

Impulsiveness, Emotional Intelligence, and Self-esteem: A Comparative Study of Juvenile Delinquents and non-delinquent Adolescents

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Juvenile delinquency in India is divided into “juveniles in conflict with the law” and “children in need of care and protection.” This research looks at how impulsivity, emotional intelligence (EI), along with self-esteem differ between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents in Kohima, Nagaland. A number of 30 adolescents were assessed using purposive sampling, 15 delinquents from juvenile homes, and 15 non-delinquent adolescents from schools, comprised the sample. Independent samples t-tests and correlation analyses revealed that delinquents had significantly higher impulsiveness ($t = 2.55, p = .016$) and lower EI, though self-esteem differences were not significant. In the juvenile group, impulsiveness correlated strongly with both venturesome ($r = .710, p = .003$) and empathy ($r = .657, p = .008$), indicating a tendency toward risk-taking and emotional responsiveness. Additionally, higher emotional intelligence was associated with greater self-esteem ($r = .548, p = .034$). In contrast, the non-delinquent group exhibited no significant correlations, though venturesome and empathy showed moderate trends with self-esteem. These findings highlight impulsiveness as a key factor in delinquency, with emotional intelligence potentially playing a role in self-esteem development among juveniles.

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency, impulsiveness, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, adolescents.

Juvenile delinquency remains a significant concern in contemporary society, posing both social and psychological challenges for individuals and communities. In the context of Indian law, juvenile delinquency is classified into two categories: “juvenile in conflict with the law” and “child in need of care and protection.” Juvenile delinquency refers to behaviour that deviates from societal norms, characterized by actions such as violence, alienation, verbal abuse, and illegal activities. Research indicates that these behaviours often stem from broader social issues. Juvenile crime, a legal term for delinquent activities committed by minors, varies in definition and age limits across different countries. In the U.S., for instance, the age at which individuals are considered juveniles can range from 14 to 21 years old, depending

on the jurisdiction. The age group of 16-20 years is particularly notable for high rates of violent crime, reflecting the continuation of early delinquent behaviour into adulthood. Common offenses among children include snatching and theft, while more serious property crimes and rape tend to become prevalent in later years.

Recognizing the importance of rehabilitation, the Indian Government introduced the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) in 2009 to safeguard vulnerable children, including juveniles in conflict with the law. Under ICPS, Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) are established in every district to handle cases involving juveniles, while Special Juvenile Police Units (SJPU) ensure child-friendly procedures. In

Nagaland, the Child Protection Service was launched in 2010, with 11 District Child Protection Units established to cater to children as defined under the Juvenile Justice Act (JJA). This includes Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) and Children in Conflict with the Law (CCL)-the latter referring to juveniles who have committed an offense before turning 18. Many children in conflict with the law are also in need of care and protection, as they often come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds where access to education, healthcare, shelter, and adequate care has been limited. The systemic challenges faced by these children highlight the need for a rehabilitative, rather than punitive, approach to juvenile justice. In Nagaland, a region characterized by its unique socio-cultural context, there is an urgent need to explore the psychological and emotional factors that contribute to delinquent behaviour among its youth.

Research has consistently explored the underlying factors contributing to delinquent behaviour, with particular emphasis on psychological traits such as impulsiveness, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem (Sehgal, 2018; Carroll et al., 2006; Mittal & Kumar, 2022). Impulsiveness, characterized by a lack of self-control and a tendency to act without forethought, has been strongly linked to juvenile delinquency. Carroll et al. (2006) found that early-onset offenders exhibited significantly higher levels of impulsivity compared to their non-delinquent counterparts, suggesting that poor mental inhibitory control plays a critical role in criminal behaviour. Similarly, a study by Srinivasan, Rentala, and Kumar (2023) found a significant positive correlation between impulsivity and aggression among male delinquent adolescents in observation homes, emphasizing that factors such as substance use and lower educational status contribute to increased impulsivity and aggression.

The development of moral and cognitive abilities in young individuals has long been a topic of significant interest among researchers and practitioners in the field of developmental psychology. Adolescence, in particular, is a critical period marked by substantial changes in brain structure and function, leading to shifts in emotional regulation, impulse control, and risk-taking behaviours (Steinberg & Scott, 2003; Römer, 2010). Emerging evidence suggests that juvenile delinquents often exhibit deficits in cognitive and moral development compared to their non-delinquent peers. This disparity may contribute to the increased propensity for risky and impulsive behaviours among young offenders, as well as their susceptibility to peer influence and perceived risk of consequences (Leverso et al., 2015).

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been identified as a protective factor against aggression and delinquency. Adolescents with higher EI are better equipped to regulate their emotions, navigate social interactions, and manage conflicts, reducing their likelihood of engaging in delinquent activities (Mittal & Kumar, 2022). Sehgal (2018) found a negative correlation between emotional maturity and delinquency proneness, suggesting that higher emotional maturity reduces the likelihood of delinquent behaviour. Furthermore, Soni et al. (2023) highlighted the role of impulsivity in risk-taking behaviour among adolescents, showing that higher impulsivity correlates with greater risk-taking tendencies, particularly among female students.

Self-esteem, another key psychological factor, has been extensively studied in relation to delinquency. Dogar et al. (2010) found that juvenile delinquents often exhibit lower self-esteem, which may contribute to feelings of social rejection and increased risk-taking behaviours. However, the relationship between self-esteem and delinquency is

complex, as some studies indicate that delinquent behaviour may serve as a compensatory mechanism for low self-worth. Additionally, weak social bonds and experiences of physical or sexual abuse have been linked to an increased likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts (Dogar et al., 2010).

Rationale of the study

This study is driven by the need to understand the psychological traits that contribute to juvenile delinquency, particularly in the socio-cultural context of Nagaland. Adolescence is a critical period of cognitive and emotional development, and research suggests that factors such as impulsiveness, emotional intelligence, self-esteem play a significant role in delinquent behaviour. While studies have examined these traits in Western populations, there is a lack of research addressing how these factors influence delinquency in India, particularly in regions like Nagaland, where socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and systemic corruption may further exacerbate youth involvement in crime. By conducting a comparative analysis of delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents, this study aims to bridge this research gap, offering insights that can inform culturally relevant intervention and rehabilitation programs. Understanding these psychological characteristics will not only contribute to the existing literature but also aid in the development of targeted policies and programs to reduce juvenile delinquency and promote positive youth development.

Objectives:

1. To compare levels of impulsiveness between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents.
2. To compare levels of emotional intelligence between juvenile

delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents.

3. To compare levels of self-esteem between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents.
4. To identify significant relationships among these variables within both groups.

Hypotheses:

1. There will be no significant difference in levels of impulsiveness between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents.
2. There will be no significant difference in levels of emotional intelligence between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents.
3. There is no significant difference in levels of self-esteem between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents.
4. There are no significant correlations among impulsiveness, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem within both groups.

Method

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of adolescents aged 12 to 18 years, with two distinct groups: juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents. The juvenile delinquent group was composed of adolescents residing in juvenile homes or under legal care in Dimapur and Kohima Nagaland, while the non-delinquent group consisted of adolescents of the same age group attending schools in Kohima. A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants for both groups on an availability basis. The total sample size was 30, with 15 participants selected from each group.

Tools used:

The Junior I.V.E Scale is a 63-item questionnaire designed to measure Impulsiveness, Venturesomeness, and Empathy in children; developed by Sybil B.G Eyesenk and H.J. Eyesenk. The scale is composed of both negative and positively worded items. The scale includes items that assess impulsive behaviour, risk-taking tendencies (venturesomeness) and empathetic responses. The scale is structured to assess these traits within the framework of higher-order personality dimensions such as Psychoticism, Extraversion and Neuroticism, as measured by the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (JEPQ).

Emotional Intelligence Scale: the Emotional Intelligence Scale is a self-report measure designed drawing on the theoretical frameworks from several key figures in the field of emotional intelligence, such as Daniel Goleman, John D. Mayer, Peter Salovey, Robert Cooper and Ayman Sawaf; particularly tailored for the Indian context. The scale consists of 34 questions, designed to measure an individual's ability to recognise, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively in themselves and others.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale: The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, created by Morris Rosenberg in 1965, is a widely used tool for evaluating overall self-esteem. It consists of 10 items, including both positively and negatively phrased statements. Participants respond using a 4-point Likert scale that ranges from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Procedure:

Permission to administer the questionnaire to juveniles was formally sought from State Social Welfare department (Social Welfare Mission Vatsalya) Nagaland. Upon approval, consent was obtained from the

Superintendent of each observation homes, namely; Observation home Chumukedima, Bright Morning Star Children home Kohima and Special home cum place of safety Dimapur to engage juvenile participants. For non-delinquent adolescent, permission was taken from the school Administrator/Principal, on approval, written consent was taken from their guardian/parents. For both juveniles and non-delinquent adolescent assent was obtained from the participants.

The purpose of the research was clearly communicated to the participants. To ensure accuracy, specific instructions related to the questionnaire were given, with clarifications provided as needed. Participants were assured of their confidentiality and that their participation was voluntary.

After data collection, scores were entered in SPSS. Reverse-scored items were manually adjusted in the SPSS Variable View before analysis. Numerical codes were assigned to categorical variables, and total scores for each scale were computed. The dataset was then processed for further statistical analysis, with the level of significance set at 0.05 ($p < 0.05$).

Data Analysis:

Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 21). Descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation were employed to summarize the dataset. The reliability of the instruments was assessed through Cronbach's alpha. The Emotional Intelligence Scale, comprising 34 items, demonstrated excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.905. The Self-Esteem Scale, which includes 10 items, showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.071. Meanwhile, the Junior IVE Scale, consisting of 63 items, yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.818. The normality of the data distribution was evaluated using the Shapiro-Wilk test.

Following this, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents. Furthermore, Pearson

correlation analysis was utilized to examine the associations among the study's key variables.

Results

Table 1. Independent sample t-test

Variable	Sample	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Impulsiveness	Juvenile	15	13.73	3.75	2.553	28	0.16*
	Normal	15	10.00	4.24			
Venturesomeness	Juvenile	15	12.27	3.06	1.280	23.911	.213
	Normal	15	10.40	4.75			
Empathy	Juvenile	15	11.93	3.41	0.221	28	.827
	Normal	15	11.67	3.20			
Emotional Intelligence	Juvenile	15	117.40	10.21	-4.750	28	<.0001**
	Normal	15	136.33	11.58			
Self-esteem	Juvenile	15	15.53	2.07	0.000	28	1.000
	Normal	15	15.53	1.81			

Table 1 reveals the mean score, standard deviation and t-test of the variables; impulsiveness, venturesomeness, empathy, emotional intelligence and self-esteem among Juvenile and non-delinquent adolescents (normal group). The results indicated a significant difference in impulsiveness, $t(28) = 2.55$, $p = .016$, with juveniles ($M = 13.73$, $SD = 3.75$) scoring higher than normal participants ($M = 10.00$, $SD = 4.24$). A significant difference was also found in emotional intelligence, $t(28) = -4.75$, $p < .0001$, where juveniles ($M = 117.40$, $SD = 10.21$) scored lower than normal participants ($M = 136.33$, $SD = 11.58$). No significant differences were observed in venturesomeness ($t(23.91) = 1.28$, $p = .213$), empathy ($t(28) = 0.22$, $p = .827$), or self-esteem ($t(28) = 0.00$, $p = 1.000$). Note. $p < .05^*$, $p < .01$

The null hypothesis 1, which stated that there is no significant difference in levels of

Impulsiveness between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents, was rejected, as the mean scores of juvenile delinquents were higher than those of their non-delinquent counterparts.

Similarly, a significant difference was found in the mean scores of Emotional Intelligence between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents. Therefore, null hypothesis 2, which stated that there is no significant difference in levels of Emotional Intelligence between the two groups, was also rejected.

However, null hypothesis 3, which stated that there is no significant difference in levels of Self-esteem between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents, was accepted, as no significant differences were observed in the mean scores for Self-esteem between the two groups.

Table 2 Pearson Correlation matrix for Impulsiveness, Venturesomeness, Empathy, Emotional Intelligence and Self-esteem in Juvenile delinquents

		1	2	3	4	5
1. Impulsiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.710**	.657**	-.363	.112
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003	.008	.184	.691
	N	15	15	15	15	15
2. Venturesomeness	Pearson Correlation	.710**	1	.372	-.264	-.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003		.173	.341	.626
	N	15	15	15	15	15
3. Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.657**	.372	1	-.180	.411
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.173		.522	.128
	N	15	15	15	15	15
4. EQ	Pearson Correlation	-.363	-.264	-.180	1	.548*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.187	.341	.522		.034
	N	15	15	15	15	15
5. Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	.112	-.137	.411	.548*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.691	.626	.128	.034	
	N	15	15	15	15	15

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The results shown in Table 2, point out two significantly positive correlation between Impulsiveness and Venturesomeness ($r=.710$, $p=.003$) and Impulsiveness and Empathy ($r=.657$, $p=.008$). Additionally, Emotional Intelligence and Self-Esteem

showed a moderate positive correlation ($r=.548$, $p=.034$), Other relationships, such as Impulsiveness and Emotional Intelligence ($r=-0.363$, $p=.184$), showed weak or non-significant associations.

Table3. Pearson Correlation matrix for Impulsiveness, Venturesomeness, Empathy, Emotional Intelligence and Self-esteem in Non-delinquent adolescent

		1	2	3	4	5
1. Impulsiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.372	.132	-.330	.084
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.172	.640	.230	.766
	N	15	15	15	15	15
2. Venturesomeness	Pearson Correlation	.372	1	-.390	0.38	-.484
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.172		.150	.894	0.67
	N	15	15	15	15	15
3. Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.132	-.390	1	-.159	.478
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.640	.150		.572	.072

	N	15	15	15	15	15
4.EQ	Pearson Correlation	-.330	.038	-.159	1	0.63
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.230	.894	.572		.825
	N	15	15	15	15	15
5.Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	.084	-.484	.478	0.63	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.766	0.67	.072	.825	
	N	15	15	15	15	15

No correlations reached statistical significance ($p > .05$)

Table 3 shows no significant correlation; however, prominent trends were observed. Impulsiveness shows a small correlation with Venturesomeness ($r = .372$), while Self-esteem was negatively correlated with both Venturesomeness ($r = -.484$) and Empathy ($r = -.478$).

Discussion

The present study examined differences in impulsiveness, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents in Nagaland. The findings revealed significant differences in impulsiveness and emotional intelligence, with juvenile delinquents scoring higher in impulsiveness and lower in emotional intelligence. The correlation analysis further highlighted key relationships among these psychological traits, particularly among the delinquent group.

The significantly higher levels of impulsiveness among juvenile delinquents compared to non-delinquents are consistent with previous research (Khan, 2021; Kudlak, 2019). Impulsivity is widely recognized as a risk factor for delinquency, as it contributes to poor decision-making, difficulty in self-regulation, and an increased likelihood of engaging in risky or antisocial behaviours (Malik et al., 2023). Given that impulsivity is often associated with externalizing behaviours such as aggression (Schmits & Glowacz, 2018), its heightened presence

among delinquents reinforces its role in delinquent tendencies.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between impulsiveness and venturesomeness ($r = .710$, $p = .003$) among juvenile delinquents. This suggests that more impulsive individuals are also more likely to seek out novel or risky experiences. Kudlak (2019) found a similar association, suggesting that while venturesomeness itself may not be directly linked to delinquency, its interaction with impulsivity increases the likelihood of engaging in risk-prone behaviours that could lead to criminal activities.

Another notable correlation was found between impulsiveness and empathy ($r = .657$, $p = .008$) among juvenile delinquents. While empathy is generally associated with prosocial behaviours, previous research (Schmits & Glowacz, 2018) suggests that certain individuals with delinquent tendencies may still possess emotional awareness but struggle with using it constructively. This could imply that impulsive juveniles may recognize emotions in others but act on them inappropriately due to their lack of self-control.

A significant difference in emotional intelligence was found, with non-delinquents scoring higher than juvenile delinquents. This finding aligns with previous studies

demonstrating that lower emotional intelligence is associated with higher aggression, poor emotion regulation, and a greater likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviors (García-Sancho et al., 2014; Downey et al., 2010). Adolescents with low emotional intelligence may struggle to manage interpersonal conflicts, leading to antisocial actions.

Despite prior research suggesting that low self-esteem is associated with delinquency (Mier & Ladny, 2017), the current study found no significant differences in self-esteem between the two groups. This aligns with findings by Malik et al. (2023), who noted that while self-esteem negatively predicts juvenile delinquency, it does not significantly moderate the relationship between impulsivity and delinquency. These findings suggest that self-esteem alone may not be a strong determinant of delinquent behaviour but may interact with other psychological factors such as emotional intelligence and aggression.

Additionally, the correlation analysis found a moderate positive relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem ($r = .548$, $p = .034$) among juvenile delinquents. This supports research by Srinivasan et al. (2022), which suggests that improving emotional intelligence can enhance self-esteem, providing a protective factor against delinquency. Adolescents with higher self-esteem are more likely to display adaptive coping mechanisms and engage in constructive social interactions, whereas those with lower emotional intelligence may struggle with self-worth and emotional regulation.

Interestingly, in the non-delinquent group, none of the psychological variables showed significant correlations. This suggests that for non-delinquent adolescents, traits such as impulsivity, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem may operate more independently, without strong interdependencies. In

contrast, among delinquent adolescents, these traits appear more interconnected, reinforcing the idea that delinquency is often influenced by a combination of impulsivity, risk-seeking behaviour, and difficulties in emotional regulation (Schmits & Glowacz, 2018). The absence of significant correlations in the non-delinquent group may also indicate that these adolescents have better-developed regulatory mechanisms that allow them to manage impulsivity and emotional responses separately. This further highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in behavioural self-regulation, as adolescents with higher emotional awareness are generally less likely to act impulsively or seek risky experiences.

Conclusion and limitations

This study provides valuable insights into the psychological differences between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents, highlighting the significant role of impulsivity and emotional intelligence in distinguishing these groups. The findings suggest that impulsivity is closely linked to risk-taking behaviours and emotional processing difficulties among delinquents, while emotional intelligence plays a protective role by fostering self-regulation and self-esteem. The absence of significant correlations in the non-delinquent group further supports the idea that delinquent tendencies arise from the interplay of multiple psychological factors rather than any single trait acting in isolation. These results emphasize the need for targeted interventions that focus on impulse control and emotional intelligence training to help at-risk adolescents develop better coping mechanisms and decision-making skills.

However, several limitations must be noted. The relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, and the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal interpretations, highlighting the need

for longitudinal studies. Relying exclusively on self-report measures may introduce response biases, such as social desirability or inaccurate self-perception, which could affect the validity of the findings, suggesting that future research should incorporate behavioural assessments and multi-source data collection. Additionally, the study did not control for confounding variables such as family environment, peer influence, and socioeconomic status, which are known to impact delinquent behaviour (Ranga & Kavita, 2021). Furthermore, the study did not explore subgroup variations within the delinquent and non-delinquent groups, such as differences based on age, gender, or severity of delinquency, which could provide a more nuanced understanding of these psychological traits. Future studies could overcome these limitations by utilizing larger and more diverse participant groups, adopting longitudinal research designs, and incorporating broader assessments that consider both psychological and environmental factors. Nevertheless, this study adds valuable insights to the expanding body of literature on the topic.

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