

Proneness to Criminality in Young Adults: The Role of Gender

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Abstract: The present study aimed to assess levels of proneness to criminality among young adults and examine the influence of gender on its various components. Criminality proneness was analyzed across six key dimensions: aggression, proneness to violence, psychopathic traits, disrespect towards law, and addiction proneness. Data were collected from a sample of young adults using a standardized assessment tool, and statistical analyses, including chi-square tests and independent samples t-tests, were conducted. Findings revealed that a majority of participants exhibited moderate levels of proneness across all components, with statistically significant differences noted among low, medium, and high levels ($p < .001$). Gender differences were also prominent, with male young adults scoring significantly higher in aggression, proneness to violence, and addiction proneness ($p < .05$), indicating a greater inclination toward externalizing behaviors. However, no significant gender differences were observed in psychopathic traits and disrespect towards the law. These results suggest that while most young adults demonstrate moderate risk levels, males may require particular attention in interventions targeting behavioral risk factors. The study highlights the need for early preventive strategies that are gender-sensitive and focused on mitigating risk behaviors that may lead to delinquency or criminal activity during the formative adolescent years. Further research is recommended to explore contextual and environmental influences.

Keywords: Gender influence, Proneness to criminality, Young adults.

1. Introduction

Proneness to criminality refers to an individual's predisposition or increased likelihood to engage in unlawful or antisocial behavior. This concept is multidimensional, influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and sociological factors. Understanding the antecedents of criminal behavior is crucial for criminological research, preventive interventions, and policy formulation.

From a biological standpoint, studies have suggested that genetic predispositions, neurophysiological deficits, and hormonal imbalances (such as elevated testosterone or low cortisol levels) may contribute to aggressive and impulsive behavior, increasing the likelihood of criminal acts (Raine, 2013). For instance, Raine's neurocriminology research highlights structural and functional abnormalities in the prefrontal cortex and amygdala of individuals with antisocial

tendencies.

Psychologically, traits such as low self-control, high impulsivity, aggression, and lack of empathy are often linked to criminal behavior. Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime (1990) emphasizes that low self-control, established early in life due to ineffective parenting, is a major predictor of criminality across the lifespan.

From a sociological perspective, factors such as poverty, peer influence, family dysfunction, educational failure, and neighborhood disorganization significantly affect an individual's exposure to and engagement in criminal activity (Sampson & Laub, 1993). According to strain theory (Merton, 1938), individuals who experience a disjunction between socially approved goals and the means available to achieve them may resort to crime as an alternative route to success. Moreover, the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) asserts that criminal behavior is learned through observation and imitation of others, particularly within family and peer groups. This theory suggests that repeated exposure to pro-criminal attitudes and reinforcement can increase one's proneness to criminal conduct.

From a psychological perspective, personality traits such as impulsivity, low empathy, aggression, and low self-control are consistently associated with a higher likelihood of criminal activity (Hare, 1993; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Youths with conduct disorder or oppositional defiant disorder may be particularly vulnerable, especially in the absence of supportive family or institutional intervention.

Modern criminological approaches advocate for a multifactorial understanding of criminality, recognizing that no single factor can fully account for an individual's proneness to crime. Instead, it is the interaction between individual vulnerabilities (e.g., temperament, neurobiology) and environmental stressors (e.g., peer influence, family dysfunction) that best explains the variability in criminal behavior.

Given the developmental sensitivity of this life stage, it is imperative to assess the levels of criminality proneness among young adults and explore the influence of gender. This study aims to identify patterns in these behavioral tendencies and contribute to gender-responsive crime prevention strategies.

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A. The Influence of Gender Among Young Adults

Among the variables influencing criminal tendencies, gender remains a key determinant. A consistent body of research has demonstrated that males are more likely than females to exhibit externalizing behaviors such as aggression, impulsivity, and substance abuse—traits commonly linked to higher criminality risk (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Eme, 2007). Theories such as the General Theory of Crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) suggest that lower self-control—a trait more prevalent among males—is a significant predictor of criminal behavior. Similarly, Moffitt's developmental taxonomy differentiates between transient adolescent-limited and persistent antisocial behavior, with males disproportionately represented in the life-course persistent group (Moffitt, 1993).

However, recent evidence suggests a narrowing gender gap in certain types of criminal behavior. Female criminality has increased in domains such as cybercrime, intimate partner violence, and substance-related offenses—often influenced by contextual factors such as trauma, economic deprivation, and peer affiliations (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Zahn *et al.*, 2008). Nonetheless, the expression and underlying motivations for criminality may differ between genders. For example, while males often engage in overt aggression, females may demonstrate relational aggression or be driven by survival strategies stemming from victimization (Odgers *et al.*, 2008; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Understanding how gender influences different dimensions of criminality proneness among young adults is crucial for developing gender-sensitive prevention and rehabilitation programs. A comprehensive examination of these patterns can support targeted policy measures and psychological interventions that acknowledge not just behavioral tendencies but also the sociocultural and emotional drivers underlying criminal behavior in both men and women.

2. Method

A. Objective

- To measure levels of proneness to criminality in young adults
- To examine the influence of gender on proneness to criminality among young adults.

B. Hypotheses

- H1: Young adults differ significantly in their levels of proneness to criminality.

- H2: Gender will have a significant influence on the levels of proneness to criminality among Young Adults.

C. Sample

A total sample size of 400 was recruited for the present study. The target population includes young adults aged 18 to 25 years residing in urban and rural areas. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across gender and educational background. The data were collected through interview using Google forms. All the samples were drawn from different colleges in and around Mysore and Bangalore.

D. Tools Used

Health and Criminality Proneness Questionnaire (HCPQ) (Rajashekara & D'Souza, 2013): This tool measures components of criminality proneness like aggression (C1), prone to violence (C2), psychopathic behavior (C3), disrespect towards law (C4), and addiction proneness (C5). The main headings are hidden and rewritten by giving different alphabets. It consists of 66 items and requires the subject to indicate his/her response by marking Yes / No / Sometimes.

Participants were recruited using a combination of online and offline methods. Before beginning the survey, participants were given an informed consent form outlining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Only those who gave their consent were allowed to proceed with the questionnaire. Data were collected using a self-administered survey consisting of a self-reported criminality scale and a demographic questionnaire. The survey was available online (using platforms such as Google Forms) and in print for those recruited through in-person channels. Completing the entire questionnaire took approximately 15 to 20 minutes. No personally identifiable information was collected to protect confidentiality, and responses remained anonymous. Upon completing the survey, participants were provided with a debriefing form that included information about the study's purpose and a list of mental health resources in case they experienced distress related to any survey content. Descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test analysis were used to analyse the collected data.

3. Results

The analysis of various components of criminality proneness across levels—low, medium, and high revealed statistically

Table 1
Levels of proneness to criminality in young adults and results of chi-square tests

Components of criminality proneness	Levels of criminality proneness			Test statistics
	Low	Medium	High	
Aggression	53 13.8	287 74.7	44 11.5	$X^2=296.578; p=.001$
Prone to violence	66 17.2	289 75.3	29 7.6	$X^2=309.109; p=.001$
Psychopathic	68 17.7	269 70.1	47 12.2	$X^2=234.703; p=.001$
Disrespect towards law	68 17.7	283 73.7	33 8.6	$X^2=286.328; p=.001$
Addiction proneness	63 16.4	287 74.7	34 8.9	$X^2=299.547; p=.001$

Table 2

Influence of gender on components of criminality proneness with results of independent sample t-tests				
Components of criminality proneness	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test statistics
Aggression	Male	33.97	6.88	t=3.494; p=.001
	Female	31.70	5.80	
Prone to violence	Male	33.02	7.11	t=4.864; p=.001
	Female	29.77	5.98	
Psychopathic	Male	31.91	7.41	t=.132; p=.895
	Female	31.81	7.19	
Disrespect towards law	Male	32.21	7.28	t=1.224; p=.222
	Female	31.35	6.47	
Addiction proneness	Male	32.48	6.94	t=2.388; p=.017
	Female	30.92	5.85	

significant differences for all components assessed (all $p = .001$). For aggression, the majority of young adults fell into the medium category (74.7%), with fewer in the low (13.8%) and high (11.5%) categories ($\chi^2 = 296.578$). A similar trend was observed for proneness to violence, with 75.3% categorized as medium, 17.2% as low, and only 7.6% as high ($\chi^2 = 309.109$). The psychopathic tendencies component also showed a predominance in the medium range (70.1%), with 17.7% and 12.2% in the low and high categories respectively ($\chi^2 = 234.703$). For disrespect towards the law, 73.7% of participants were in the medium group, 17.7% in the low group, and 8.6% in the high group ($\chi^2 = 286.328$). Addiction proneness followed a comparable distribution, with 74.7% at medium levels, 16.4% at low, and 8.9% at high ($\chi^2 = 299.547$). These findings suggest that most young adults exhibit moderate tendencies across various dimensions of criminality proneness, but significant subsets fall into low or high-risk categories, warranting targeted preventive interventions.

Independent samples t-tests were computed to examine gender differences across various components of criminality proneness among young adults. The results revealed that male young adults scored significantly higher than females in the domains of Aggression ($M = 33.97$, $SD = 6.88$; $t = 3.494$, $p = .001$), Proneness to Violence ($M = 33.02$, $SD = 7.11$; $t = 4.864$, $p = .001$), and Addiction Proneness ($M = 32.48$, $SD = 6.94$; $t = 2.388$, $p = .017$). These findings suggest that males may be more inclined toward externalizing behaviors and risky tendencies associated with criminality.

No significant gender differences were found in Psychopathic traits ($t = .132$, $p = .895$) or Disrespect towards law ($t = 1.224$, $p = .222$), indicating that these components are relatively comparable between male and female young adults.

4. Discussion

A. Major Findings of the Study

- Most young adults exhibited moderate levels of criminality proneness across all the components, with significant differences across low, medium, and high levels ($p = .001$).
- Male young adults showed significantly higher scores in aggression, proneness to violence, and addiction proneness, indicating greater risk for externalizing behaviors.
- No significant gender differences were found in psychopathic traits or disrespect towards law.

The findings of this study highlight important developmental

and behavioral patterns among young adults concerning proneness to criminality. A predominant number of participants exhibited moderate levels of criminality-related traits such as aggression, proneness to violence, psychopathic tendencies, disrespect toward law, and addiction proneness. This aligns with developmental theories suggesting that adolescence is a period of increased impulsivity, identity exploration, and susceptibility to peer influence, which may contribute to risk-taking and rule-breaking behaviors (Steinberg, 2008). These results suggest targeted interventions are needed, especially for male young adults at higher risk.

Notably, significant gender differences were observed in aggression, proneness to violence, and addiction proneness, with male young adults scoring higher. These findings corroborate earlier research indicating that males are generally more prone to externalizing behaviors and delinquency, often due to a combination of biological, social, and environmental factors (Moffitt, 2006; Archer, 2004). The absence of gender differences in psychopathic traits and disrespect for law suggests that certain cognitive or attitudinal elements of criminality may be similarly distributed across genders, possibly influenced by common sociocultural norms or shared environmental stressors.

The implications are twofold. First, the predominance of moderate-level traits underscores the need for early preventive interventions, such as social-emotional learning programs and behavioral counseling in schools, to help young adults manage aggressive impulses and peer pressure. Second, the gender-specific patterns imply that interventions should be tailored. For instance, male-focused programs might emphasize anger management and substance abuse prevention, while also promoting emotional regulation and pro-social behavior across all young adults regardless of gender. Moreover, these findings have policy implications. Schools, community leaders, and mental health professionals should collaborate to implement youth-centered programs that monitor behavioral patterns and provide support to those at risk of escalating toward high proneness to criminal behavior.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the varying levels of proneness to criminality among young adults, with most individuals exhibiting moderate tendencies across key components such as aggression, proneness to violence, psychopathic traits, disrespect for law, and addiction proneness. The presence of significant gender differences—particularly higher scores

among males in aggression, violence, and addiction proneness—suggests the need for gender-responsive interventions. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of early identification and targeted preventive strategies to address behavioral risks during adolescence, a critical period for shaping long-term psychosocial development and lawful conduct.

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