



Original Article

# Comparison of the real self, ideal self and ought self in adolescents with and without criminal history in Isfahan

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Adolescents, as a vulnerable population, are at risk of developing social complications for several reasons. The aim of this study was to compare actual self, ideal self and ought self between the adolescents with and without criminal history in Isfahan.

**Materials and Methods:** In this cross-sectional study conducted in 2012, 79 adolescents between 15 to 18 years old in Rehabilitation and Training Center, and 120 adolescents without criminal history studying in high schools of Isfahan were matched for age. Data gathering tool was a questionnaire consisting of demographic data and 27 items concerning self-discrepancy. The data were analyzed by ANCOVA, ANOVA, chi square, and independent t-test in SPSS software.

**Results:** The mean ( $\pm$ standard deviation) score of actual self, ideal self, ought self, difference between actual self and ideal self and difference between actual self and ought self in delinquency group was  $63.08 \pm 13.82$ ,  $80.97 \pm 15.34$ ,  $77 \pm 14.14$ ,  $-17.89 \pm 18.17$  and  $-13.92 \pm 17.09$ , respectively and in adolescents with no criminal history  $73.63 \pm 9.33$ ,  $79.35 \pm 14.69$ ,  $75.07 \pm 15.56$ ,  $-6.07 \pm 15.17$  and  $-1.31 \pm 16.3$ , respectively. Actual self mean score was significantly higher in the group with no criminal history ( $P < 0.001$ ), but there was no significant difference in the mean scores of ought self ( $P = 0.36$ ) and actual self ( $P = 0.45$ ) between the two groups.

**Conclusion:** The actual self scores were lower in adolescents with criminal history than the adolescents without criminal history; therefore, educational planners and school authorities should adopt an appropriate training approach with regards to actual self to protect adolescents against delinquent behavior.

**Keywords:** Adolescent, Delinquent, Self

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## Introduction

Adolescence is considered as period of transition and transfer; the transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents try to identify themselves and the mood varies considerably in this period. If adolescence passes with no problem, adolescents will become healthy adults and play adult roles efficiently (1). Adolescents comprise a substantial segment of Iran's population, so that the Statistical Centre of Iran estimated the age group of 15-24 years 19.9% for men and 20.1% for women in 2005-2010 (2). One of

the complicated and disturbing current problems drawing many researchers, sociologists, criminologists, psychologists, and health professionals' attention is the issue of young offenders, so called, juvenile offenders, which is growing day to day. Offender refers to a person who commits a criminal act that is prohibited by law and/or shari'a and failure to do an act that is considered essential and obligatory by law and/or shari'a (3). The causes of crime include poverty, poor economic status, family problems, educational problems, migration and stress. One of the concerns of scholars and officials is lowering the age of criminality, so that the statistics of 2007 indicated that 2.18 million individuals under 18 years were arrested in the USA

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and delinquency has been on rise worldwide, as well (4). Alport's theory emphasizes personality integrity, and states adolescents make their own personality coherent in the course of storing information about the do's and don'ts, and hence achieve trans-hand interaction and personality flourishing. Meanwhile, if the circumstances surrounding the adolescents' findings are inconsistent and in conflict with each other, a phenomenon called self-discrepancy is developed in them and their coherent personality is predisposed to being threatened and deteriorated (5). Higgins is a famous theorist of self, particularly self-discrepancy. Actual self consists of the attributes that a special person (such as yourself or another) believes that you have. Ideal self include the dreams and hopes of a person. It can be argued that the ideal self includes the attributes that a special person (such as yourself or another) would like you to have. Ought self, which includes the tasks and conscience towards which a person has a sense of responsibility, comprises a sense of morality, obligation and duty in the individuals. In fact, ought self comprises the attributes that a special person (such as yourself or another) believes that you should have. Ideal self and actual self are considered as self-directories. The dissociation and difference between the actual self and ideal self defines an individual's susceptibility to the negative emotional states (6,7)

The difference and dissociation between the actual self and ideal self cause depression and emotional distress and subsequently leads to frustration, sadness and anxiety in the individuals (8), and less difference and rift between the actual self and ideal self brings better mental health for the individuals (9). The rate of dissociation and difference among the three levels (actual self, ideal self and ought self) depends on several factors such as demographic, social and family (9, 10). According to the literature review, no research has been yet done on self-discrepancy in delinquent adolescents, but several studies have been conducted on normal adolescents and other fields which will be examined below. The findings of studies indicate that family and the current interactions in it directly impact the psychological interactions including identity formation and maladaptive behavior (11,12).

In a study of self-discrepancy in adolescents based on the family process and content model, the findings indicated that family processes (solidarity with parents and religious beliefs), the family content and social context of family influenced the formation of various aspects and the rate of dissociation between ideal self and ought self in the

adolescents (9). Another study demonstrated that the role of family processes in self-discrepancy from religious imperatives is undeniable and the individuals with strong family processes train the girls with less religious self-discrepancy (13). Other studies show that self perception in juvenile offenders is cognitively lower than the grown individuals; in other words, anti-social behavior may reflect the inability to think about themselves in relation to others (14). Mental health contributes fundamentally to individual and community life, but nowadays there are numerous obstacles facing normal mental processes of the individuals which can separately cause difficulties for the process of development and adaptation (8). On the other hand, since adolescents constitute a large age group, as efficient and creative workforce, In Iran, considering the health in this large social segment and paying attention to their educational needs is highly important.

In line with appropriate planning and flourishing of true talents, educational and training facilities of the community are necessary to prevent, struggle and reduce juvenile delinquency in Iran. No study has been yet conducted on self-discrepancy in delinquent adolescents, and hence the variables influencing adolescents' individual and social behaviors should be fully understood, so that the factors in and the differences between the two groups of offenders can be identified and reduced. Detecting these factors helps to plan for declining psychological gaps between them. In response to this vital requirement, this study was aimed to compare actual self, ideal self and ought self between the adolescents without criminal history and delinquent adolescents in Isfahan, Iran in 2012.

## Materials and Methods

This cross-sectional study was conducted in 2012. Study population of the present study consisted of two groups of male adolescents living in Rehabilitation and Training Center, and the students of high schools of Isfahan were matched for age. 15-18 years of age was considered as the inclusion criteria. By the formula of sample size calculation, the minimum sample size of 98 individuals per each group was needed. Only 79 individuals at the Rehabilitation and Training Center met the inclusion criteria, and so were all studied as census. For the control group, 120 normal studying adolescents were enrolled after matching and studied.

To gather the data, we required the permission of the Bureau of Prisons and the Department of Education. After obtaining the Bureau of Prisons

authorities' consent, we referred the Isfahan Rehabilitation and Training Center and obtained the permission to gather the data after the purposes of the study were explained to them. Since the researcher was not permitted to enter into the main section of the Center, the data were gathered with collaboration of a psychologist at the Center after some explanations regarding the questionnaire fill-out were given to him. For the control group, each of the six education districts of Isfahan was considered and a high school or vocational school was randomly selected from each cluster and enrolled into the study. For data gathering, we firstly referred the Isfahan Department of Education and gave some explanations on the purposes of the study to the security officer to receive an official letter of introduction.

Then, we referred the schools, explained the purposes of the study to the principals and justified them. Then, we referred to the classrooms of interest and explained the purposes of the study to all students, and had them fill out the questionnaire if they were consent to participate in the study.

Moreover, the participants were ensured that the data are used solely for research purposes, the questionnaire's data will be maintained as confidential with the researcher. It should be noted that if the studying participant had the history of being referred to the Rehabilitation and Training Center at least once, he was excluded from the study.

**Research instruments**

In this study, a two-section instrument was used. In view of several studies, some underlying factors could contribute to the incidence of delinquency (16-18). To further complete the study, we gathered and examined the demographic characteristics including age, education, parents' occupation,

income, economic status, educational progression at school, data on smoking status and parents' education level by a demographic questionnaire's first section.

The questionnaire's second section addressed self-discrepancy, consisting of 27 items. This instrument has been developed as a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree and has already obtained Cronbach's alpha 0.81.

The data were analyzed by ANCOVA, ANOVA, chi square and independent t test in SPSS software.

**Results**

Overall, 199 participants filled out the questionnaire. Group 1 consisted of 120 (60.3%) adolescents without criminal history and group 2 consisted of 79 (39.7%) individuals. The mean (standard deviation) age in delinquent adolescents was derived 16.60 (0.86) and in adolescents without criminal history 16.40 (0.69). The age at smoking onset was 12 (2.97) in delinquent adolescents and 13.14 (2.11) in adolescents without criminal history. There was no significant difference in mean age ( $P=0.07$ ) and mean age at smoking onset ( $P=0.23$ ). Table 1 shows the frequency and association between the participants' and parents' education and parents' marital status of the two groups of delinquent and normal adolescents. The participants' and parents' education level was significantly higher in the group without criminal history ( $P<0.001$ ); in addition, in the group without criminal history, a larger proportion of the parents lived with each other ( $P<0.05$ ) (Table 1).

Frequency and association of smoking and hookah smoking, having smoker among the friends and in family, and family income in the two groups are shown in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Frequency and association between the participants' and parents' education and parents' marital status among adolescents with and without criminal history

P	Without criminal history N (%)	With criminal history N (%)	Group	Variable
0.001<	0 (0)	4 (5.1)	Able to read	Participants' education
	0 (0)	14 (17.7)	Primary	
	0 (0)	33 (41.8)	Secondary	
	120 (100)	28 (35.4)	High school	
0.001<	0 (0)	2 (2.5)	Illiterate	Father education
	6 (5)	44 (55.7)	Primary	
	14 (11.7)	18 (22.8)	Secondary	
	28 (23.3)	9 (11.4)	High school	
0.001<	72 (60)	6 (7.6)	Academic	Mother education
	0 (0)	2 (2.5)	Illiterate	
	7 (5.8)	41 (51.9)	Primary	
	15 (12.5)	18 (22.8)	Secondary	
0.05<	36 (30)	15 (19)	High school	Parents' marital status
	62 (51.7)	3 (3.8)	Academic	
	105 (87.5)	55 (69.6)	Living married	
	8 (6.7)	18 (22.8)	One died	
	7 (5.8)	6 (7.6)	Divorced	

The findings indicated that smoking and hookah smoking was significantly more frequent in delinquent adolescents than the group without

criminal history. The income level of the group with criminal history was lower than the group without criminal history ( $P < 0.001$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Frequency and association of smoking and hookah smoking, having smoker among the friends and family, and family income among adolescents with and without criminal history

P	Without criminal history N (%)	With criminal history N (%)	Variable	Group
0.001<	14 (11.7)	56 (70.9)	Yes	Smoker in family
	106 (88.3)	23 (29.1)	No	
0.001<	21 (17.5)	65 (82.3)	Yes	Smoker in friends
	99 (82.5)	14 (17.7)	No	
0.001<	12 (10)	52 (65.8)	Yes	Smoking
	108 (90)	27 (34.2)	No	
0.001<	12 (10.8)	48 (60.8)	Yes	Hookah smoking
	107 (82.9)	31 (39.2)	No	
0.001<	7 (5.9)	3 (3.8)	Very good	Family income
	29 (24.4)	8 (10.1)	Good	
	74 (62.2)	35 (44.3)	Average	
	8 (6.7)	22 (27.9)	Poor	
	1 (.8)	11 (13.9)	Very poor	

Since the parents' economic status, income and education in the group without criminal history was significantly higher than the group with criminal history, ANCOVA was used. The findings indicated no significant association was seen between the scores of self-discrepancy, actual self, ideal self and ought self of the two groups. The actual self, ideal self, ought self, the difference between the actual

self and ideal self, and between the actual self and ought self were compared between the two groups (Table 3). The findings indicated that only actual self was significantly different between the two groups, and the difference in mean score of ought self and deal self between the two groups was not significant. Even, no difference was seen in the actual self, ideal self and ought self between the two groups.

**Table 3.** Comparison of the actual self, ideal self, ought self, the difference between the actual self and ideal self, and between the actual self and ought self among adolescents with and without criminal history

t-test result	Without criminal history Mean±Standard deviation	With criminal history Mean±Standard deviation	Group	Variable
0.76	11.75±73.06	11.35 ±73.68		Self-discrepancy
0.001<	9.33±73.63	13.82±63.08		Actual self
0.43	14.69± 79.35	15.34±80.97		Ideal self
0.71	15.56±57.07	14.14±77		Ought self
0.069	15.17±6.07	18.17 ±17.89-		Ideal self and actual self difference
0.69	16.33±1.31 -	17.09±13.92 -		Ought self and actual self difference

**Discussion**

This study was conducted to compare actual self, ideal self and ought self between the adolescents without criminal history and delinquent adolescents. The demographic findings of this study indicated that education level of the participants and their parents in the group without criminal history was higher than the group with criminal history. In the group without criminal history, a larger proportion of the parents lived with each other. Also, the findings indicated that that the income level of case group was lower than the group with criminal history. In Saki et al study, similar findings were obtained, so that the delinquent adolescents had a larger proportion of school drop-outs and primary and secondary education than the control group.

Also, the economic status of the delinquent group was weaker than the other group, and the parents of most delinquent adolescents were illiterate and

lowly educated. Family cohesion and family relations were weaker in the delinquent adolescents' families (20). Rey et al study is consistent with our study as they derived a significant association between Single parent and juvenile delinquency, as well (21).

Another study indicated that the family, and structure and relations governing it could contribute remarkably to the formation of self (13, 22, 23). Schiro-Osman believes that self is strongly influenced by the parents and subsequently influences it other domains (actual self, ideal self and ought self) (23). In addition, a study confirmed the family's contribution to the incidence of delinquent behaviors (24).

In the present study, the presence of smoker(s) in family or friends was significantly higher in the life of delinquent adolescents than the other group, which indicates the potential great effect of several

other reasons such as friends on delinquency and behavioral disorders in adolescents, despite the significant role of the family in this regard (25, 26). Schiro-Osman also believes that the important others have a remarkable role in transformation and growth of the "self" (23).

In the present study, actual self mean score was significantly lower in the delinquent adolescents and there was no significant difference in ought self and ideal self between the two groups. It could be explained by the inherent conscience and desire in the people to be good and it is necessary to investigate the predisposing factors of delinquency incidence. In similar studies of self-concept and delinquency, the findings indicated that the perception of self-concept in adolescents with no history was higher than that in juvenile offenders (27, 28); in addition, in a study aimed at explaining the association between alienation and delinquency, a feeling of disgust from self was the most common and important factor of explaining delinquency in the study population (29).

Since the crime and background of its incidence and formation can be a factor for the formation of insecurity, vulnerability and disturbance of order and stability, and on the other hand, this could be considered as an obstacle facing political, social and economic growth (31, 32), it is recommended to do systematic and comprehensive studies of the psychological characteristics in delinquent adolescents and to apply the feedback of these studies in rehabilitation and training centers.

One of the limitations of the present study was the number of the individuals with the inclusion criteria that did not allow us to enroll the participants randomly. Also, the conditions of the Rehabilitation and Training Center and failure to allow the

researcher to enter into this center to fill out the questionnaire were other barriers to doing the research. This study recommends the counseling and behavior therapy professionals working at such centers to focus the therapeutic techniques on the concepts of "self" because the explanation and analysis of various aspects of self could be incorporated into treatment of behavioral disorders in adolescents with criminal history. In addition, further research is needed to study the association between self-discrepancy and other psychological factors including mental health, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, etc. in the adolescents without criminal history and delinquent adolescents.

### Conclusion

The actual self was evaluated in the delinquency group to be less than the control group, but no difference in ideal self and ought self was seen between the two groups.

Therefore, the center should pay additional attention to actual self. As self is conceptualized within the community and by the educational styles of the community subdivisions, including families, schools and other institutions; policy makers, educational planners and cultural and educational authorities must pay close attention to the behavioral problems in adolescents.

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