 0.210 and a significant value at 0.011. This implies that the higher the peer pressure, the higher 

\((M=2.62; SD=0.42)\). The results imply that the respondents will was averagely high, though most questions were answered with disagree and have a low interpretation. This means that some of them doubt their capability which is evident by a low score in the item, “I like being a leader”.

The conflict of initiative vs. guilt produces the ego strength of purpose. The result suggests that the respondents have low \((M=2.56; SD=0.30)\) level of purpose which means that they lack the ability to envision and pursue their goals in life. In other words, respondents have a low purpose in life.

The respondents’ competence is high which imply that the respondents are able to use their physical and cognitive abilities to finish tasks that are put before them. The respondents score high in the item “I finish what I start” which goes to show that their level of competence is really high \((M=2.64; SD=0.39)\).

The mean of 2.81 \((SD=0.40)\) suggests that respondents have high fidelity. This emerges from adolescents’ identity crisis. This is supposed to mean that they feel a sense of duty to self and others. However that is not the case here, many of them agree that they accept themselves which denotes a high level of self acceptance, but then when it comes to dealing with others, they mostly agree that they are “not loyal to anyone”, with the answers they gave, somehow questions their sense of fidelity is somewhat questionable.

**Relationship between Socio-Cognitive Development and Ego Strength**

The results show a Pearson correlation of 0.514 and a significant value at 0.000 level of significance. These results signify a positive relationship between socio-cognitive development and ego strength.

Cognitive skills are positively correlated to ego strength, as shown by a Pearson correlation of 0.329 and a significant value at 0.000 level. Emotional skills are also positively correlated to ego strength as shown by a Pearson correlation of 0.277 and a significant value of 0.001 level. Inter-personal skills likewise show to be positively correlated to ego strength with a Pearson correlation of 0.522 with a significant value of 0.000 level. This implies that the higher the level of a child’s socio-cognitive development the higher the ego strength.

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Furthermore, the results show that there is a relationship between peer pressure and purpose with a Pearson correlation of 0.210 and a significant value at 0.011. This implies that the higher the peer pressure, the higher
the level of purpose.

Moreover, the results show that there is a no significant relationship between peer pressure and competence with a Pearson correlation of .024 and a significant value at .775. This implies that peer pressure has no bearing in the respondents’ level of competence.

Similarly, the results show that there is a no significant relationship between peer pressure and fidelity with a Pearson correlation of 1.54 and a significant value at .065. This implies that peer pressure has no bearing in the respondents’ level of fidelity.

The findings of this study show that the influence of caregivers, parents and peers is necessary as one goes through the different stages of psychosocial development. This influence is seen from infancy through adolescence and if adapted well an individual will have these different ego strengths.

**Predictors of Ego Strength**

Interpersonal skills has shown to predict ego strength. The variance accounted for is 27.2% and has unstandardized coefficient of .303 with a t value of 7.318 at .000. This shows a positive correlation, showing that the higher the respondents interpersonal skill, the higher the level of ego strength. Likewise, inter-personal skills of the respondents predict hope, purpose and fidelity which is accounted for 20.1%, 8.1% and 12.7% respectively. Both cognitive skills and interpersonal skills predict will with variance accounted for 10.3% and 2.9% respectively. Only emotional skills predict competence ($R^2_{change} = 12.7%$).

**Difference on Ego Strength**

Ego strength does not differ regardless of the respondents age ($F = .357; p = .784$), family structure ($F = .902; p = .405$), and socio-economic status ($F = 1.69; p = .188$). Nonetheless, only fidelity differs in terms of socio-economic status ($F = 3.404; p = .036$). Respondents from “have enough for everyone” ($M = 2.89; SD = 0.43$) has highest fidelity level than those who are “poor” ($M = 2.59; SD = 0.32$) and “poor but striving” ($M = 2.81; SD = 0.40$).

**IV. DISCUSSION**

**Socio-cognitive Development**

The study of Howard and Jenson (2003) shows that delinquent youth have a number of specific cognitive deficits when compared with none delinquents. McGloin and Pratt (2003) also supported Howard and Jenson’s findings that cognitive ability mediates the effect of concentrated disadvantages on both the early onset and the onset of delinquency. However, the results of the current study differ from these previous studies as the findings of this study show that the respondents have a high level of cognitive skills which means it does not take a low cognitive ability for someone to be delinquent. This means that delinquent children may have a high or low cognitive skill and this will not affect their behavior. Different studies have shown the importance of emotional skills for children. The study of Gunderson (2010) has shown that skills such as regulation and recognitions of emotions, sharing, listening, waiting for one’s turn and showing consideration for others has shown to be connected to popularity and acceptance by others. Bukowski, Buhmertser and Underwood (2011) and Santrok (2012) noted that emotions play a
role in peer relations.

Children who have good emotional skills can relate well with others.

The results of this study showed that the respondents have a high level of interpersonal skills. Social skills are closely linked to development and the interpersonal skills needed by a five year old will not be adequate for a twelve year old (Mental Health Foundation of Australia, 2007).

**Peer pressure**

Geary’s (2005) study is consistent with the research findings of the current study which shows the strong influence peers have on each other. The result of this study only strengthens the idea that peers certainly influence each other—positively and negatively. In other words, adolescents can be influenced to do good or bad by others. Contemporary wisdom holds that children contribute significantly to one another’s development (Ladd, 2005). Beginning in the early years, the development of human beings seems to require input from socialization agents who are either mature as well as those who are not. Whether it is an interaction between toddlers or teenagers, it is evident that peers are a necessity, not luxuries in human development.

**Ego Strength**

The present study has shown that the respondents have a high level of hope, will and competence and because they trusted someone during infancy and developed the ego strength of hope, it helps them to believe in themselves and build their own views of the future. This is supported by the theory of Erikson which states that the trust learned in infancy is basic for fidelity in adolescence. Adolescents need to learn how to trust others before they can have faith in their own views about the future. They should have developed hope during infancy and couple with that the other ego strengths—will, purpose and competence, in which each is a prerequisite for fidelity (Feist & Feist, 2006).

Schultz and Schultz (2009) said that fidelity includes sincerity, genuineness and a sense of duty in one’s relationship with other people. Adolescents are said to no longer need parental guidance once they establish their internal standards of conduct. They now have confidence in their own religion, political view and social ideologies. During this stage of fidelity, the adolescent is ready to learn to be faithful to an ideological point of view. Fidelity consists of the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of unavoidable differences in value systems. Without an outlet for fidelity, young people will either have a weak ego or suffer ‘confusion of values’ or search for a deviant group to be loyal to (Engler, 2009). This would explain the deviant behaviors such as, stealing, vandalizing, underage drinking and use of drugs.

Ages 12 to 18 are a stage where adolescents resolve the crisis of basic ego identity. This is where the self image is formed and there is an integration of ideas about oneself and what others think. Shaping an identity and accepting it are difficult tasks and are often filled with anxiety. People who come out of this stage with a strong sense of self identity are ready to face adulthood with confidence. Those who fail on the contrary, experience an identity crisis, which is confusion between the roles of childhood and adulthood (Schultz & Schultz, 2009).

**Relationship between Socio-Cognitive**
Development and Ego Strength

The finding of this study shows that having a high level of socio-cognitive development will help one to have a high level of ego strength. This finding is supported by Stang and Story (2005) who said that during adolescence teens develop a stronger recognition of their own personal identity and this includes personal moral and ethical values and feelings of worth and self esteem. Social interactions, particularly with peers are crucial to socio-cognitive development. Social interactions contribute indirectly by fostering the growth and role-taking skills and providing the experience children need to learn what others are like (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010).

Relationship between Peer pressure and Ego Strength

In terms of the relationship between peer pressure and ego strength, the present study established a positive realationship. Erikson notes that adolescents whose development has restricted their access to acceptable social roles or made them feel that they cannot measure up to the demands placed on them may choose negative identity. Adolescents with a negative identity may find support for their delinquency image among peers (Santrok, 2012). Ego strength keeps us from losing our individuality to the forces and demands of the society (Feist & Feist, 2006). However, according to Spodek and Saracho (2013), ego strength allows children to stand up to pressures. Children will not conform to peer pressure if they are confident and have developed optimal ego strength.

The findings of this research show that once a child builds the trust needed with

the caregiver, they build up their hope and this helps them to form good relationships with other people. This finding is supported by Schultz and Schultz (2009) who said that hope is the sense that childhood needs and desires will be met. A lack of this sense of hope makes children to approach life with uncertainty and fear and this hinders their exploration for involvement in activities and relationships. Infants’ most significant interpersonal relations are with their primary caregivers ordinarily their mothers.

Children’s creative skills have been linked to individual skills and talents including ego strength and divergent thinking skills (Spodek & Saracho, 2013). It is at this stage that children learn to communicate more effectively—to walk, climb, push, pull and hold on and let go of objects. They take pride in these skills. If they are able to exercise them, the ego strength will be acquired but failure to result in feelings of doubt (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). Similarly, the respondents of this current study have shown that being hopeful and trusting others improves one’s interpersonal skills. The higher the ego strength of hope the higher the interpersonal skills.

The findings of this research show that the higher the interpersonal skills are, the higher is the level of purpose. This finding is supported by Feist and Feist (2006) who said that the ego strength of purpose develops during the play age stage where children interact with their age mates. Motor and mental abilities continue to develop, and the children’s initiatives are channeled towards realistic and socially accepted goals. This means that once the child feels the sense of purpose they are able to set standards that can be accepted by them and others. Once that happens, good relationships are formed...
between them and their peers.

If children are scolded, humiliated, or rejected, they are likely to develop feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. Praise and reinforcement, on the other hand, promotes feelings of competence (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). This supports the findings of this study that when children have a high level of competence, their emotional skills are high too. When children know how to control their emotions i.e., when they know when and where to use emotions, they become competent in what they do. Children who have effective strategies or emotional skills for dealing with disappointments or losses or any other upsetting events that they might come across in life are likely to bounce back than those who do not (Mental Health Foundation of Australia, 2007).

**Predictors of Ego Strength**

The findings of this study have shown that having interpersonal skills will help one to develop the ego strength of fidelity. This is supported by Schultz and Schultz (2009) who stated that fidelity includes sincerity, genuineness, and a sense of duty in one’s relationship with other people. This begins at the ages of 12-18 when adolescents resolve the crisis of basic ego identity. Adolescents need to learn how to trust others before they can have faith in their own views about the future, which shows the relationship between interpersonal skills and fidelity. If they lack this fidelity, young people will either have a weak ego or suffer “confusion” of values or worse, search for a deviant group to be loyal to (Engler, 2009).

**Difference on Ego Strength**

The present study shows that ego strength is the same regardless of age, family structure, and socio-economic status. Don Bosco Forum (2009) mentioned that the usual age range of a young Filipino offender is 14-17 years old. This is because they are given greater freedom to roam the streets, where they are more likely to use violence, drugs, and alcohol when joining gangs and succumbing to peer pressure. Furthermore, the results imply that there is no significant difference in the family structure and the ego strength to the respondents, which means that, whether the child comes from a family that has both parents or just one of the biological being present, has no bearing in their ego strength. This result is supported by Skolnik (2012) who said that it is not just coming from a one-parent family that is the problem. There are also other factors that affect an adolescent’s ego strength.

The finding of this study shows that socio-economic status has no significant relationship with the ego strength of the respondents. Although children living in poverty are particularly likely to enter school with a range of social and behavioral difficulties with over 40% showing difficulties in social competence and 20% exhibiting disruptive behavior. To a great extent, children’s reduced social competence and emotional well being reflects the effects of poverty and most crucially the impact of poverty. However the same study showed that not all children in the face of socio-economic adversity are affected the same (Hartas, 2011).

The research finding of Sigelman and Rider (2010), however, has shown that parents of
adolescents who belong to middle to high socioeconomic status tend to provide more stimulating and support-ive home environment for their children than those from low socioeconomic status. The result is higher academic achievement, better adjustment, better health, better cognitive functioning and better adjustment in adulthood. This however, does not mean that coming from a poor socio-economic status will make one a delinquent as supported by the finding of this study.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that socio-cognitive development is related to ego strength. Children who see themselves as having a high level of the skills that are found in the socio-cognitive development such as cognitive, emotional and interpersonal skill will be more satisfied in dealing with themselves and others. However, children who lack or have a deficit in any of the skills under socio-cognitive development will have a hard time adjusting to the environment in which they live in and will have difficulty dealing with ‘self’. Peer pressure was also found to be related to ego strength which means that when children are under pressure from their peers they tend to improve their ego strength.

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